

REINHARD LAMP

The Brass to John Rudyng in Biggleswade¹

or

How a Mutilated Monument Rebirthes in its Former Splendour

Site

The memorial is laid out on a big slab of grey Purbeck marble in the chancel of St. Andrew's church, in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. In the course of the centuries it was severely damaged, many of the individual elements that were inlaid in the stone disappeared.

In the 19th century, a well-meaning but senseless restoration tore the monument asunder. The remaining fragments of the brass were pried out of their fittings and reassembled in a geometrical design on the chancel wall, disregarding the general message of the monument, and the marginal text-fillets grouped in defiance of their order, the last line being placed first, and the first coming at the end. Evidently, the people in charge did not know what they were doing.

In the course of such headless activity, unbelievably, the important figure of Death was excluded. It was lost, but turned up later, and eventually passed into the hands of the Society of Antiquaries.²

After a fire in 1954, the church underwent repair-work. The chancel floor was opened, the original slab found underneath, and the

1 All biographical and background-information is thankfully, and on trust, taken from Ralph GRIFFIN, *A Brass Once In Biggleswade Church*, in: *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. VII/6, 1939, pp. 251-258.

2 Griffin describes how it was found at a dealer's in Ramsgate, was bought by the antiquary W. J. Mercer, whose widow presented it to the Society of Antiquaries, op. cit., p. 254.

fragments were relaid in their original positions, including the figure of Death.³



Fig. 1: Rudyng's sepulchral slab, photo K. Herring.

3 The Secretary of the Monumental Brass Society prevailed upon the Parochial Church Council to invalidate their original decision against relaying the brass in its old bed, and the Society of Antiquaries parted with their figure of Death and generously financed the restoration. According to KULICKE, K. W., *The Rudyng Brass, Biggleswade*, in: *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. IX/5, London, 1955, p. 284-285.

The Commemorated

John Rudyng died in October or November 1471. He was a church-dignitary, incumbent of many high-ranking offices and prebends. He was Archdeacon of Stow (1455-56), Archdeacon of Bedfordshire (1460-68), Prebendary of Biggleswade (1467), an office which he resigned in 1468 on becoming Archdeacon of Northamptonshire. In 1471 he became Archdeacon of Lincoln and Prebendary of Sutton-cum-Bucks.⁴ That he had a law-degree is indicated both in the marginal text and the foot-inscription.

In his will he directed to be interred in his prebendal church in Buckingham.⁵ As his memorial is in Biggleswade now, there must have been some change of mind, or immediate need. The brass must have been ready, commissioned most likely by Rudyng himself, who also might well have arranged the lay-out of his monument in all details, except perhaps for the inscriptions. The date of demise⁶ was never added.

Description

John Rudyng's memorial was once an extraordinarily complex monument, but only parts of it have survived. It was already severely mutilated in the 18th century. Gough publishes a drawing of it as he found it.⁷

4 Griffin, op. cit., p. 255.

5 Rudyng made his will on 1st October 1481, wherein he directed his body to be buried in his prebendal church of Buckingham. cf. Alfred Gibbons, *Early Lincoln Wills*, 1888, p.196, recorded by Griffin, op. cit., p. 257. The original will can be visited on the internet under <https://prezi.com/w-xbbvxfexfi/the-books-of-john-rudyng/>

6 Saul, Nigel, At the Deathbed of Archdeacon Rudyng, in: *Bulletin* 108 (May 2008), Monumental Brass Society, p. 156.

7 Gough, R., *The Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*, London 1786-1799, vol. II, 273, p. CII, as recorded by Griffin, op. cit., plate I, p. 250. / It can be visited under <https://prezi.com/w-xbbvxfexfi/the-books-of-john-rudyng/>

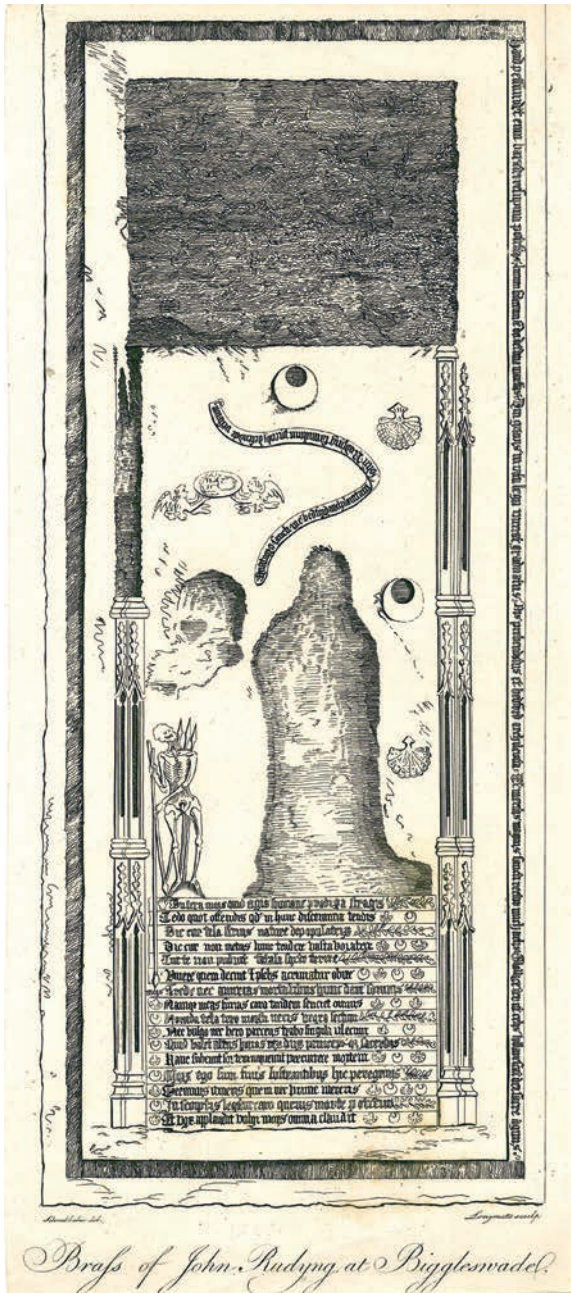


Fig. 2: Drawing of the monument as extant at the end of the 18th century.

