

Gareth O'Neal

"Witness in Brass":

The Funerary Monuments of English Knights (ca. 1300-ca. 1600)

ABSTRACT: *This article explores the depictions of English medieval and early modern knights on funerary brass etchings. On the basis of the brass rubbings in the Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection at California State University, Fullerton, it analyzes the religious symbolism, the armor, and the heraldic devices used to portray the knights' pious loyalty to God and king. The author argues that the etchings characterize the knights in a positive light in an attempt to have viewers pray for their souls.*

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

Introduction

The medieval and Renaissance mind found solace in the permanency offered by funerary brass etchings. In William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the English king promises that such monuments will act as "witness[es] [...] in brass" to the soldiers' actions, and that the markers for those who will have lost their lives at the Battle of Agincourt (1415) will be admired by future generations.¹ Monumental brasses feature "an inscription, figure, shield of arms or other device engraved in flat plate brass for a commemorative purpose."² Most act as markers over burial plots, depicting the deceased entombed below in the prime of life and how they hoped to appear at the resurrection.³ They were placed in churches from about 1250 until 1650,⁴ and they provide an excellent window into medieval and early modern culture, as they illustrate individuals wearing the clothing, arms, armor, and accoutrements of their profession as well as their status in life. Extant depictions range across the social strata, from duchesses, archbishops, and knights to university masters, brewers, and yeomen, the only exception being the king and the royal family.⁵ While the brasses once numbered around 250,000, only 8,000 remain in England today due to early modern

¹ William Shakespeare, "Henry V," in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 1528, 4.3.96-101: "A many of our bodies shall no doubt/Find native graves, upon the which, I trust,/Shall witness live in brass of this day's work./And those that leave their valiant bones in France,/Dying like men, though buried in your dunghills, They shall be famed." See George Vane, "Brass Rubbings Collection: Introduction," Hamline University, Archives, Brass Rubbings Collection, accessed May 17, 2019.

² Malcolm Norris and Michael Kellett, *Your Book of Brasses* (London: Faber, 1974), 13.

³ Fr. Jerome Bertram, "The Iconography of Brasses," in *Monumental Brasses as Art and History*, ed. Fr. Jerome Bertram (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), 62-63.

⁴ Clare Gittings, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing* (London: Blandford Press Ltd., 1970), 5.

⁵ Vane, "Brass Rubbings Collection: Introduction." While there are monumental brasses of kings, such as Robert the Bruce, they are anachronisms made during the nineteenth century or later. No medieval brass survives of an English king or his immediate family.

iconoclasm and war.⁶ These brass engravings can be replicated with the application of paper and grease pencil or heelball to create so-called "brass rubbings." In 2016, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) received a sizable donation of such rubbings from the 1960s, the Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection (RBC) of English Medieval and Renaissance Monumental Brass Rubbings, which serves as the primary-source basis for this article.⁷

Most of the RBC rubbings are in excellent condition and provide a clean facsimile of the memorialized deceased. They are based on etchings that range from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, and they affirm trends found in other contemporary depictions. While the RBC includes knights, ladies, clergy, and academics, this article will focus on the brass rubbings of knights. The selection provides an excellent survey of differing artistic qualities throughout the period of their creation, ranging from the earliest known extant brass⁸ until late into the fashion of funerary brasses.⁹ One textual source that provides context for the later periods of monumental brass manufacture and the iconoclastic defacement in the Renaissance is the diary of William Dowsing, a Puritan who was given the duty of destroying idolatry and superstition under Oliver Cromwell, a task that he recorded diligently in his journal.¹⁰

Scholarship of monumental brasses can generally be divided into that of the late Victorian era, when the importance of the brasses was re-assessed and found meritorious for research, and that of the 1950s through the 1970s, when knowledge of the monuments and collecting rubbings became a hobby for many living in or visiting England. From the first wave of scholarly interest, the works of Herbert Haines (1826-1872)¹¹ and Herbert Druitt (1876-1943)¹² continue to be useful. While Druitt was more of a collector than a scholar, Haines was one of the seminal authors for the study of brasses, using an art-historical methodology and

⁶ Vane, "Brass Rubbings Collection: Introduction."

