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*“Crosses Crucifixes & other superstitious images”:  
The Survival of English Monumental Brasses through Iconoclasm  
(ca. 1500-ca. 1700)*

ABSTRACT: This article explores the depictions of English medieval and early modern individuals on funerary brass etchings. Inspired by the brass rubbings in the Roberta F. “Bobbe” Browning Collection at California State University, Fullerton, it analyzes why some brasses remained undamaged during the Henrician reforms of the sixteenth century and the English Civil War of the seventeenth century. The author argues that etchings that survived often skirted Puritan sensibilities or expressed Catholic traditions in unfamiliar language.

KEYWORDS: medieval history; early modern history; Renaissance; England; monumental brasses; funerary monuments; effigies; brass rubbings; iconoclasm

*Introduction*

The Soldiers entering the Church, and Quire, Giant-like, began a fight with God himself, overthrew the Communion-Table, tore the Velvet cloth from before it, defaced the goodly Screen, or Tabernacle-work, violated the Monuments of the Dead, spoyled the Organs, brake down the ancient Rails, and Seats [...] a miserable spectacle to all good eyes.

Thus wrote Bruno Ryves (1596–1677), a Royalist clergyman, in the 1646 edition of the Oxford newsbook *Mercurius Rusticus*.<sup>1</sup> While King Henry VIII of England may not have intended to launch far-reaching religious reforms,<sup>2</sup> his 1534 *Act of Supremacy* resulted in over a century of religious conflict that eventually spread to all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The English Reformation introduced the legal process that suppressed monasteries,<sup>3</sup> destroyed church documents, and established a precedent that would be used by Parliament and the Puritans for the destruction of religious iconography in the following century.<sup>4</sup> During the English Civil War, members of Cromwell’s New Model

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<sup>1</sup> Bruno Ryves, *Mercurius Rusticus, or, The countries complaint of the barbarous outrages committed by the sectaries of this late flourishing kingdom together with a brief chronology of the battels, sieges, conflicts, and other most remarkable passages, from the beginning of this unnatural war, to the 25th of March, 1646* (London: R. Royston, 1685), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 470: “The Reformation must not be confused with the changes introduced into the Church of England during the ‘Reformation Parliament’ of 1529-36, which were of a political rather than a religious nature, designed to unite the secular and religious sources of authority within a single sovereign power: the Anglican Church did not until later make any substantial change in doctrine.”

<sup>3</sup> This act was devastating and uprooted a significant number of individuals. As there were nearly 900 religious houses in England, this order could easily have dislocated an estimated two percent of the population. See George W. Bernard, “The Dissolution of the Monasteries,” *History* 96, no. 324 (2011): 390-409, here 390.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain House of Commons, *Journals of the House of Commons: From April the 13th 1640, in the Sixteenth Year of the Reign of King Charles the First, to March the 14th 1642, in the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of King Charles the First* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1803), 287.

Army were charged by Parliament to eradicate "Crosses Crucifixes & other superstitious images" from churches and other places of public prayer.<sup>5</sup> However, that superstition extended beyond the depictions of the Virgin Mary and the saints specified by the official commissions. Funerary monuments were also destroyed, with centuries-old monumental brasses<sup>6</sup> being pried from their places on church floors. Some were sold for scrap or used as palimpsests (i.e., repurposed for other deceased individuals), while others were melted down for shot to feed the Parliamentary war efforts.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), received a sizable donation of monumental brass rubbings, facsimiles made from the original funeral effigies, inspiring my interest in the extant brasses in England and ultimately leading to this article.<sup>8</sup>

Several of the primary sources used here come from the pens of those who condoned or carried out the acts of iconoclasm<sup>9</sup> after government admonitions against idolatry;<sup>10</sup> others were written by contemporaries who criticized the defacement of church monuments or by antiquarians who sought to document these acts.<sup>11</sup> The Parliamentary admonitions against idolatry<sup>12</sup> and the appointment of William Dowsing (1596–1668) as "Commissioner for the destruction of monuments of idolatry" provide context to English iconoclasm.<sup>13</sup> Thankfully, William Dowsing gave posterity a rare primary source, as he kept a diary of his actions at over 250 churches in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> "William Dowsing's Commissions from the Earl of Manchester," in *The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia During the English Civil War*, ed. Trevor Cooper (Woodbridge: The Ecclesiological Society/The Boydell Press, 2001), 349.