It shows the empty indent of a kneeling figure of the commemorated between the canopy-shafts, with a prayer-scroll unwinding from the top. Filling its curve to the left is the bearded, severed head of John the Baptist on a platter held by two hovering angels.



Fig. 3: Matrix of the commemorated, rubbing and photo K. Herring.

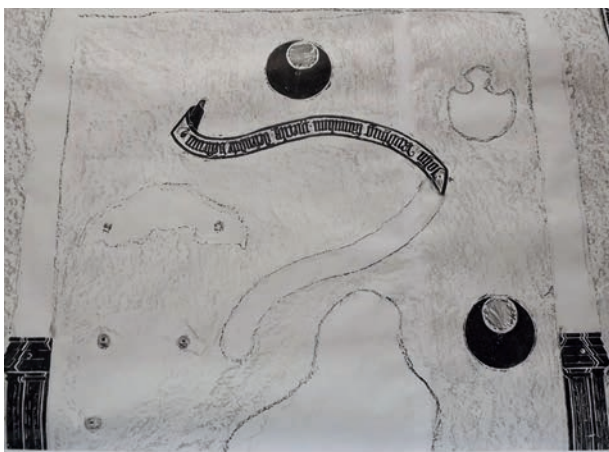


Fig. 4: Matrix of John's platter, rubbing and photo K. Herring.

Beside the figure-indent, leaning against the left-hand shaft of the canopy, stands a half-size, gruesome skeleton personifying Death. He grins up at the central figure and stabs the longer of the two lances that he holds in his hand into the top of the foot-inscription underneath. On his back he carries three spears.



Fig. 5a: Skeleton, photo Kevin Herring.



Fig. 5b: Skeleton, rubbing R. Lamp, photo Kevin Herring.

The remaining surface has two heraldic scallops and crescents, Rudyng's emblems.



Fig. 6: Rudyng's coat of arms.⁸

8 GRIFFIN, p. 254. / Rudyng's bible contains his arms, which can be visited under <https://prezi.com/w-xbbv-fxefxi/the-books-of-john-rudyng/>

At the top is a big, shallow indent with brass rivets around the borders: a complete rectangular brass plate is missing there. Below the commemorated and the figure of Death is an inscription-plate that fills the space between the canopy-shafts down to the bottom, and the memorial was rounded by a marginal text, of which only the right-hand fillet is extant. Therefore, the monument had suffered extreme damage already before Gough's record.

What now remains is:	One half of the prayer-scroll
	Two heraldic crescents
	Three fillet-portions of the marginal text
	Canopy-sideshafts
	Foot-inscription
	Figure of Death.

Happily, the missing texts have survived in a record by Macklin and Griffin.⁹

An open Question

Haines¹⁰ no longer records the platter as extant, but more emblems, a canopy, angels, and four saints, namely SS. John the Baptist, Anna, Elizabeth, and Mary of Egypt, the latter without hints as to their identification, their localization, and their grouping.¹¹ Neither does he identify his sources.

So the great slab now possesses only few of its originally numerous, rare, and most impressive elements, but one can imagine what it must have looked like before its dismemberment.

9 MACKLIN, *Brasses*, p. 148./ GRIFFIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-254.

10 HAINES, *Manual for the Study of Monumental Brasses*, vol. II, Oxford/London 1861, Kingsmead reprint 1970, p. 4. / GRIFFIN, p. 254.

11 Anne has no definite attribute; she is generally shown accompanied by her daughter Mary, often together with her little boy Jesus on her knees, but these accompanying figures are not mentioned. St. Elizabeth, the wife of the landgrave of Hessa, was well-known and widely loved in central Europe; her attribute is the basket holding food for the poor. Mary of Egypt, an early saint, is shown as being covered completely by her long hair. But the description also fits Mary Magdalene, one of the best-known female saints. As not all those saints are recognizable, they probably had their names engraved on a label underneath.

However, mystery veils the function of the big square indent, which occupies the entire top part of the design, and one wonders what it may have contained. Rudyng's will is no help there; it contains hardly more than his many bequests. There must have been a contract with the marbler's workshop, but it is not to hand,¹² and we may indulge in some educated guessing.

The elements which Haines reports must have appeared within this lost plate. The inlaid side-shafts stop sharp at the indent, before finishing their completion in the canopy-roof. Most uncommonly, the micro-architecture continued on the plate in engraved mode, surrounding the figurative arrangement and filling the entire plate.