⁷ 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."

⁸ Sir John d'Aubernoun (Daubernoun) (1277), RBC; original brass: St. Mary's Church, Stoke D'Abernon, borough of Elmbridge, Surrey, England.

⁹ William Wightman and Wife (1579), RBC; original brass: St. Mary's Church, Harrow on the Hill, London, Middlesex, England.

¹⁰ *The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia during the English Civil War*, ed. Trevor Cooper (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001).

¹¹ 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).

¹² Herbert Druitt, *A Manual of Costume as Illustrated by Monumental Brasses* (London: Alexander Moring Ltd./De La More Press, 1906).

attempting to identify styles of engraving.¹³ Haines brought a new methodology, and he added to the legitimacy of studying funerary monuments seriously rather than as a mere fancy or hobby. However, Haines's studies are less accessible to a modern readership due to their highly technical and antiquated descriptions of armor. Fr. Jerome Bertram's scholarship emerged during the second wave of scholarly interest in funerary brasses, namely in the 1960s and 1970s, and his publications continue into the early 2000s.¹⁴ His work connects the researchers since the 1970s and is frequently cited by contemporary scholars. Nigel Saul has contributed both books and articles that range from medieval views of death to the monuments themselves; his analysis focuses more on societal views and the reasoning of the individuals in question, reading the deceased's will and the writings of their family within the context of their religious and secular constraints.¹⁵ While Paul Binski's works do not focus exclusively on monumental brasses, they provides an interpretive context to medieval funerary rites.¹⁶

The monumental brass rubbings reflect the medieval and early modern past to which we have a tenuous connection through culture but that is nonetheless centuries removed. However, there is a connection through the cultural need for memory, entreating the living to commemorate the dead in the same way that those alive will want to be remembered. This article argues that the knights of the Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection entreat viewers to remember and pray for the deceased as they portray pious loyalty to God, king, and family through religious symbolism, armor, and heraldic devices.

I. Hic Iacet Peccator ("Here Lies a Sinner")

While grave markers, in the simplest and most literal form, serve as a boundary and reminder that a body is buried beneath and should not be disturbed, in the context of faith, they connect the dead with the living. Though actions and charities may be listed, according to Fr. Jerome Bertram,

[t]he purpose of a medieval brass is more than just to mark a grave or glorify a dead person; it is, in common with every branch of church art, a visual lesson in the meaning of life, seen always in the context of faith. It is there to show us 'how shall all dead be': to give us the

¹³ Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁴ Fr. Jerome Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England* (New York: Great Albion Books, 1971); Fr. Jerome Bertram, ed., *Monumental Brasses as Art and History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996); Fr. Jerome Bertram, "From Duccius to Daubernoun: Ancient Antecedents of Monumental Brass Design," in *Pagans and Christians: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Papers in Honour of Martin Henig, Presented on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Lauren Adams Gilmour (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 219-228.

¹⁵ Nigel Saul, "Parchment and Tombstone: Documents and the Study of English Medieval Monumental Sculpture," *Archives* 27 (October 2002): 97-109; Saul, *English Church Monuments*.

¹⁶ *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200-1400*, ed. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (London: Royal Academy of Arts/Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987); Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 2001; first published 1996).

destiny of the human person beyond death, to encourage us to live worthily of such a destiny, and to pray for the dead that they might be swiftly purified in fulfilment of that destiny.¹⁷

This point is often overlooked, or is deemed trivial in secular academic study, but Fr. Jerome Bertram, himself an ecclesiastical scholar, reminds readers that these depictions served as reinforcements of faith and religious practices. This may have been especially true for the illiterate who relied on the artistic imagery and symbolism to learn the doctrines of their faith. Thus, both the deceased etched into brass and the living were connected.¹⁸ The image not only assured and reinforced the belief in everlasting life after death, but was also a reminder that the dead, too, had once been of flesh, and that the acts of the living influenced the fate of the soul.