<sup>6</sup> A funerary monument made by etching into a sheet of a brass alloy and affixing said sheet to the floor or wall of a church; see Ian Chilvers, *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 102, s.v. "Brass, Monumental."

<sup>7</sup> George Vane, "Brass Rubbings Collection: Introduction," Hamline University, Archives, Brass Rubbings Collection, accessed April 2, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection of English Medieval and Renaissance Monumental Brass Rubbings, University Archives and Special Collections, California State University, Fullerton; in citations below abbreviated as "RBC."

<sup>9</sup> *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper; "William Dowsing's Commissions," in Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm in the English Civil War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 264–265.

<sup>10</sup> "Parliamentary Legislation against Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry," in Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 257–261; "Anti-Stuart Iconoclasm," in Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 262–263.

<sup>11</sup> John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments within the United Monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Islands Adjacent, with the dissolved Monasteries therein contained: their Founders, and what eminent Persons have beene in the same interred* (London: Thomas Harper, 1631); Ryves, *Mercurius Rusticus*, 119.

<sup>12</sup> "Parliamentary Legislation against Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry," in Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 257–261; "Anti-Stuart Iconoclasm," in Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 262–263.

<sup>13</sup> "William Dowsing's Commissions," in *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper, 349–350.

<sup>14</sup> *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper.

accounts of Bishop Joseph Hall (1574-1656) record what it was like to be a bishop in charge of one of these churches (Norwich) raided by the iconoclasts.<sup>15</sup>

After many of the monumental brasses had been destroyed,<sup>16</sup> the surviving brasses went largely unnoticed outside of antiquarian circles until Victorian scholars devoted themselves to their study. Scholarship on funerary monuments took off in the late Victorian Era, when the importance of the brasses was re-assessed and found meritorious for research. The works of both Herbert Druitt<sup>17</sup> and Herbert Haines<sup>18</sup> are often cited, even in modern scholarship. A contemporary scholar, Nigel Saul, has written numerous works on the phenomenon of church monuments.<sup>19</sup> This history and understanding of the medieval mindset is contrasted here with research into the Puritan contempt for historically Catholic religious iconography<sup>20</sup> and Philippe Ariès's analysis of changing European attitudes toward death and commemoration.<sup>21</sup> Father Jerome

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Hall, *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Joseph Hall, D.D., Successively Bishop of Exeter and Norwich: Now First Collected, with Some Account of His Life and Sufferings, Written by Himself*, ed. Josiah Pratt (London: C. Whittingham, 1808); Joseph Hall, *The Works of Joseph Hall, D.D., Successively Bishop of Exeter and Norwich: With Some Account of His Life and Sufferings, Written by Himself* (Oxford, England: D. A. Talboys, 1837).

<sup>16</sup> There remain about 8,000 brasses in England and about 400 remain on the Continent (from 250,000 that are estimated to have existed throughout Europe); see Vane, "Brass Rubbings Collection: Introduction."

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Druitt, *A Manual of Costume as Illustrated by Monumental Brasses* (London: Alexander Moring Ltd./De La More Press, 1906).

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Haines, *A Manual for the Study of Monumental Brasses: With a Descriptive Catalogue of Four Hundred and Fifty "Rubbings" in the Possession of the Oxford Architectural Society* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1848); Herbert Haines, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses: Comprising an Introduction to the Study of these Memorials and a List of Those Remaining in the British Isles* (London: J. H. and J. Parker, 1861; reprinted Bath: Adams & Dart, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> Nigel Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobham Family and Their Monuments, 1300-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001); Nigel Saul, "Parchment and Tombstone: Documents and the Study of English Medieval Monumental Sculpture," *Archives* 27 (October 2002): 97-109; Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm in the English Civil War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003); Alexandra Walsham, "Inventing the Lollard Past: The Afterlife of a Medieval Sermon in Early Modern England," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58, no. 4 (2007): 628-655; John Walter, "'Abolishing Superstition with Sedition'? The Politics of Popular Iconoclasm in England 1640-1642," *Past & Present* 183, no. 1 (2004): 79-123; Robert Whiting, "Abominable Idols: Images and Image-Breaking under Henry VIII," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33, no. 1 (1982): 30-47; Catherine Eileen Winiarski, "Adulterers, Idolaters, and Emperors: The Politics of Iconoclasm in English Renaissance Drama" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2007); Peter David Yorke, "Iconoclasm, Ecclesiology and 'the Beauty of Holiness': Concepts of Sacrilege and the 'Peril of Idolatry' in Early Modern England, circa 1590-1642" (PhD diss., University of Kent at Canterbury, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Knopf, 1981; reprinted 2008).