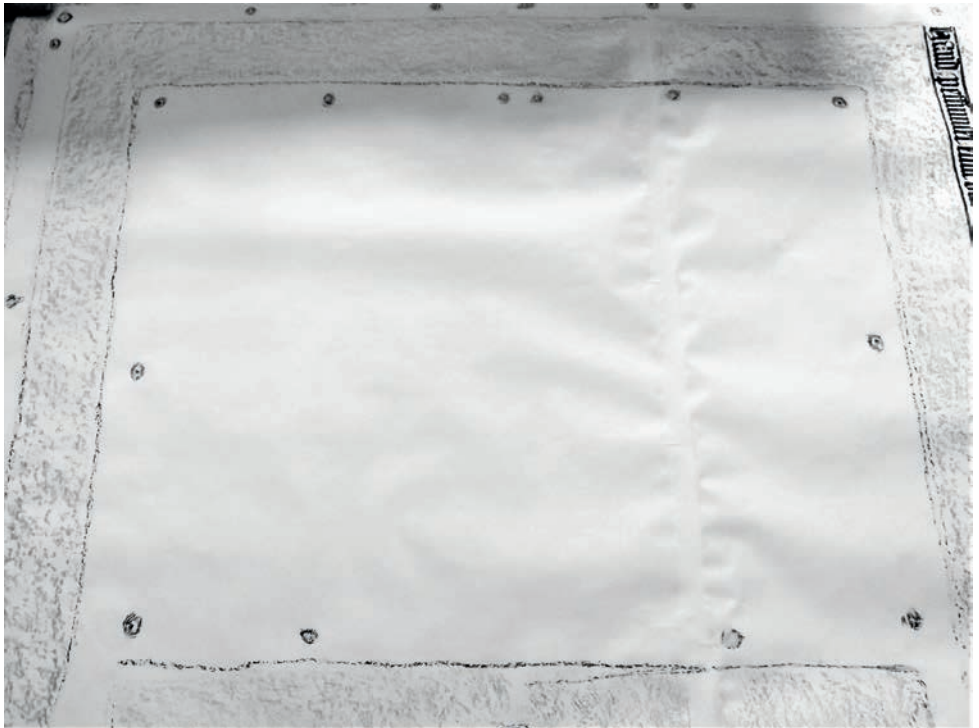


Fig. 7: Matrix with rivets of the lost plate, rubbing and photo K. Herring.

12 Author has not seen that contract with a workshop.

Such a unique, abrupt, and total change from the technique of insertion to engraving may well have been intended to convey some essential message, to accompany a fundamental contrast within the composition. The brutal, evil figure of Death with his message that he is the end of life would seem incompatible with the memorial of a high church-dignitary and can only be justified in a Christian context if there is a counterweight that negates, that silences such a heathen message with an element of sufficient dimension, importance, and delicacy. It might well have contained a scene illustrating the continuation of life in the spiritual world. Such an assumption would tally with Haines' mention of Saints and angels.

That seems to have been the function of the lost plate. Thus, the lower element, which is taken up by Death glorying in his invincible might over life on earth, would receive a fitting counterpart in a celestial scene, perhaps showing the soul of the commemorated being commended to God by saints, such as Rudyng's patron saints and others whom he revered, and then being carried by angels towards Heaven, into the clouds of the canopy roof – an *elevatio animæ*, an elevation of the soul.¹³

Thereby an aesthetically satisfactory and theologically sound composition would be created. This is of course a conjecture, it is true, but if the picture seems convincing, it may well be that is precisely what the brass contained.

13 The possibly latest example extant of an *elevatio animæ* is the brass commemorating Walter Beauchamp in Checkenden (1430).

Inscriptions

A) Prayer-Scroll

The script is textura cut in relief. The recorded parts appear in Antiqua-lettering within fluted brackets.¹⁴

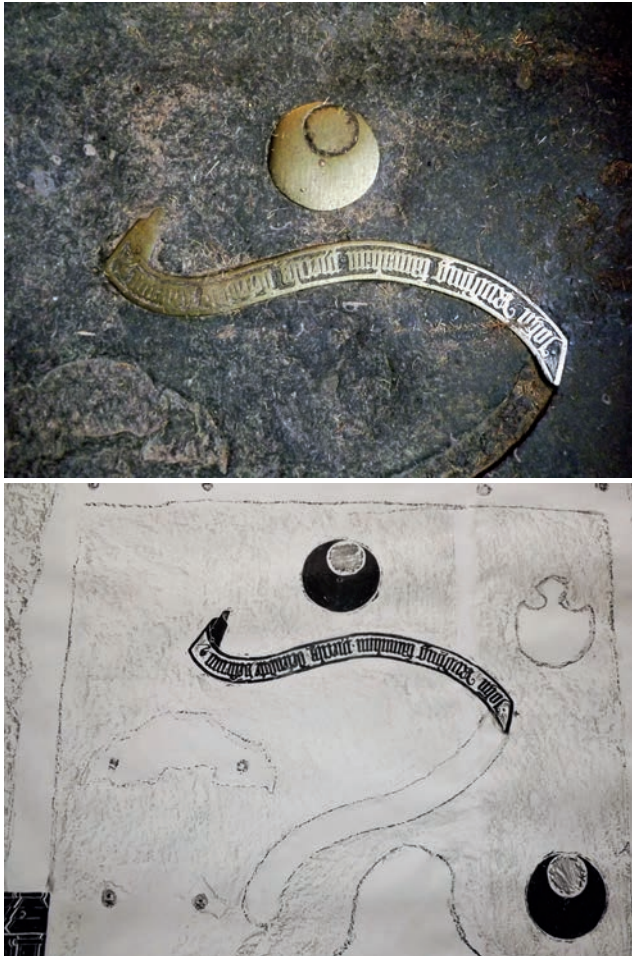


Fig. 8a, 8b: prayer scroll, photos and rubbing K. Herring.

14 LACK, STUCHFIELD and WHITTEMORE, *The Monumental Brasses of Bedfordshire*, London, 1992, p. 13.

Text

{Quatuor O sancti me Bedford archilevitam}

John Rudyng famulum precibz defendite vestrum

Clear Text, punctuation added

{Quatuor O sancti, me, Bedford archilevitam,}

John Rudyng, famulum, precibus defendite vestrum!

Translation

{O Ye four Saints, protect me, the Archdeacon of Bedford,}

Your minister John Rudyng, with prayers!