Even the *memento mori* ("Remember that you will die.") that the brass etching provided to observers reinforced the temporality of the earthly body and its resurrection on Judgment Day. The knights in the RBC share characteristics of individuals depicted in early to mid-adulthood. There is a consensus among scholars regarding the reason for this commonality in depictions in brass. It remains likely that the engraved effigies "were not portraits in the modern sense. Rather, they were idealized figures in the prime of life that represented the deceased as she or he would appear at the resurrection."¹⁹ It follows that the effigy represented the body of the individual and not the soul. The portrayal of the dead by the living carefully circumvented the issue of pre-supposing the post-mortem fate of the individual. While inscriptions frequently asked viewers to pray for the souls of the individuals depicted (to shorten their time in Purgatory), the images did not depict the dead in Paradise, though they could involve heavenly imagery, such as angels flanking the burial pillow.²⁰ The depiction of the deceased in the prime of life and awoken after the slumber of death reflected the desire for God's mercy and for salvation, interpreting the metaphysical redemption through the physicality of the body.

To the medieval Christian, prayers for dead were salvific. According to Malcolm Norris and Michael Kellett, "during [spiritual purification], the dead, unable to help themselves, may be helped by the prayers and devotions made on their behalf by living Christians. Most people [...] were deeply concerned to ensure that their memorials would attract attention and inspire the viewer to prayer. They similarly wished to be as close to the most holy places."²¹ This

¹⁷ Bertram, "Iconography of Brasses," 62-63.

¹⁸ One could even make an argument that the brass would be an act of charity or evangelization, as the image provided instruction to Christian beliefs.

¹⁹ Barbara J. Harris, "The Fabric of Piety: Aristocratic Women and Care of the Dead, 1450-1550," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 308-335, here 316.

²⁰ Margaret Cheyne (1419), RBC; original brass: St. Peter's Church, Hever, Sevenoaks district, Kent, England.

²¹ Norris and Kellett, *Your Book of Brasses*, 23.

shows one of the major beliefs of medieval Christianity: those still alive had some degree of control over their state of grace with God while the dead were stagnant in that they could do nothing else to influence their fate. The individuals tried to depict themselves to viewers and church patrons as pious and worthy of prayer (that might lessen their suffering in Purgatory).²² These public displays, as well as the endowments paid to install brasses and sing Mass for the deceased, kept the public aware of these influential families and earned prayers due to their charity to the Church.

The placement of the burial sites was extremely important to the cleansing the soul. While benefactors devoted considerable attention to the symbolism that reflected the deceased depicted on the engraved brass, they cared at least as much about the deceased's placement in relation to the chapel and the objects that aided in the celebration of the Mass. The original brass of Sir Edmund Flambard (1370) can be found in St. Mary's Church, Harrow on the Hill, in London.²³ The brass rests in the chancel,²⁴ the section of the church near the altar, which was reserved for the clergy, and which physically separated the latter via divider or raised steps from the laypeople in the nave during Mass. Even though the brass may have been visible to congregants while receiving Holy Communion (and, thus, may have inspired them to pray for the deceased), access to it would have been restricted to the clergy. This is significant since the altar was the location of the Transubstantiation, the transmission of a sacrament of great mystery and a powerful symbol of the Catholic faith. One of the most important of these holy sites was the Easter sepulcher:

[Some] monuments resembled altars that functioned as Easter sepulchers and were located either in the chancel or a niche at the east end of the church's north wall. These tombs became the site of the central dramatic ritual that marked the Easter holiday. On Good Friday, the priest placed the host on the altar and covered it. A candle burned in front of it, and members of the parish kept vigil at the altar until Easter morning, when the cover on the host was removed and Mass celebrated.²⁵

The location of the tomb entailed a weighty choice, as placement close to sites of religious significance could only benefit the soul of those buried close by as they would be close to the Eucharist.²⁶ The Easter sepulcher marked the most significant site within the chapel as it symbolized Christ's death and

²² Jacques Le Goff argues that it was in the twelfth to thirteenth century that Purgatory was "born." If this is true, this might also explain why there are no funerary brasses that pre-date this time. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984; first published 1981 as *La naissance du purgatoire*).

²³ Sir Edmund Flambard (1370), RBC; original brass: St. Mary's Church, Harrow on the Hill, London, Middlesex, England. See Ben Weinreb, Christopher Hibbert, Julia Keay, and John Keay, eds., *The London Encyclopaedia*, 3rd ed. (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011; first published 2008), 788.