Bertram's work spans decades of publication and is almost a pre-requisite for understanding the history of funerary monuments in English churches. His work charting the lost monumental brasses has been indispensable for this article.<sup>22</sup> Trevor Cooper's critical edition of William Dowsing's journal has also been essential; Cooper's work, which compiles and edits his own and other authors' contributions to provide a biography and contextualize Dowsing's actions, makes it the authoritative work on the iconoclast.<sup>23</sup> This article builds off the rediscovery of monumental brasses that began with the gentlemen scholars of the Victorian Era, as well as the scholarship that came with the renewed public interest in English brasses since the 1970s, and is a contribution to the documentation and preservation efforts that continue to this day.<sup>24</sup>

This article sets out to investigate early modern English iconoclasm to better understand the reasons why certain brasses endured while others did not, and whether there were commonalities among extant brasses that might have facilitated their survival. Using sociocultural evolution and dialectical theories, I examine the changes in legal justification and religious thought regarding iconoclasm from the English Reformation to the early seventeenth century and compare that to the military application of those practices during the Civil War. My article analyzes the predominantly elite class form of commemorating the dead through effigies etched on brass that allowed the monuments to skirt Puritan sensibilities and survive early modern iconoclasm.

### I. "In the execution of the ordinance of Parliament"

Iconoclasm in England<sup>25</sup> is not just relegated to the chaotic religious reforms of the Renaissance and early modern era. In addition, these acts of destruction are not unique to the disputes between church traditions and Protestant or Puritan reformers. Iconoclasm in English churches dates to at least the fourteenth century. According to William Langland,<sup>26</sup> friars would remove old monuments to open up space in the church for new ones: "And in the beldying of tounbes, They travaileth grete / To chargen ther cherche flore, And chaugen it ofte."<sup>27</sup> The issue of iconoclasm and the willful destruction of religious art and church

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<sup>22</sup> Fr. Jerome Bertram, *Lost Brasses* (North Pomfret: David & Charles, 1976); Fr. Jerome Bertram, ed., *Monumental Brasses as Art and History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, RBC.

<sup>25</sup> This section's heading ("In the execution of the ordinance of Parliament") is a quote from a 1643 commission for William Dowsing, signed by the Earl of Manchester, printed in Louis B. Gaches, "1045. Peterborough Minster: Iconoclasts and the Cloisters, *Fenland Notes & Queries: A Quarterly Antiquarian Journal for the Fenland* 6 (1904-1906): 72-78, here 76.

<sup>26</sup> The presumed author of the Middle English allegorical poem *Piers Plowman*.

<sup>27</sup> Trevor Cooper, "Brass, Glass, and Crosses: Identifying Iconoclasm outside the Journal," in *The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia During the English Civil War*, ed. Trevor Cooper (Woodbridge: The Ecclesiological Society/The Boydell Press, 2001), 89-106, here 101.

traditions do not just pertain to destruction during the time of the Reformation or Cromwell's reign. Only a small minority of Puritans or Protestants were active in the destruction of these images. In many cases, the destruction had areligious roots, or the acts were at least heavily influenced by social and political tensions rather than religious ones. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were extremely damaging to church artifacts, but it is the survival of monumental brasses within this time frame that is the focus of this article—the interplay between political and military power and religious upheaval.

From the beginning of the Reformation, iconoclasm was used as a tool to move the Church in England from the dominion of the pope in Rome to its new dominion under the English Crown.<sup>28</sup> The issue of uncontrolled, or at least unsanctioned, iconoclasm was an issue that plagued religious and governing bodies throughout England in the century leading up to the Civil War. With Parliament swayed by Puritan sensibilities, the governing body passed the Legislation against "monuments of superstition and idolatry" on September 8, 1641. The ordinance called for the clearing of rails, as well as raised chancels, and outlined the removal of tapers, candlesticks, and basins from the Communion table, among numerous other actions required of each church. The biggest reform came in the decree that the use of crucifixes was to be abolished and that "Pictures of any One or more Persons of the Trinity," as well as images of the Virgin Mary, were to be removed.<sup>29</sup> Parliament followed up eight months into the Civil War with the "Orders of the Committee for the Demolition of Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry."<sup>30</sup> This new law gave the previous admonition against idols a bit more political weight, requiring churchwardens in each parish to carry out the removal of the items and give an account to the committee. Though these laws should have affected only the minority of monumental brasses, as most were effigies of the interred rather than etchings of the Trinity or the Holy family,<sup>31</sup> these ordinances made iconoclasm an official business of Parliament, and individuals could use them in the defense of the destruction of church property.