Comment

1 *Quatuor sancti*: presumably the saints recorded by Haines.

2 *famulus*: in medieval times meant “student”, which does not fit here, though. In classical Latin times, it signified “assistant, helper”, but the word was also used for “priest of a (certain) deity”. It was possibly chosen as a proof of humility. “Minister” happily covers both these meanings.

Stylistic Appreciation

The scroll-text is a couplet consisting of two hexameter-lines. The script is textura-miniscule cut in relief.

B) Marginal Inscription

Only three brass fillets from the right-hand side have remained.¹⁵ The script is textura-minusculum, the *i* often dotted. Italics indicate ligatures (*nexus litterarum*), underlining is in the original a supraletter-bar, signifying an abbreviation-mark. Flourishes separate the verses. The recorded parts appear in Roman lettering within fluted brackets.

¹⁵ After the “County Series” for Bedfordshire (Monumental Brass Society), p. 13.



Fig. 9a, 9b, 9c: text-fillets, photos K. Herring.

Text

{ Rudyng marmoreus lapis est datus iste Johanni quem trucidis ethereus rex salvet ab ore tyranni }

Haud pessumdet eum barathri resupina potestas § lumen sidereum sed ei det diua maiestas § Qui gravis in vita legu vir erat graduatus § Bis prebendatus Et bedford archilevita § Et meritis magnus sancti

{ rector michaelis Glowcetir ut celis hillarescat [sic] det sacer agnus Hujus basilice sponsus fuerat meritosus talis erat qualem descripsi plus liberalem }

Clear Text, arranged according to versification; punctuation added

- 1 { Rudyng marmoreus lapis est datus iste Johanni.
- 2 Quem trucidis ethereus rex salvet ab ore tyranni, }
- 3 Haud pessumdet eum barathri resupina potestas,
- 4 Lumen sidereum sed ei det diua maiestas.
- 5 Qui gravis in vita legum vir erat graduatus,
- 6 Bis prebendatus et Bedford archilevita
- 7 Et meritis magnus¹⁶ sancti { rector michaelis
- 8 Glowcetir.¹⁷ Ut celis hilarescat det sacer agnus,
- 9 Hujus basilice sponsus fuerat meritosus.
- 10 Talis erat qualem descripsi plus liberalem }

Übersetzung

- 1 { To John Rudyng is dedicated this marble slab.
- 2 May the heavenly King save him from the grim tyrant's maw, }
- 3 May the power of Hell that lies waiting below in no way be his perdition,
- 4 But instead may the divine majesty award him its heavenly light.
- 5 He was serious in his life, a man graduated in the laws,
- 6 Doubly prebendary, and Archdeacon of Bedford,
- 7 And, great in his merits, { Rector of St. Michael of

16 In v. 7, "*Et meritis magnus rector...*" we would rather have expected "*magnis*", but the rhyme-scheme bears the word out as so intended.

17 Surprisingly, "*Glowcetir*" scans correctly:

Glow ce tir **ut** ce **lis** hi la **res** cat **det** sa cer **ag** nus.

- 8 Gloucester. May the Holy Lamb grant that he rejoice in the
heavens,
9 Who was dedicated to this church, a man of deserts.
10 He was such as I have described him, and more: high-minded,
noble, and generous.}

Comment

- 3 *resupina*: "bent backwards, on the back"; we offer "lying waiting" (the image is that of a cat, bent backwards, preparatory to pouncing on his prey.)
- 3 *barathrum*: *from a Greek word meaning "abyss", taken figuratively "the underworld, Hell".*
- 9 *sponsus*: *"the betrothed", but here taken figuratively, "dedicated".*
- 10 *plus*: *"and more" – this translation is an attempt.*
- 10 *liberalis*: The principal meaning of this word is "noble", but it has many secondary meanings. Undertones here are "magnanimous; high-minded; decent". These overtones should be integrated into the translation.

Stylistic Appreciation

The poem is made up of ten hexameters.¹⁸

It also possesses a fine system of rhymes. In the following diagram, the arrows in the margins illustrate the vertical rhymes between the first, or – respectively – the second halves of the verses, the central ones the horizontal linkage within the verse. The colours are self-explanatory.

18 In disregard of classical prosody is *liberalem* (v.10); it has a long [i:], and is here made to have a short first syllable. V. 9 *basilice* is another case of incorrect scansion, for it has three consecutive short syllables, which means the word cannot be made to scan. Some artifice must prevail here, lengthening its first syllable. After that the verse has its caesura after the fourth stress instead of after the third. But one should not take exception at such minor departure from orthodoxy; it is not a flaw in the poem, indeed such disregard for correct syllabic quantities is quite often seen.

1	↓	{Rudyng marmoreus		lapis est datus iste Johanni.	↓
2	↑	Quem trucis ethereus		rex salvet ab ore tyranni, }	↑
3	↓	Haud pessumdet eum		barathri resupina potestas,	↓
4	↑	Lumen sidereum		sed ei det diva maiestas.	↑
5		Qui gravis in vita	∨	legum vir erat graduatus,	
6		Bis prebendatus	∧	et Bedford archilevita	
7		Et meritis magnus	∨	sancti {rector michaelis	
8		Glowcetir. Ut celis	∧	hilarescat det sacer agnus,	
9		Hujus basilice sponsus	↔	fuerat meritosus.	
10		Talis erat qualem	↔	descripsi plus liberalem. }	

The first four verses are linked vertically by rich, i.e. disyllabic, end-rhymes: *-anni* and *-estas*, but also by disyllabic caesura-rhymes: *-reus* and *-eum* respectively. Vv. 5/6 and 7/8 have saltire-rhymes, vv. 9 and 10 leonine rhymes.

