Medieval Inscriptions in Oxfordshire

By Jerome Bertram

SUMMARY

The study of medieval epigraphy in England has been neglected in comparison with well-developed and well-funded projects in France, Germany and other countries. Examples from the historic county of Oxfordshire show the range and scope of inscriptions in various media, and for various purposes. Reference to the author's attempts to collect information on local inscriptions illustrates the problems encountered and the results to be expected in compiling a corpus of medieval inscriptions. A version of this paper was delivered at a meeting of the British Archaeological Association in March 2001.

Inscriptions can be found on innumerable medieval artifacts, in a surprising variety of scripts, languages and techniques. The study of medieval inscriptions, well developed on the Continent of Europe, cuts across many existing disciplines, and enables one to illuminate another. A detailed analysis of lettering types can help to provide more accurate dates or places of origin for unprovenanced articles of uncertain age; the language may shed invaluable light on the development of Latin scholarship or vernacular orthography; the content may reveal the spread of popular literacy, and illustrate historical and theological developments.

We may choose to analyse inscriptions in several different ways, depending on our interests or our motives. Thus we may decide to concentrate on letter forms, on language and versification, on medium and technique, or on the purpose for which the inscription was originally cut, carved, painted, stamped or cast. In collecting material for analysis all these factors must be taken into consideration. The perennial temptation for antiquaries and archaeologists is to concentrate on one factor alone, and to collect material for study only with that one factor in mind. Thus in the 17th century, antiquaries and heralds often transcribed only the wording of inscriptions with no regard for letter forms or material; in the 18th century the Gough-Nichols circle copied letter forms meticulously, with little understanding of the purpose behind the inscriptions; in the 19th and 20th centuries many scholars concentrated on specific media, looking for instance at seals, brasses, bells, tiles or glass with virtually no cross-reference to the other media. As a result in England there has been little systematic attempt to collect inscriptions of all types, and to analyse them across the board, whereas in Germany and France the study of *Epigraphie* or *Epigrafik* is well developed (and well funded).[1]

Over the past few years I have been collecting medieval inscriptions in Oxfordshire, both surviving and lost, as a pilot study to explore the possibilities of an English medieval epigraphy. The more I collect the more I become aware of other sites or categories of artifacts to examine, and it is becoming clear that without the sort of state-funding and state-authorisation provided in other countries, it would be a long and complicated task to compile a complete corpus of medieval inscriptions, even for the limited area of a single city

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[1] For an overview of European epigraphy, see R. Favreau, *Epigraphie médiévale* (1997). French inscriptions are published in the series *Corpus des Inscriptions de la France Médiévale*, published by C.N.R.S., under the general direction of Edmond-René Labande; German inscriptions appear in the massive series *Die Deutschen Inschriften* published by the various regional Academies.

or a single county. Nevertheless, without at least an approximately complete corpus to work from, there is a danger that the study would become merely anecdotal, and quite misleading impressions could be created about the relative popularity or frequency of certain types of inscription. I have now collected what I imagine to be at least 90 per cent of the material in Oxfordshire, which is as near as we shall get for the moment to a representative section of an English corpus. This material is still far from being in publishable form, and the necessary editing and funding would be another major task. This present paper must therefore be no more than a provisional foray into largely uncharted country.

To begin with, let me define 'medieval', 'inscriptions', and 'Oxfordshire'. By 'medieval' I here mean material dating from between 1066 and 1558. Inscriptions before 1066 throughout England have already been collected and published by Elizabeth Okasha and others.[2] Few enough survive, and there are none at all in Oxfordshire, save for some items in the Ashmolean which belong to other counties. The end date is determined by the death of Queen Mary: since the bulk of these inscriptions are religious in character, the sudden and dramatic change of religion which succeeded that tragic queen is marked by a very clear change in the purpose and wording of inscriptions, which gives us a convenient finishing date.

By 'inscriptions' I mean, following the example of the Continental scholars, any written text in any medium other than manuscript or printed books and documents, or coins and seals, all of which have their own highly-developed disciplines, and would add to the bulk of material inconceivably. Nevertheless, these other forms of written text can shed useful light on inscriptions, and will need to be brought into our study for comparison.[3]

By 'Oxfordshire' I mean of course the city and university, and the historic county represented by Pevsner and the *Victoria County History*, though in discussing the material I have noticed occasional examples from just over the borders. The boundaries are of course largely arbitrary, and the makers of inscriptions would have paid little attention to them: many of our local inscriptions were in fact made in London or elsewhere, so the historical accident of their being found in a particular locality may have little significance with regard to lettering or technique. We should resist the temptation to imagine every artifact is 'local', and to detect local traditions before seeing a similarly representative corpus from elsewhere. But boundaries we must choose if the material is to be manageable at all.

Of the possible methods of dividing up the subject, I have chosen to follow that of purpose and motive, which will enable us to cut sections, as it were, through other possible categories. Thus as we proceed we shall meet six scripts, five languages and at least ten materials with their appropriate techniques in the course of this article.