Two later iconoclastic ordinances added some temperance to the destruction that was occurring in churches and chapels throughout the country. This was likely sponsored by Members of Parliament after they had seen the damage done in their own parish churches and heard reports of the removal of items unrelated

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Aston, "Iconoclasm in England: Official and Clandestine," in *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640*, ed. Peter Marshall (New York: Edward Arnold, 1997), 167-192, here 167.

<sup>29</sup> "Parliamentary Legislation against Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry," in Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 257-258.

<sup>30</sup> This ordinance was passed on May 17, 1643.

<sup>31</sup> It is unknown how many brasses this may actually have affected. While there are some extant brasses of the Nativity, the number of brasses depicting the Trinity or the Virgin Mary prior to this time is uncertain.

to the articles contained in the previous two laws. As Parliament had officially sanctioned the destruction of many religious images, some individuals had strayed too far from the letter of the law. In a bit of a backstep and an attempt to rein in iconoclasts, Parliament decreed that their ordinance of August 24, 1643,

shall not extend to any Image, Picture, or Coat of Arms in Glass, Stone, or otherwise in any Church, Chappel, Church-yard, or place of publique Prayer as aforesaid, set up or graven onely for a Monument of any King, Prince, or Nobleman, or other dead Person which hath not been commonly reputed or taken for a Saint: But that all such Images, Pictures, and Coats of Arms may stand and continue in like manner and form, as if this Ordinance had never been made.<sup>32</sup>

This new ordinance specifically exempted funerary monuments from the previous admonitions against idolatry. While an attempt to curtail some of the destruction, Julie Spraggon notes that the destruction of brasses continued, some even under the command of members of the nobility, such as the Earl of Manchester.<sup>33</sup> Even if this specific protection had come too late for many memorials already swept up in the public fervor of iconoclasm, now parishes and families had some legal footing for the defense of their monuments.

The ordinances of August 1643 and May 1644 were based on several legal precedents from the Tudor period. John Weever, an antiquarian and poet, wrote the first full-length book dedicated to English church monuments. His *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631) was the culmination of over three decades of research. In it, Weever describes the destruction of church property that had occurred during the English Reformation, additionally reprinting Queen Elizabeth's 1559 proclamation against breaking or defacing monuments.<sup>34</sup> He chose to reprint the Queen's preamble to the proclamation in full, stating that the destruction of funerary monuments and memorials were the actions of "sundrie people, partly ignorant, partly malicious, or covetous."<sup>35</sup> Though Weever used the preamble to negatively characterize contemporary iconoclasts, the substance and prescribed purpose of the original proclamation remained accurate.<sup>36</sup> And this was not the only precedent from a Tudor monarch creating a law intended to protect funerary monuments from damage. Trevor Cooper notes that Parliament's ordinance of 1643 had its clause protecting the memorial of a "dead Person which hath not [been] commonly reputed or taken for a Saint" lifted directly

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<sup>32</sup> "Parliamentary Legislation against Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry," in Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 260.

<sup>33</sup> Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 122-123.

<sup>34</sup> Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments*, 50-54.

<sup>35</sup> Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments*, 52. Weever certainly let his opinions be known, though allowing the deceased Queen to speak for him.

<sup>36</sup> John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign, Together with an Appendix of Original Papers of State, Records, and Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 279-281.

from an Edwardian command a century prior.<sup>37</sup> The ordinances of 1643 and 1644 had been copied from Elizabethan and Edwardian proclamations, giving them over a century of legitimacy, and for those versed in legal scholarship they subtly tied contemporary iconoclasts to the ignorant, sundry people of the past.<sup>38</sup>

