

Remarkable visual evidence for four lost monumental brasses at St Clement Colegate



Monumental brass of Margaret Pettwode, 1514.
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Just one medieval brass, of Margaret Pettwode (fig. 1), survives at St Clement's but in the 1740s, when Francis Blomefield wrote about the church, there were six. He recorded little about their appearance but he did transcribe their inscriptions. Just when the others were lost is unclear but it seems likely that they had disappeared before 1815, when John Sell Cotman etched the Pettwode brass for his book *Engravings of the Most Remarkable of the Sepulchral Brasses of Norfolk*. The brass of Geffry Qwynsy had survived to the mid 1790s when it was recorded by Thomas Talbot but this had also gone by 1890 when Edmund Farrer conducted his careful survey of the monumental brasses of Norfolk (Farrer, 1890, 60).

The loss of brasses from churches had begun after the Reformation, even as brass was still being used to memorialize the dead. Seen as frequently expressing idolatrous ideas, and of tempting value, the practice of removing brasses from churches continued until the beginning of the 19th century. In 1680, for example, Thomas Browne estimated that c.100 brasses had been lost from Norwich Cathedral alone since the Reformation. Under

the influence of the Gothic revival and the romantic taste for medievalism that became popular at the end of the 18th century, the practice of removing brasses from churches began to cease (Spraggon, 188). This was also the period when brass rubbing began to flourish as a hobby and antiquarian pursuit. So gradually public perceptions of the historical value of these objects began to change and the brasses that remained at the beginning of the 19th century have generally been preserved.

Brasses were only very rarely recorded visually before the 19th century so we are very fortunate indeed to have drawings of four of the five lost brasses of St Clement's, together with one of Margaret Pettwode's, which were made by the Norwich antiquarian John Kirkpatrick (1687-1728) in the first quarter of the 18th century (figs 3-6 below).



Figs 2-5 John Kirkpatrick, drawings of the four lost brasses at St Clement Colegate:
Mrs Agnes Wood (upper left), Mrs Elizabeth Wood (upper right), Mr John Borough
(lower left) and Mr Geffry Qwynsy (lower right)

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Kirkpatrick's draughtmanship was not refined but a comparison of his drawing of the Pettwode brass (fig. 6) with the object itself suggests that he was a quite scrupulous recorder of what he saw. There are three obvious deviations from the original (fig. 1). Firstly the drawing is reversed, suggesting that it was intended to be the basis of an engraving (notice the pencil squaring off, which eased the process of reversal). Secondly, Kirkpatrick did not copy the memorial inscription, instead adding two notes "St Clemts Mrs Margaret Petwood widow" and "No. 4". Thirdly, in a bid perhaps to make sense of the plain triangle of brass below the hemline, on which there is a scratch looped line, Kirkpatrick added two rather weakly drawn feet.



Fig. 6 John Kirkpatrick, brass of Margaret Pettwode, pen and ink, 1700-28 © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery/ Norfolk Museums Service



Fig. 7 J. S. Cotman, brass of Margaret Pettwode, etching, 1815 © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery/ Norfolk Museums Service

John Sell Cotman made the same gesture in his etching of the brass (fig. 7) and while his version seems at first glance clearer, more proficient and more accurate, it is Kirkpatrick's attention to the smallest details of the original, which proves the more reliable record of the original. Cotman's attention was focused on generating a strong outline and an indication of the flatness of brasses rather than reproducing the gestures towards three-dimensionality that monumental brass engravers often used. As Sally Badham and Ron Fiske have noted, Cotman generally eschewed shading (Badham & Fiske, 512). Thus his approach was quite different from Kirkpatrick's, who attended to the gestures of the brass engraver, reproducing the roundness of the arms and torso and the weight of the fabric and depth of each fold of the dress. Kirkpatrick also included the sections of cross-hatched brass between the arms and hips that Cotman disregarded in his emphasis of outline.

Bearing this comparison in mind, when we turn to the drawings Kirkpatrick made of four of the lost brasses we can be reasonably confident that they reproduce them quite accurately, although in each case without their inscriptions (for which see Blomefield 1745, 817-8). Among their many details, it is striking to see, for example, that the first and second wives of Edmund

Wood (figs 2-3) were depicted wearing the same distinctive girdle clasp, if not the same belt. Its size and elaborateness suggests very powerfully the wealth and success of their husband, a leading parishioner of St Clement's, who lived opposite the church on the other side of Eyebridge Street. Wood was a grocer, who was appointed sheriff in 1536 and mayor in 1548 (Ewing, 23). Note too the glorious damask of John Borough's sleeves and the ermine of the lining of Geffry Qwynsy's coat, suggesting the rich diversity as well as the wealth generated by Norwich's medieval textile trade.

Kirkpatrick's drawings are therefore remarkable sources for two reasons. Firstly, at a time when brasses were disappearing quite frequently from churches, Kirkpatrick's decision to draw them was very unusual. Secondly, his approach was distinctive in the considerable attention he paid to shading and the delineation of fabrics and bodies. One cannot help wondering whether this was the result of his scrupulousness as an antiquarian or his professional eye as a linen draper. Whatever the impetus, these apparently modest drawings provide a wealth of information we would otherwise not have.

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