²⁴ Pauline Chandler, e-mail message to author, September 6, 2017.

²⁵ Harris, "Fabric of Piety," 315.

²⁶ Harris, "Fabric of Piety," 325.

resurrection.²⁷ Placing wealthy patrons into sacred spaces not only privatized the space but also reinforced the existing relationship between villeins and manorial lords. Those who could afford it were separated from the lower classes of society not only in life but also in eternal rest.

II. From Crusade to Tournament

Depictions of arms and armor showed the prowess of a knight and the affluence of a king even after mounted knights were no longer used on the battlefield, changing from a presentation of martial expertise to one that emphasized wealth and athleticism. The memorial to Sir John d'Aubernoun (1277) in Surrey is the earliest known extant brass (see Figure 1 below).²⁸ His armor consists mainly of chainmail, with a heater shield that would likely be used in both mounted and infantry combat, as well as a lance with banner, shrunk in scale to fit the length of the brass.²⁹ While d'Aubernoun was unlikely to have participated in a Crusade,³⁰ his armor resembled that of crusaders.³¹ D'Aubernoun's brass depicts an individual of the military class whose armor was practical for what he may have encountered in battle during his lifetime. There were major changes in armor between the thirteenth century and the sixteenth century, and the brasses reflect this.³² The ornateness of the helmet in comparison to the simplistic design of the plate armor pictured on the Westminster Abbey brass of Sir John Harpedon (1437) shows the transition away from the martial armor and toward protection designed for the joust (see Figure 1 below).³³ This is consistent with changing military tactics and their effect on the socially elite knights; thus,

²⁷ Harris, "Fabric of Piety," 325.

²⁸ Norris and Kellett, *Your Book of Brasses*, 14.

²⁹ Sir John d'Aubernoun (Daubernoun) (1277), RBC.

³⁰ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 79.

³¹ See, for example, Sir Roger de Trumpington (1289), RBC; original brass: St. Mary and St. Michael Church, Trumpington, Cambridgeshire, England.

³² During this period, between the earliest extant brass (1277) and 1437, Sir Roger de Trumpington (1289), RBC; Sir Robert de Septvans (1306), RBC; original brass: St. Mary's Church, Chartham, Kent, England; Sir Edmund Flambard (1370), RBC; Son of John Peacock (1380), RBC; original brass: St. Michael's Church, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, England; and John Hadresham (1417), RBC; original brass: St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church, Lingfield, Tandridge district, Surrey, England, all have what the author would qualify as practical armor meant for actual use. This practical armor can be identified by the simple mail coif, great helm, or bascinet helmet without decoration and without the "frog mouth"-shaped visor that would enclose the face and be secured to the breast plate via buckle or other closer. The shape of the tournament helmet provided extremely limited view but superb protection from a wooden lance splintering upon impact on an opponent's body armor at full gallop. The shape would have been almost useless in combat where the knight would have been nearly blinded by the limited field of vision and at a disadvantage by the numerous points that a decorated and ornate helm would provide an enemy to grab in close quarters.

³³ Sir John Harpedon (1437), RBC; original brass: Westminster Abbey, London, Middlesex, England.

brasses from the first half of the fifteenth century focus on jousting suits since plate armor was becoming obsolete due to the proliferation of firearms on European battlefields.³⁴