When these ordinances became the law of the kingdom, they gave those with political or military sway the power to act on the growing Puritan sensibilities. Edward Montagu, the second Earl of Manchester and a Major-General in the Parliamentary forces of the Eastern Association, used his noble and military power to enforce the ordinances. The Earl wrote and endorsed two commissions for William Dowsing to carry out Parliament's August 28, 1643, ordinance against idolatry. In December 1643, the Earl bestowed upon Dowsing the power to remove and deface "all Crucifixes Crosses & all Images of any one or more p'sons of the Trenity or of the Virgin Marye & all other Images & pictures of Saints & supersticious inscriptions" in churches and places of public prayer in East Anglia.<sup>39</sup> Dowsing was one of few iconoclasts who wrote about his actions and kept a journal of the churches he visited and many of the items he defaced. His journal notes that, even with his commission from the Earl, the extent of his powers and the ordinances of Parliament were debated. Dowsing writes that one Mr. Weeden and one Mr. Mapletoft argued that the eighty superstitious pictures that he had removed from Pembroke College were not part of the ordinance. The men continued at length, quoting both legal statutes and Scripture in defense of their respective positions.<sup>40</sup> Dowsing, his commissions, and the ordinances of Parliament were not beyond reproach. All three could be and were challenged.<sup>41</sup> The commission gave Dowsing the authority to remove inscriptions, and though he sometimes reached beyond the letter of the law, this limited his ability in most cases to justify the removal of entire brasses. Funerary monuments fell under an exemption from Parliament's call for the destruction of superstitious images, an exemption based in Tudor legislation from a century earlier, and the scope of Dowsing's commission for the destruction of brasses was legally restricted to inscriptions. While that did not save all the brasses, it probably saved some.

## II. "And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images"

Contemporary brasses<sup>42</sup> that conformed to Protestant sensibilities and inscriptions that were written in unfamiliar language were more likely to survive

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<sup>37</sup> Trevor Cooper, "The Parliamentary Ordinances," in *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper, 349-350.

<sup>38</sup> This latter association with sundry people likely was not the intention of the legislature, but it lends a sense of irony to modern readers.

<sup>39</sup> "William Dowsing's Commissions," in *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper, 349-350.

<sup>40</sup> "Journal of William Dowsing," in *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper, 161.

<sup>41</sup> Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 124.

<sup>42</sup> This section's heading ("And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images") is a quote from *The Holy Bible* (Authorized King James Version), Leviticus 26:30.

than those that were easily recognized as following Catholic traditions. Many brasses could also get caught up in legal disputes that were unrelated to any religious controversy whether or not they should be considered idols. One such example comes from the brass of William Thynne and his wife Anne in London's All Hallows-by-the-Tower church (see Figure 1).<sup>43</sup>



Figure 1: Brass Rubbing of William Thynne and His Wife (1546). Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection of English Medieval and Renaissance Monumental Brass Rubbings. © University Archives and Special Collections, CSUF.

The two are depicted in semi-profile, gazing into each other's eyes, their hands folded in prayer. William lies to the left from the point of the viewer, the *dexter* side from his own perspective. He is clean shaven and his head rests on his frog-mouthed helm. He is depicted in full plate armor with a chainmail skirt covering his thighs. Anne lies to the right from the point of the viewer, the *sinister* side from her own perspective. She wears a French hood and a lace collar with her dress. Underneath them is an inscription in English asking for mercy from God who freely grants eternal life to all those who repent from their sins. The effigies

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<sup>43</sup> William Thynne and his wife (1546), RBC; original brass: All Hallows-by-the-Tower/All Hallows Barking, London, Middlesex, England; see Figure 1 above.

of William and Anne are a palimpsest. On the reverse side of their brass is the engraving of a lady and a clergyman that date to circa 1530.<sup>44</sup> This places the original engravings into a historical context just before the Henrician reforms. Jerome Bertram describes the period after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries as "the heyday for the destruction of brasses" as virtually all the plates were removed and sold, with some being repurposed for new effigies.<sup>45</sup> Beginning with the dissolution of the monasteries, priories, convents, and friaries, Henry VIII appropriated the assets and incomes of thousands of religious houses and created a state-controlled mechanism of iconoclasm. The formation of the Church of England destroyed many brasses but paradoxically saved some as palimpsests. Those that were not melted down for or used for scrap were often repurposed, as the sheet metal was already formed to the appropriate shape and thickness for etching and inlaying into a church floor. Palimpsests also had the advantage of having been created in times after Protestant sensibilities had taken root among the population, thus increasing their chances of survival in the changing religious and political landscape.