We have here a most complex and interesting rhyme-scheme, which binds the lines in an intricate and varied pattern, thus enhancing the cohesion of thought and the poetic substance.

The wording is highly interesting.

The first half of the semantic field is theological. Hell is very much to the fore and is painted in darkest colours and appears in words strongly appealing to the imagination: *barathrum* "the abyss, unfathomable hole", and also presents it not so much as an abstract phenomenon but as a subject endowed with volition – *tyrannus* "the tyrant" – and bent on wreaking evil: *trux* "grim, terrible", *resupinus* here understood as "lying underneath, waiting for prey" as in an ambush, waiting to "tear him down to perdition" (*pessumdare*).

This is more than counterweighed by the many invocations of God. Four times there are subjunctives, requesting that the commemorated may be saved and given access to the spiritual world. And in many words the powers above are named. The spiritual world also appears in the form of a live subject – *rex ethereus* "the celestial king", *sacer agnus* "the Holy Lamb" – but the abstract notion of Divinity is more marked: *lumen sidereum* "the star-light", *diva maiestas* "divine majesty", *celis* "in the heavens".

The theme then swings over to the temporal, naming Rudyng's offices (or rather a short selection of this actually long list), and his quali-

fications, highlighting his merits (the word appears twice even, in vv. 7 and 9) and virtues, painting a noble character.

The wording in this poem is particularly rich and varied. Rare and learned words are used, they are imaginative, forceful, and intelligently composed.

C) Foot Inscription



Fig. 10a: Foot-inscription, photo K. Herring.

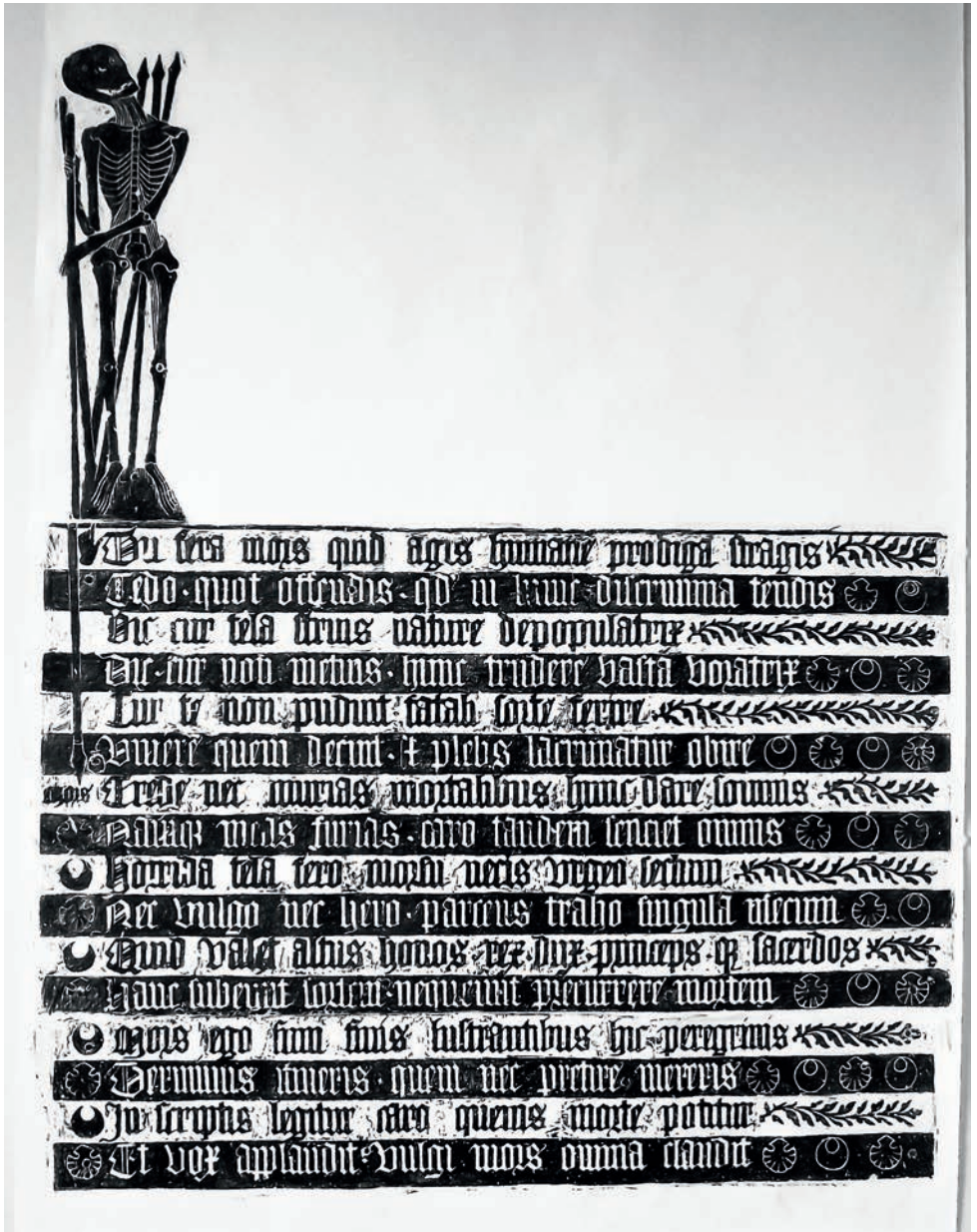


Fig. 10b: Rubbing R. Lamp, photo K. Herring.

The script is textura, the lines being alternately engraved and cut in relief. From line 8 on, the verses begin alternately by a scallop and a crescent, the end of the lines being filled by garlands of leaves, scallops and crescents in alternation. The first line has at its beginning a manicule, a small hand pointing an accusing finger at Death above it, and the first six lines start with Death's lance stabbing through the text.