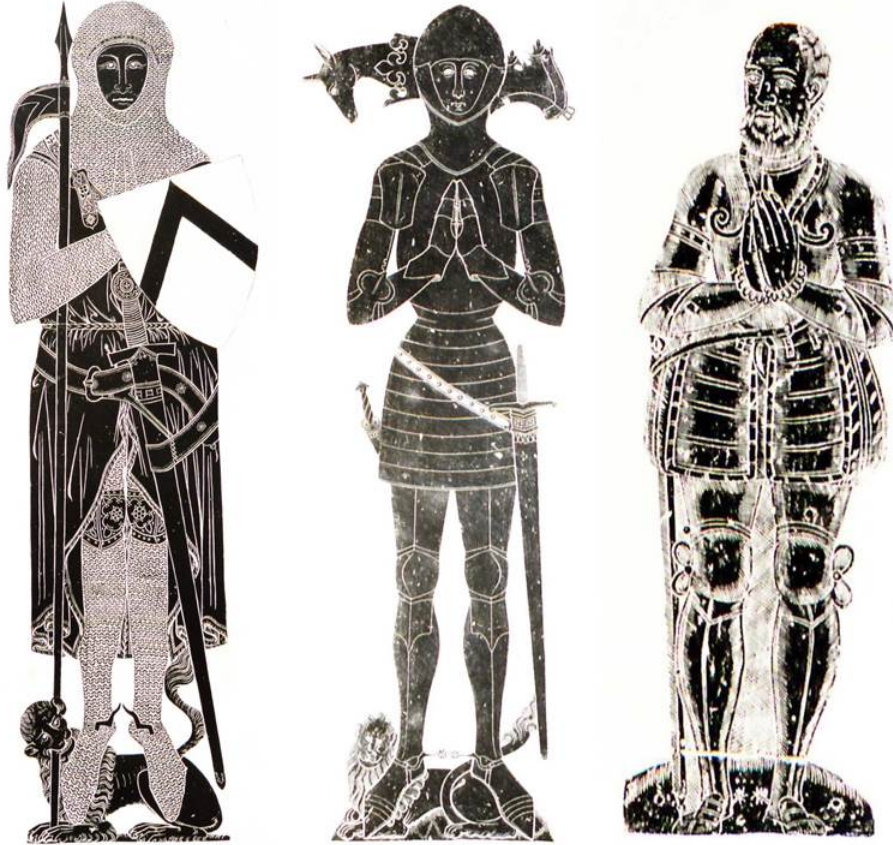


Figure 1: Brass rubbings (from left to right) of John d'Aubernoun (1277), John Harpedon (1437), and William Wightman (1579). Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection of English Medieval and Renaissance Monumental Brass Rubbings. © University Archives and Special Collections, CSUF.

Even amidst the military conflicts of the last quarter of the Hundred Years' War and just decades after Agincourt, there was a shift away from the societal importance of the knight as a combatant. Tournament armor was expensive and not usable in battle. Thus, the change from military use to sporting use showed a societal shift in the importance of the tournament for the knight and his pursuit of sporting honor rather than glory through martial prowess and service to the king. Knights no longer had to participate in military campaigns to provide dutiful service. The honors, investitures, and trappings of the knight maintained their importance in funerary depictions, but the semiotic connotations changed to emphasize wealth and athletic prowess rather than military duty.³⁵

³⁴ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 86.

³⁵ The permanency of this armor also carried religious connotations. According to Ephesians 6:10-18, every Christian is, metaphorically, a warrior in eternal service to God.

Eventually, the significance of the tournament in the identity of the knight changed, but armor continued to be depicted even after its near-complete disuse or even when it is doubtful that the man depicted had participated in battle during his lifetime. Knights continued to be depicted in full plate armor even though they likely did not participate in military campaigns. The brass of William Wightman (1579) in St. Mary's Church, Harrow on the Hill (London), shows him in full Elizabethan armor (see Figure 1 above).³⁶ William was a prominent Member of Parliament, serving as clerk to Sir Anthony Browne and secretary to Baron Seymour of Sudeley before becoming teller of the change of coin Tower mint in 1551 and high treasurer of the army in 1557.³⁷ While it is entirely possible that Wightman had served in military campaigns in his twenties before becoming involved with London politics and the army treasury, it is more likely, given his high positions involving royal treasuries as well as the lack of England's involvement in major wars during his youth, that the young man was occupied learning the skills necessary for his future *métier* in secretarial and exchequer matters. Thus, the plate armor on Wightman's memorial probably had ceremonial significance as a mark of status (rather than the purpose of identifying him as a veteran). Suits of armor reflected a societal and political tradition. While earlier knights had a practical necessity for them, they also marked their status and affluence, as only those with sufficient land or rents could afford a custom-made suit and the constant upkeep of arms and armor. While the purpose of the full suit of armor had changed, the image held cultural significance: armor still marked the status of the individual, fealty to the king, and service to the Crown, even if its military function had since been lost.