Conventions in the structure of epitaphs made Catholic traditions easy to discover for those with rudimentary literacy skills, even when the inscriptions were written in Latin. John Weever describes one of methods the iconoclasts used to select inscriptions, or even whole monuments, to destroy:

The foulest and most in humane action of those times, was the violation of Funerall Monuments. Marbles which covered the dead were digged up, and put to other uses (as I have partly touched before) Tombes hackt and hewne a peeces; Images or representations of the defunct, broken, erazed, cut, or dismembred, Inscriptions or Epitaphs, especially if they began with an *orate pro anima*, or concluded with *cuius animae propitiatur Deus*.<sup>46</sup>

Weever details authorities looking for certain Latin phrases in inscriptions to warrant a brass's destruction: *orate pro anima* and *cuius animae propitiatur Deus*.<sup>47</sup> Up until the fourteenth century, funerary epitaphs commonly consisted of two parts. The first section gave the name, date of death, and sometimes included the profession or a brief word of praise for the deceased. The second part consisted of a prayer for the deceased's soul.<sup>48</sup> After the fourteenth century, there was a change in the arrangement of phrases on epitaphs, but there remained a consistent formula. Most epitaphs in the century before Henry VIII drew on the *orate pro anima* and *cuius animae propitiatur Deus* formulae, which made brasses

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<sup>44</sup> Brass Rubbing: William Thynne and Anne, The Horowitz Collection, William R. and Clarice V. Spurlock Museum of World Cultures, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, accessed April 2, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Bertram, *Lost Brasses*, 15-17.

<sup>46</sup> Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Dathryn Walls, "Titus Oates as 'Monumental Brass' in Absalom and Achitophel," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 50, no. 3 (2010): 545-556, here 549-550: "Pray for the soul of" and "on whose soul may God have mercy," respectively.

<sup>48</sup> Ariès, *Hour of Our Death*, 218.

that called for intercessory prayers easily identifiable. Within a century, the phrasing on monuments changed significantly. No longer did inscriptions call for intercessory prayers on behalf of the deceased or use uncertain language when referencing the fate of the soul. Newer monuments reflected the change from hope and prayer to "faith alone," one of the central teachings of the Reformation, as the determining factor for salvation.<sup>49</sup> If a brass avoided familiar, pre-Reformation stock phrases in its inscriptions or was written in a language by then unfamiliar to most (such as Latin or French), even if it openly asked for intercessory prayers, it had a greater chance of surviving past the interregnum period. Dowsing often ignored inscriptions in French, a language by then indeed unfamiliar to most.<sup>50</sup> Brasses could avoid offending Puritan sensibilities if they were not immediately readable.

The Roberta "Bobbe" Browning Collection contains fifty-four original brass rubbings from the earliest known brasses in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth century until the end of the practice around 1650. The brass of William Thynne and his wife Anne (described above) is one example of a post-Reformation brass monument that conforms to Puritan sensibilities or at least avoids the controversy over intercessory prayers.<sup>51</sup> Conforming to Puritan beliefs was one reason brasses might avoid the iconoclast's pry bar. Another method is demonstrated in the brass of William Wightman and his wife (see Figure 2).<sup>52</sup> The two are depicted in a manner similar to William Thynne and Anne. The wife is once again on the *sinister* side of the brass (i.e., the left side from her perspective, which is the right side from the viewer's perspective) and wearing a hood similar to the one of the Thynne brass, but her dress has a high, closed lace collar unlike Anne Thynne's open design. William Wightman is on the *dexter* side (i.e., the right side from his perspective, which is the left side from the viewer's perspective) in Elizabethan-era plate armor. Both monuments attempt a more realistic design than earlier brasses; the cross-hatch method of shading likely borrows from methods used in contemporary woodcuts. Yet the 1579 Wightman brass differs from the 1546 Thynne brass significantly, as it has no inscription. This trend shows a change in the English Renaissance views on death and salvation, which no longer called for intercessory prayers and relied on faith alone, a trend shown on Henry VIII's monument for his father, and which others may have wished to emulate.<sup>53</sup> Later monumental brasses shifted to more secular

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 97-100.

<sup>50</sup> Trevor Cooper, "Identifying Iconoclasm," in *Journal of William Dowsing*, ed. Cooper, 102.

<sup>51</sup> William Thynne and his wife (1546), RBC; original brass: All Hallows-by-the-Tower/All Hallows Barking, London, Middlesex, England; see Figure 1 above.