Text

1		Tu fera mors quid agis · humane prodiga stragis ~~~
2		Cedo · quot offendis · qd' in huic discrimina tendis
3		Dic · cur tela struis · uature depopulatrix ~~~~
4		Dic · cur nou metuis · huic trudere vasta voratrix Ω
5		Cur te nou puduit · fatali sorte ferire ~~~~
6		Vivere quem decuit · & plebs lacrimatur obire ΩΩ
7	Mors	Crede nec iniurias mortalibus huic dare sonuis ~~~~
8	Ω	Namqz meas furias · caro tandem seueriet ouuis Ω
9	∩	Horrida tela fero morsu necis orgeo seclum ~~~~
10	Ω	Nec vulgo nec hero · parceus traho singula mecum Ω
11	∩	Quid valet altus honos · rex · dux · princeps · qz sacerdos ~
12	Ω	Hanc subeunt sortem · nequeunt precurrere mortem Ω
13	∩	Mors ego sum fuis · lustrantibus hic peregrinis ~~~~
14	Ω	Terminus itineris · quem nec pretire uereris ΩΩ
15	∩	In scriptis legitur · caro quem morte potitur ~~~~
16	Ω	Et vox applaudit · vulgi mors omnia claudit Ω

Clear Text Appropriate punctuation added.

1 Tu fera mors, quid agis – humane prodiga stragis?
 2 Cedo: Quot offendis! Quid in hunc discrimina tendis?
 3 Dic: Cur tela struis, nature depopulatrix?
 4 Dic: Cur non metuis hunc trudere, vasta voratrix?
 5 Cur te non pudit fatali sorte ferire
 6 Vivere quem decuit et plebs lacrimatur obire?
 7 Mors: Crede nec iniurias mortalibus hunc dare somnis!
 8 Namque meas furias caro tandem sentiet omnis.
 9 Horrida tela fero: morsu necis urgeo seclum.
 10 Nec vulgo nec hero parcens traho singula mecum.
 11 Quid valet altus honos? Rex, dux, princepsque sacerdos -
 12 Hanc subeunt sortem, nequeunt precurrere mortem.
 13 Mors ego sum, finis lustrantibus hic peregrinis,
 14 Terminus itineris, quem nec preterire mereris!
 15 In scriptis legitur: caro quevis morte potitur.
 16 Et vox applaudit vulgi: Mors omnia claudit.

Translation

1 Thou savage Death, overflowing with human destruction and
 misery, what art thou doing?
 2 Out with it: How many¹⁹ dost thou offend! Wherefore bend
 thy decisions against this man?
 3 Speak: Why dost thou range thy spears for action, thou
 decimator of Nature?
 4 Say: Why feelest thou no qualms about thrusting this man down,
 thou desolate, bleak, crude devourer?
 5 Why hast thou not felt ashamed to strike with fatal lot
 6 Him who ought to live, and whose decease the people bewep?

19 After CARTLIDGE, Neil, A Debate with Death: John Rudyng's Brass in St. Andrew's Church, Biggleswade, Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society, vol. XIX/2 (2015), pp. 94-100.

Death:

- 7 Do not believe that delivering this man up to sleep, into the realm of dreams, is injurious to humankind.
- 8 Verily, in the end all flesh shall feel my furies.
- 9 I carry terrible spears, and come down on the world with the death-bite.
- 10 Sparing neither the common folk nor the great man, I drag with me each and everything.
- 11 What availeth high honour? King, duke, prince, and priest,
- 12 This lot they all undergo, they cannot outrun Death.
- 13 I am Death, the end for all those strangers wandering around here,
- 14 The journey's terminus, which thou dost not deserve to overstep.
- 15 In books one reads: all flesh is held in subjugation by Death.
- 16 And the people's voice applauds: Death finishes off everything.

Comment

- 2 *cedo* is not a form of *cedere* here, but an interjection appealing to someone to speak.
- 3 *struis* *struere* is used in the military sense: "to arrange battle-order".
- 4 *vasta* Dictionaries list three meanings. The first is "waste, desolate, empty, bleak", the second is "enormous, monstrous", the last is "crude, raw, uncouth".²⁰ Such discrepancy points to a homonym, which means that different words appear in the same guise, but having different meanings, and stemming from different etyma.²¹ The weight seems here to be not so

20 Walde's "etymologisches Wörterbuch der lateinischen Sprache" as also Langenscheidt's "Großes Schulwörterbuch Lateinisch-Deutsch" and other dictionaries have two entries with different meanings for *vastus*, the one saying "desolate, waste; raw, crude" is marked with a supraletter-bar for length of the vowel.

21 Examples in English: *bear*, *tear*, *see*, *rape*, *mean*.

- much on Death's gigantic dimension, because about that he has had words sufficient already in vv. 1, 2, whereas here moral and atmospheric criteria seem to prevail. Preference is given to the first and last groups.²²
- 6 *lacrimatur*: The verb *lacrimare* also exists in the deponential – seemingly passive – form, with no difference in meaning, though, both saying “weep”. The inhabitual infinitive-construction here, translates literally: “the people weep for him to die” (really “to have died”).
- 7 *somnis* After Cartlidge.²³ The word can be understood as derived from *somnus* “sleep”, because (strangely) it also has a plural for use in poetic language. However, it can also be the dative plural of *somnium* “dream” (for *somniis*), “giving this man to the realm of dreams”. Prosody covers both variants.
- 9 *urgere* “lay pressure on st.”²⁴
- 9 *seclum* a by-form of *seculum*.²⁵
- 13 *peregrinus* means “stranger”. In the Middle Ages it took on the Christian meaning of “pilgrim”, but that would not go with this heathen, crude character of Death who says he “finishes off everything”.²⁶

22 Cf. CARTLIDGE 2015, p. 98.

23 Cf. CARTLIDGE 2015, p. 96.

24 CARTLIDGE 2015, p. 98, has: “I drive the world forward”: Here is a wrong translation. Neither has the Latin *urgere* this positive connotation, nor will the context here allow for it. On the contrary, Death jubilates over his destructive power and is far from having mankind's welfare in mind. What is more, the author commits a serious error, an anachronism, an illicit transfer of an important idea of the 18th and 19th centuries of Enlightenment into the Middle Ages, namely the belief in human progress and evolution. But that is incompatible with the medieval belief in the perfection of the world as it is, the creation being proof of God's wisdom.