The suit of armor indicated a fulfillment of the feudal contract. It proved an important symbol, though it changed from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century. Only one brass depicts a confirmed crusader, Roger de Trumpington (1289) (see Figure 2 below), and the majority of other military brasses are not those of dubbed knights but rather those of "country squires" who may not have fought or even possessed a full suit of armor.³⁸ In addition, large-scale combat was likely not seen again until the English Civil War,³⁹ and even then the primary method of protection was mostly leather with few, if any, large metal plates.⁴⁰ Contemporary society expected that the manorial lord would be depicted in full armor. Individuals needed to observe the inherited connection of

³⁶ William Wightman and Wife (1579), RBC.

³⁷ R. J. W. Swales, "Wightman, William (by 1517-80) of Harrow-on-the-Hill, Mdx," *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social & Local History*, accessed May 17, 2019; S. T. Bindoff, "Wightman, William (bef. 1517-80), of Harrow-on-the-Hill, Mdx," *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social & Local History*, accessed May 17, 2019.

³⁸ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 79.

³⁹ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 79.

⁴⁰ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 86.

their social class to the traditions of service in times of need. When their memorial remained as the only object commemorating their life, they would continue to be known as warriors or otherwise loyal servants. As their memory faded, their only depiction was that of men armed for war. Their depiction as cavalymen or crusaders stressed their role after death, as they or their family wanted posterity to know them as warriors, however dubious that claim may have been.

III. Trumpets and Lions

Heraldry aided in the identification of individuals, and the conventions in design changed drastically as they increasingly served to establish familial or dynastic connections. The depictions of heraldry on brasses indicate the identity of the deceased, as well as their social position, so that the descendants could substantiate their own situation within the local parish and social strata. Individuals could fabricate inherited titles or honors to fortify their status or fraudulently claim inherited honors. For example, Sir Edward Dering, First Baronet, commissioned a series of brasses for his ancestors, several of whom were invented by the nobleman to enhance his pedigree.⁴¹ While his actions are deplorable in their particular context, the emphasis on and determination with regard to lineage showed the importance placed on familial connections and obligations. It especially shows a loyalty to family as the commissioner of such (fraudulent) monuments was willing to risk his social standing and the wrath of the authorities to shore up the social position of his descendants. Due to such invented lineages, it was necessary to establish regulations, especially as inheritance and heraldic practices were changing throughout the period.

The conventions of heraldry became more complex from their initial use as simple identifiers in battle to methods of tracking lineage through familial coats of arms. The visual art and use of early heraldry varied greatly from what it transformed into around the time of the Hundred Years' War. John d'Aubernoun's shield (1277) features the simple design of a chevron on a solid field (see Figure 2 below).⁴² Roger de Trumpington (1289), the only confirmed crusader in the RBC, holds a shield displaying a considerably more complex design than d'Aubernoun's, namely a trumpet alongside stylized crosses (see Figure 2 below).⁴³ Meanwhile, Robert de Septvans brass (1306) features a knight in chainmail with winnowing fans⁴⁴ not just on his shield, but also on his surcoat and ailettes (see Figure 2 below).⁴⁵ These three knights share a certain simplicity

⁴¹ Sir Anthony Richard Wagner, *English Genealogy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 358.

⁴² Sir John d'Aubernoun (Daubernoun) (1277), RBC.

⁴³ Sir Roger de Trumpington (1289), RBC.

⁴⁴ A tool used to separate the grain from the chaff.

⁴⁵ Sir Robert de Septvans (1306), RBC.

in the design of their heraldry. Early heraldry was merely intended to identify the knight quickly and reliably on the battlefield, and carried no family significance, as fathers and sons often used different heraldry.⁴⁶ The images might pun on the knight's name, which was known as "cant" or "rebus."⁴⁷ This provided an easily remembered connection between the symbol and the wearer, which can be seen in the case of both Roger de Trumpington and Robert de Septvans. Trumpington displayed trumpets on his heraldry, and Septvans played on the French word "sept," meaning "seven," and the similar pronunciation of "van" and "fan."