<sup>52</sup> William Wightman and Wife (1579), RBC; original brass: St. Mary's Church, Harrow on the Hill, London, Middlesex, England; see Figure 2 below.

<sup>53</sup> Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England*, 129-132.

forms of memorial, or the inscriptions professed faith rather than calling on viewers to pray for the deceased. Monuments that showed either non-controversial biblical expressions of faith or that remained secular in their memorial were less likely to be damaged.



Figure 2: Brass Rubbing of William Wightman and His Wife (1579). Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection of English Medieval and Renaissance Monumental Brass Rubbings. © University Archives and Special Collections, CSUF.

### III. "For greedinesse of the brasse"

Both Parliamentary and Royalist armies<sup>54</sup> were responsible for damage to church monuments, yet much of the testimony was dramatized by Englishmen who were unfamiliar with the riots and looting that often occurs in war. Joseph Hall was an English moralist and an early satirist. During the time of the Civil War, he was the appointed bishop of the diocese of Norwich. His autobiographical writings recount the damage that the cathedral near his palace sustained at the hands of the soldiers:

Lord what work was here! What clattering of glasses! What beating down of walls! What tearing up of monuments! What pulling down of seats! What wresting out of irons and brass from the windows! What defacing of arms! What demolishing of curious stonework! What tooting and piping upon organ pipes! And what a hideous triumph in the market-place before all the country, when all the mangled organ pipes, vestments, both copes and surplices, together with the leaden cross which had newly been sawn down from the Green-yard pulpit and the service-books and singing books that could be carried to the fire in the public market-place were heaped together [...] Neither was it any news upon this guild-day,

<sup>54</sup> This section's heading ("For greedinesse of the brasse") is a quote from Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments*, 51.

to have the cathedral, now open on all sides, to be filled with musketeers, waiting for the Major's return; drinking and tobacconing as freely, as if it had turned alehouse.<sup>55</sup>

Hall describes the chaotic scene of Parliamentary forces sweeping over the cathedral near his palace with soldiers destroying the church's items in their drunken revelry. This narrative of destruction at the hands of English musketeers is not unique. Bruno Ryves also describes similar scenes of Parliamentary raids in *Mercurius Rusticus*. However, both Jerome Bertram and John Walter argue that these accounts may be exaggerated. Bruno Ryves was a Royalist propagandist who attempted to characterize iconoclasm as the acts of religious radicals or the insane.<sup>56</sup> There is little reason to doubt Hall witnessed such events or that the raids did occur, but Hall's background as a moralist and a satirist, as well as his status as the local bishop at the time, brings up questions of exaggeration with regard to those acting upon Parliament's ordinance. Unlike countries on the Continent, England did not share borders with any others who were historically competing for the same material resources or regional control, thus it was often saved from the invasion of foreign troops. Both Joseph Hall and Bruno Ryves were probably somewhat unfamiliar with the military practice of soldiers raiding towns to enhance their supplies and incomes while on campaign.

Royalist forces were also responsible for damage to churches and the funerary monuments they contained in the execution of their duties. One such account comes from the antiquarian research of Anthony Wood (1632-1695), whose life's work was devoted to publishing the history of Oxford. His 1674 survey of the colleges, *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, was extremely extensive.<sup>57</sup> Wood describes several acts of willful destruction of church property in the name of the war effort. He wrote about an army of Royalists emptying a church of its monuments "especially those engraven on brass plates, were sacrilegiously conveyed away, when the King's ammunition was reposed therein in the time of the Civil War, an. 1643, and after."<sup>58</sup> Both sides of the English Civil War are shown by contemporary accounts to be responsible for damage to church monuments. However, Jerome Bertram claims on the basis of the remaining evidence that locations who were housing Royalists had their brasses survive for centuries after these troops had left.<sup>59</sup> Thus, much of the damage that was part of the war effort for those of Royalist loyalties seems to have been incidental rather than the intentional damage done by Puritan forces.

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<sup>55</sup> Hall, *The Works of Joseph Hall*, 55.

<sup>56</sup> Bertram, *Lost Brasses*, 22-23; Walter, "Abolishing Superstition with Sedition," 80.

<sup>57</sup> Originally published as Antonius à Wood, *Historia et Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1674).

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Wood, *The History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls University of Oxford*, trans. John Gutch (Oxford: Printed for the Editor, 1786), 232.

<sup>59</sup> Bertram, *Lost Brasses*, 24.