25 Interestingly enough, “world”, from Old High German *werald*, really means “man's life-span”.

26 Cf. CARTLIDGE 2015, p. 98.

14 *pretire* short for *preterire*, in reality *præterire*, an abbreviation-mark missing – on purpose, in order to save the metre, the word having a first long syllable, thus incompatible with the prosody.

Stylistic Appreciation

The text is a poem made up of sixteen Latin hexameters.²⁷ The system of *cæsura*-rhymes and end-rhymes is most elaborate and impressive. It is a dialogue between a Weeper, standing for a friend, a relative, the poet, or humankind generally, who accuses Death for his indiscriminately murderous activity, and Death's vindication of himself.²⁸

27 Only few departures from the classical rule are seen here. The words *Cedo* (v. 2) and *itineris* (v. 14) both have a short first syllable, whereas the metre here demands a long one. In the other cases it is the opposite: *traho* (v.10) and *caro* (vv. 8, 15) have each a long end-syllable, but are here pronounced as short. The suppression of an abbreviation-mark in *pretire* is intentional, as the complete word would be incompatible with the metre. All these remarks say nothing about the quality of the text as a whole, as medieval writers easily took such occasional departures from the classical rules of syllabic quantities in their stride.

28 The poem is not, as Nigel Saul has it (*At the Deathbed of Archdeacon Rudyng*, in: *Bulletin* 108 (May 2008), *Monumental Brass Society*, p. 156), a dialogue between Death and Rudyng, as he is spoken of in the 3rd person singular in vv. 2 and 7 (*hunc*), it is an altercation between Death and a First Voice, the advocate of life.

1		Tu fera mors, quid agis ↔	humane prodiga stragis ?	
2		Cedo: Quot offendis! ↔	Quid in hunc discrimina tendis!	
3	↓	Dic: Cur tela struis,	nature depopulatrix?	↓
4	↑	Dic : Cur non metu is	hunc trudere, vasta voratrix?	↑
5	↓	Cur te non pudit	fatali sorte ferire	↓
6	↑	Vivere quem decuit	et plebs lacrimatur obire ?	↑
7	↓	(Mors:) Crede nec iniurias	mortalibus hunc dare somnis!	↓
8	↑	Namque meas furias	caro tandem sentiet omnis.	↑
9	↓	Horrida tela fero:	morsu necis urgeo seclum.	↓
10	↑	Nec vulgo nec hero	parcens traho singula mecum.	↑
11		Quid valet altus hon os ? ↔	Rex, dux, princepsque sacer dos -	
12		Hanc subeunt sortem, ↔	nequeunt precurrere mortem.	
13		Mors ego sum, finis ↔	lustrantibus hic peregrinis,	
14		Terminus itin eris, ↔	quem nec pretire mer eris!	
15		In scriptis leg itur: ↔	caro quevis morte pot itur.	
16		Et vox appl audit ↔	vulgi: Mors omnia cl audit.	

Vv. 1/2 set out on the rich, disyllabic leonine rhyme,²⁹ and the lines have in addition the same cæsura-rhyme and end-rhyme. The next four verse-pairs, i.e. vv. 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, and 9/10, are all internally coupled with a cæsura-rhyme and a – different – end-rhyme, both disyllabic, a particularly impressive show. Follow vv.11 to 16 with again disyllabic leonine rhymes.

Not enough with this exploit, the author also links words within the lines by sound-effects, or by additional internal rhyme. Thus in v. 4, the repeated initial consonants of *vasta voratrix* are most effective. In vv. 3, 4, and 5 (in three consecutive lines therefore) the vowel-sound [u:] is prominent, creating the gloomy atmosphere of destruction. Vv. 9 and 10 have a great number of [o:] -endings of words: in addition to the normal rhyme of *fero* and *hero*, there are *urgeo*, *vulgo*, and *traho*, and these two lines sound almost like the “hoho” of triumphant laughter of pitiless unconcern. V. 12 adds the internal rhyme-pair of *subeunt* and *nequeunt*, v. 15 the pair *scriptis* / *quevis*³⁰ to the already rich leonine rhyme, adding quite sizable extra weight to the domain of sounds.

29 Leonine rhymes link the cæsura-word with the end-syllable or syllables of a verse.

30 The pairs *scriptis* / *quevis* and *itineris* / *mereris* are not acoustic rhymes, but visual. That is seen quite often in medieval Latin in English sepulchral inscriptions; it was deemed sufficient by poets of the time.

Yet another effect comes through the use of rhythm. Vv. 2 and 3 have not only the two first words *Dic: cur* in common, but have also – up to the *cæsuras*, which are in addition linked with a rhyme, and a rich, disyllabic one at that – exactly the same rhythm. This strongly enhances the repetitive effect of this verse-pair. Another instance of conscious use of rhythm appears in v. 11, where the sequence of four long syllables (*Rex, dux, princeps*) comes like hammer-blows, underlining the importance of the message, quite like the last verse, which consists almost entirely of such weighty syllables.