Figure 2: Brass rubbings (from left to right) of John d'Aubernoun (1277), Roger de Trumpington (1289), and Robert de Septvans (1306). Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection of English Medieval and Renaissance Monumental Brass Rubbings. © University Archives and Special Collections, CSUF.

Heraldic displays became more complex as the conventions around their use changed. The brass rubbing of Eleanor de Bohun, the Duchess of Gloucester (1399), features five shields⁴⁸ which show the heraldry (from top to bottom, left

⁴⁶ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 118.

⁴⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., database, s.v. "rebus, n.," accessed May 13, 2018.

⁴⁸ Eleanor de Bohun, Duchess of Gloucester (1399), RBC; original brass: Westminster Abbey, London, Middlesex, England. Originally there were six, with three flanking the Duchess of Gloucester on each side. One has since been lost to time, possibly due to her husband's tomb,

to right) of her husband Thomas Woodstock, the Bohun family, the Earl of Hereford, the Woodstock quartered with Bohun, and her parents.⁴⁹ Of note is the heraldic evolution from marking knights to indicating familial ties. From its initial creation for the individual knight, the heraldic display became an emblem that was inherited from both mother and father. No longer just a quick identifier in battle, the heraldic display provided proof of (legitimate, noble) identity in a non-centralized political system and a mostly illiterate populace. Though the brass of Eleanor was created in 1399, less than a century after that of Robert de Septvans, much had changed: heraldry was now identifying familial ties and proving hereditary titles and honors. Even to modern scholars, heraldry often remains "the only clue to the identification of a figure."⁵⁰ This iconography became important enough to place one's coat or coats of arms for descendants to chart genealogy and provide a clear proof of identity within the community.

Outside of heraldry, other signs also carried weight that espoused both familial and community connections. Many early brasses of knights portray an animal beneath the knight's feet due to the heraldic importance of the beasts, as well as the cultural connotations they carried.⁵¹ The brass of Sir John d'Aubernoun shows the knight using a lion as a footrest (see Figure 2 above).⁵² Drawing from heraldic connotations of courage and regality, d'Aubernoun appears to have pacified the creature, though it still nips at the end of the his banner. Thus, the nobleman's courage and strength display his ability to subdue the lion, even as it still attempts to break free from its pacified position. Another common animal found in the etchings are dogs, which may show the animal's popularity as loyal pets and companions much like in today's society.⁵³ Sir Roger de Trumpington lays his feet on his hound, which playfully bites at the knight's sword (see Figure 2 above).⁵⁴ Also of note are the animal's large and ferocious feet, which may have been stylized to show its usefulness as a guard and hunting dog. The association of man and dog affirms their working relationship on the hunt and while guarding the home, as well as their companionship. This display of animals, especially the domestic partnership with canines, is important to note since it emphasizes that these brass etchings were not holy images, though they were allowed in sacred ground. Catholic doctrine "has never allowed animals to have souls to be prayed for," but has acknowledged their importance and

originally laid alongside her own, being relocated after her death. His brass, that of Thomas of Woodstock, is also lost. Only descriptions remain of the etching as that of a warrior and a crusader.

⁴⁹ "Eleanor de Bohun, Duchess of Gloucester," brass rubbing, Hamline University, Digital Collections, Brass Rubbings, accessed May 17, 2019.

⁵⁰ Bertram, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing in England*, 15.

⁵¹ Gittings, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing*, 53.

⁵² Sir John d'Aubernoun (Daubernoun) (1277), RBC.

⁵³ Gittings, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing*, 54.

⁵⁴ Sir Roger de Trumpington (1289), RBC.

allowed their memorialization in these monuments.⁵⁵ The animal displayed reflected not just the power or courage of the knight, but also the home life or playfulness of the deceased. They were not religious symbols: rather, they were glimpses into a knight's personality and helped to humanize or show a small part of familial or domestic life. These images suggested loyalty to family, which the deceased or their families desired to etch permanently into their memorials.