Though it is unfair to portray a single individual from the Puritan movement as the quintessential example of a social or political force, William Dowsing is regularly cited as a typical iconoclast of the English Civil War, based on the rare autobiographical account of his actions. In the critical edition of Dowsing's journal, Trevor Cooper and others have attempted to place Dowsing's iconoclastic actions into the context of Puritan reform, governmental upheaval, and the legal pedantry concerned with the removal of "popery" (i.e., things Catholic). Much of the damage to church property is reported in the context of a bloody civil war, one with both physical and spiritual components. Often the two could not be easily disentangled, and in many cases the defacement of church property carried a monetary incentive.<sup>60</sup> Cooper presents six written accounts of parishes paying for the partial destruction of brasses, removing some or all the inscriptions.<sup>61</sup> Jerome Bertram argues that—unlike other objects made of glass, stone, and wood—brasses and metal ripped from churches had commercial value, but brasses were also the most difficult to deface or destroy in the carousing after a hard-fought battle.<sup>62</sup> The *Mercurius Rusticus* relates the story of soldiers attempting to damage an inlaid brass:

They turn to the Monument of the Dead, some they utterly demolish, others they deface [...] They attempted to deface the Monument of the late Lord Treasurer the *Earl of Portland*, but being in Brass, their violence made small impression on it, therefore they leave that, and turn to his Fathers Monument, which being of Stone was more obnoxious to their fury.<sup>63</sup>

Though brasses were the only monuments that were still profitable if defaced or destroyed, they proved a more difficult target for soldiers who were seeking to cause damage, but who were likely neither prepared nor had the tools to remove metal rivets or pry heavy metal from the pitch-filled floor indent. Had soldiers been prepared for either, that could have led to the systematic destruction of all or most brasses on campaign.

### *Conclusion*

Iconoclasm was a tool for social and religious change from the beginning of the English Reformation. Government restructuring to accommodate the monarch as the head of the Church of England created the mechanisms that launched legal, state-sanctioned iconoclasm. Once these mechanisms were in place, it was difficult to rein in the wanton destruction of church and funerary monuments. Despite the legal precedent of a century of Tudor proclamations and

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<sup>60</sup> William Dowsing, for example, was paid for his efforts, charging each church for the destruction of its own property.

<sup>61</sup> Cooper, "Brass, Glass, and Crosses," 104.

<sup>62</sup> Bertram, *Lost Brasses*, 18-23. Bertram paints a very vivid picture of musketeers moving on to the more easily breakable statuary when the brass plates held up to hammering from "drunken soldiers with pole-axes and the ill-organized vandalism of this sort of sack," referencing a similar description of the sack of a church in *Mercurius Rusticus*.

<sup>63</sup> Ryves, *Mercurius Rusticus*, 147 (original author's emphasis/italics).

Parliamentary ordinances, once the state had opened the doors of the church to iconoclasm, it was difficult to demand restraint from undisciplined soldiers or angry Puritans. With regard to the monumental brasses that did survive, there may have been some commonalities that facilitated their survival, other than blind luck. Brasses with inscriptions that did not conform to previous conventions or formulae, or that were written in uncommon languages, made Catholic ties less immediately noticeable. Newly etched monuments that reflected the changing beliefs in the origins of salvation, or those that remained secular in their memorial style, could more easily avoid offending the sensibilities of the rabble. The medium itself (i.e., brass) may have helped some monuments that otherwise would have been destined for marring by the soldier's poleax. The general heartiness of inlaid metal slates compared to free-standing statuary allowed quite a few brasses to survive to the modern day.

The topic of why brasses *survived* is one of the fields that has eluded the interest of scholars. Plenty of work has been done on how and when brasses were *lost*, and, on occasion, there is evidence to show who *defaced* the monuments. There is even much research as to why brasses were *destroyed*, as English iconoclasm is a sore topic even for modern scholars who are centuries removed from the religious conflict of the Civil War. More research could be done on why monumental brasses, almost right after the Restoration, remained unnoticed outside of antiquarian circles for almost two centuries, or why Victorian scholars were the ones who discovered funerary monuments as primary sources for medieval English culture. Though it is a shame that many brasses are lost to history, it is the privilege of our time to have the opportunity to freely disseminate the research concerning brass plates and rubbings, not just to fight against centuries of neglect, but also to honor the deceased and preserve their memory.

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