Altogether, the versification is a magnificent achievement.

The style of the first part is couched in impressive rhetoric. Death is directly engaged, in a cannonade of reproach. Repetition is employed as a means of underlining the statement – not a thoughtlessly blank reiteration, but effectful by means of slight variation. The first five lines are structured around rhetorical questions, the interrogative words being *quid* (twice), *quot* and (three times) *cur*, in addition to the imperatives *cedo* and (twice) *dic*. Death is accused in the harshest tone and morally rebuked for cruelty and lack of discretion in his decisions. It is a splendid piece of histrionic stance, which is for all that by no means devoid of true sorrow, righteous indignation, and disgust.

The next part is Death's reply. It is full of self-evidence and non-sequitur, setting out by refuting the idea that a man's death is an outrage to humankind, and that in the end all must go. In answer to the question "Why dost thou arrange thy weapons in ranks for battle?" Death says "I have horrible weapons". One wonders about such loose logic.

The poem can be relished for its brilliant versification and high rhetoric.

However, it is intrinsically areligious, as with its central message that "Death ends all" it opens no issue for the soul into a spiritual after-life, which is part of the principal Christian message. Such a heathen epitaph is therefore incompatible with the Christian belief, and such a sepulchre for a high-ranking priest in a Christian church seems incomprehensible, unacceptable. But we should bear in mind that we do not know what the lost plate contained, and that probably a counter-monument filled the top of the slab, with a celestial scene, quite possibly an elevation of the

soul, which by its size, delicacy, and religious weight was able to negate the influence of the terrible little figure of Death and the foot-inscription.

The designer of this memorial was a sensitive, creative mind, who transcended traditional barriers and opened new fields of sepulchral art. It is quite possible that Rudyng himself orchestrated his tomb, for that must have been near his heart. The poet of the foot-inscription has shown himself a consummate master of the Latin language. He is an admirable versificator, has a stunning lexical horizon, is a superb stylist with resounding rhetorical powers. He has given us magnificent poetry – a literary feast not easily to be forgotten. It is a great pity that he has remained nameless.

Thus, this brass was and is an exceptionally rich and precious monument. The greater the shame that it was so vandalized over the ages.

Appreciation of the Script

One wonders why the arrangement of alternately raised and engraved script was chosen, as it has no function within the text, not even possesses particularly aesthetic charm. Such differentiated treatment would of course have been a superb means of marking the change of speaker, from the accuser to Death, a method most effectfully and meaningfully employed on the brass to John Blodwell in Balsham church, Cambridgeshire. What is more, it would also have avoided the necessity of identifying the new speaker. The word “Mors” has been somewhat shamefacedly added, in small characters, so as to make perfectly clear who was speaking – a stratagem helpless and ugly, and openly jarring with the interesting and complex design of the brass and especially with the fine versification of the poem.

The inference then would be that such an excellent author cannot have ordered the clumsy alternate treatment of the script-lines, nor the even clumsier addition of the word “Mors”, as that would have become self-evident if the two speakers had had their text done out in different techniques. The lance-head anyway points to the beginning of Death’s speech, and thus the change would have become clear beyond doubt.

If such an assumption is sound, the question of course arises as to why such a patently good plan was not realized. Two explanations seem to offer themselves:

Either the author had wished for a “counterchanged rendering of the script”, believing the engraver would seize the implication, which, however, he did not. Or, although he had understood his author, the engraver had been inattentive for a moment and had, perhaps after a pause, inadvertently continued the second line in engraved mode. Anyhow, when he realized his mistake, it was too late for redress, and he had to follow up his method as best he could. Such recognition of error would also explain the ungainly, limping addition of the word “Mors”, most likely the engraver’s artifice to preclude all doubt as to the speaker’s identity.

We probably, therefore, ought to imagine the text as the author had conceived it, namely the first part cut in relief, the latter in engraved lettering, or vice versa, the technique thus producing a dramaturgical effect. Had he perhaps visited Balsham, and been inspired? If his plan had worked, Rudyng’s foot-inscription would have made the same overwhelming impression and would have been an artistic creation on a par with the admirable Blodwell brass.

To sense more and more clearly what the monument must have looked like in the past, and to realize how fittingly and with what spiritual intensity it was created, is an experience of dimension. In sum, Rudyng’s monument excels in its complexity of design, linguistic quality, depth of thought – and is a nonpareil.

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Additum

The foot-inscription in the translation of Neil Cartlidge

CARTLIDGE, NEIL, „A Debate with Death: John Rudyng’s Brass in St. Andrew’s Church, Biggleswade“, in: *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. XIX/2 (2015), p. 94-100. The accentuated passages are translated inappropriately or false.

You cruel Death, prodigal with the disasters you inflict on humanity – what are you doing? I challenge you to say **how many people you will harm by bringing catastrophes upon this one particular man!** Tell me why you range your weapons [against him], you depopulator of nature! Tell me why you’re not afraid to trample down this man, you insatiable devourer! Why were you not ashamed to strike with a fatal destiny one who deserved to live, whose death the people lament with tears?

Don’t think it any kind of outrage to mortal beings that this man should be put to sleep, for ultimately all flesh will feel [the effect of] my rages. I bear terrifying weapons, **driving the world forward** with the bite of mortality. Sparing neither the crowd, nor any hero, I take with me every single thing. What is the good of any lofty honour? Kings, duke, prince and priest, all undergo this fate; they cannot outrun death. I am Death, and this is the finishing-point for every wandering **pilgrim**, the journey’s end that you can never deserve to escape. It is written in the scriptures that all flesh is subject to death: the voice of the people approves, and death is the conclusion of all.