Conclusion

While the brass rubbings in CSUF's Roberta F. "Bobbe" Browning Collection are relatively few compared to the number of extant brasses, the range of those depicted, from the earliest known surviving brass until late in the trend of memorializing the deceased on an inlaid etched brass slab, provides an excellent survey of the period from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century. The knights or the survivors of the deceased commissioned these plates to solicit prayers for the deceased's souls through the depictions of a pious attitude toward the Christian faith, the kingdom, and the family. The religious iconography and placement of the slabs attempted to draw the living's attention and solicit intercessory prayers from the pious. The image of the knight resting in the prime of life reinforced the belief in the afterlife, acting as a reminder for the living to contemplate their fate after death. It reminded worshipers of the corruptibility of the body and the temporality of life, as well as the chance at renewal at the resurrection. The funerary memorial also functioned as a type of receipt for charity to the Church, and its endowment allowed the deceased of the elite to privatize sacred space. Above all, it called to the living to pray for the dead depicted and to earn grace through charitable prayer.

The depictions of armor showed the prowess of knights even after significant changes in warfare and the knightly classes due to the increasing ineffectiveness of heavy cavalry in a new method of warfare focusing on pike and shot. The change in the depiction of knights from armor functional for war to tilting helmets meant only for the joust illustrates how the expectations toward the knights had altered as well; no longer did they have to serve in war to fulfill their social duties to their lords. Instead, they could bring honor to themselves and the kingdom by competing and proving their athletic mettle by unseating their opponents in sport rather than through lethal violence. The knights' continued depiction in full plate armor even after the disuse of full armor, or despite the depicted men's unlikelihood of having participated in military campaigns, proves the continued ceremonial and metaphorical importance of such armor. It had since become a symbol of loyal service to the king or one's own country in the fulfillment of social expectations, just as these men's ancestors may have worn their armor in military service. The battlefield had changed to the realm of

⁵⁵ Gittings, *Brasses and Brass Rubbing*, 55.

the political, but being depicted in armor continued to be a social expectation for knights.⁵⁶

As the signified connotations of the armor changed, so did the use and purpose of heraldry. Simple icons punning on the wearers' names or geometric symbols over solid fields had previously identified individuals in the chaos of war. However, they changed to become coats of arms and grew increasingly complex with each generation as they were inherited from parents and combined with those of spouses. This complexity and change in customs came about due to heraldry acting as proof of identity and a simple method of tracking genealogy in a largely illiterate society. The transition to an inherited coat of arms, as well as complex rules governing the use of heraldry outside its initial military purpose, ensured the succession of honors and titles to descendants. Yet even with the complex symbolism in heraldic devices and their use on funerary monuments, brasses featured animals that connoted courage, loyalty, and familial connections. Such animals reflected the personality or achievements of the knights and perhaps the desire, in the case of the dog, to etch the domestic connection between man and beast into brass and from life into afterlife.

Much of this article could have been written on medieval Christian funerary practices and the respective symbolism in each act and image; indeed, scholars have filled entire books on the subject.⁵⁷ While the knights are some of the most visually striking brasses due to the detailed and realistic depictions of their armor, they only account for around a quarter of CSUF's collection of brass rubbings. Ladies, academics, and clergy account for most of the rubbings and still need to be analyzed. Thus, many lords and ladies wait patiently in archival tubes to have their lives described and their secrets uncovered.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Gareth O'Neal of Anaheim, California, earned two B.A. degrees in French and Comparative Literature (2015), as well as an M.A. in English at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) (2018), where he is also a member of the Theta-Pi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta (History Honor Society). His English M.A. thesis applied Albert Camus's absurdism to H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos. He is currently pursuing an M.A. in History at CSUF with a thesis/project on the brass rubbings in CSUF's Roberta "Bobbe" Browning Collection. He is a 2019 recipient of CSUF's Hansen Fellowship in Oral and Public History. He also served as an editor for this volume of "The Welebaethan: A Journal of History." His article printed above originated in a CSUF graduate seminar in World History.*

⁵⁶ Though after the "Rough Wooing," with the installation of James I of England and the violent reign of the Cromwellian Protectorate following the execution of Charles I, the political arena may have been no less bloody than the battlefield.

⁵⁷ See Philippe Ariès, *Images of Man and Death*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Bertram, ed., *Monumental Brasses as Art and History*; Danielle Westerhof, *Death and the Noble Body in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008); Miri Rubin, *Medieval Christianity in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).