1   SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS

The most obvious and most numerous category is that of sepulchral monuments. In the churches and chapels of Oxford city and county there are, or were, some 500 known medieval memorials, virtually all of which had inscriptions, most of which are recorded. About 480 were in 'brass' (i.e. an alloy of copper with tin, zinc, lead and iron), and have been well studied.[4] The oldest is the slab of John de Coleville, 1273, in St. Frideswide's Priory

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[2] E.g. E. Okasha, *Corpus of Early Christian Inscribed Stones in South-West Britain* (1993); E. Okasha, *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (1971).

[3] See for example J. Higgett, 'Epigraphic Lettering and Book Script in the British Isles', in W. Koch and C. Steininger (eds.), *Inschrift und Material: Inschrift und Buchschrift* (1999), 137-50.

[4] See for example many papers in *Oxf. Jnl. of Monumental Brasses* (1897-1913), and J. Bertram et al., 'The Lost Brasses of Oxford', *Monumental Brass Soc. Trans.* (hereafter *MBST*), xi (1972-3) , 219-52, 321-79.

(now the cathedral), which still shows the indents for letters separately cast in metal.[5] These letters, which were mass-produced and used on a great many inscriptions throughout England, are in the script which I continue to call 'Lombardic': broad legible Uncial forms, characterised by the closed C and E. They appeared in the third quarter of the 13th century, dominated the field until the middle of the 14th, and were used occasionally much later.

Like 18 other early examples in the county, the Coleville inscription is in French, with the common rhyme:

Johan de Coleivile gist yci
Dieu de sa alme ait merci.
Qi pour l'alme priera
dis iours de pardon avera. Amen.
(John de Coleville lies here, may God have mercy on his soul. Whoever prays for his soul shall have ten days of indulgence. Amen.)

It tells us simply who is buried here, and requests our prayers for his soul, with the incentive of a dispensation from ten days of canonical penance for those who do pray. The number of days granted can vary: there are two very similar inscriptions at Dorchester, of which the more legible promises 50 days,[6] while contemporary memorials at Rotherfield Grays and Ewelme offer 100 (Fig. 1). Later in the century, at All Saints church in the city, the mayor of Oxford, John de Bereford, who was involved in the famous riots of St. Scholastica's day, managed to secure a grant of 620 days. None of these French inscriptions tell us the date of death of the deceased, but documentary evidence is available for enough to give us a reasonable sequence for dating.[7]

Another common French formula is seen on a clear indent for a brass at Aston Rowant:

Vous qe par ici passetz,
Pur l'alme Sire Hughe le Blount prietz;
Le corps de qi ici gist
L'alme receive Ihesu Crist.
(You who pass by here, pray for the soul of Sir Hugh de Blount, whose body lies here, but may Jesus Christ receive his soul.)

It is variously dated 1314 or 1327: similar lines appear on another Blount family slab, at Buckland (formerly Berkshire). The first two lines can be read on a coffin-lid in Dorchester to Brother Rauf, where the standard metal letters were set into a tapering slab with incised decoration.[8]

Fig. 1. Indent for brass of William Wace, c. 1300-25, Ewelme. *Drawing by author.*

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[5] Illustrated in S. Badham and M. Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses from the London Marblers* (1999), 154.

[6] Illustrated in J. Coales (ed.), *The Earliest English Brasses, Patronage, Style and Workshops 1270-1350* (1987), fig. 167.

[7] The examples in Rotherfield and All Saints are lost: see *Oxfordshire Parochial Collections* (Oxon. Rec. Soc. ii, iv, xi, 1920-9), 247 (Rotherfield Grays); *MBST*, xi, 335 (All Saints).

[8] Illustrated in *Earliest Eng. Brasses*, fig. 212.

After the middle of the 14th century, brass inscriptions were engraved on plates rather than inlaid in separate letters. The metal was too hard to cut like stone, but needed to be engraved with many strokes along the lines of the design. The technique can be well observed on the inscription to Benet English at Nuffield, soon after 1351 (Fig. 2). The earliest such inscription is dated 1333, being the foundation-plate of Bisham Priory, recycled for a post-medieval brass at Denchworth (formerly Berkshire).[9] Both of these are in the praescissa form of Gothic minuscule script, with square-cut lower terminations to letters such as i, m and n, making it easy to read. The praescissa script was difficult to execute with a pen, and as a result was rare and prestigious on manuscripts: in brass it is no more difficult than any other, but its use seems to have been confined to the 14th century. The earliest use of Gothic minuscule in England is on a monument at Hereford cathedral to Bishop Swinfield, probably prepared before his death in 1316, which has a surviving incised inscription, formerly accompanied by a brass with the same wording in Lombardic lettering.[10]

Fig. 2.   Detail of inscription on brass to Benet Englisshe, *c.* 1351, Nuffield. *Photograph by author.*

The famous Middle English inscription at Brightwell Baldwin is in the praescissa script:

Man com & se how schal alle dede be
wen (th)ow comes bad & bare.
Noth hab ven ve away fare:
All ys ozer mens that we for care:
Bot (th)at we do for godys luf ve have nothing (th)are.
Hundyr (th)is grave lys John (th)e smyth
god yif his soule heuen grit.[11]

It must date from soon before 1370, and has no parallel. English does not appear again on a sepulchral inscription until 1401, at Goring (Fig. 3), and does not become common until the last quarter of the 15th century: can it be a coincidence that between Brightwell Baldwin and Goring lies Ewelme, the home of the Chaucer family?

After about 1380, the script used, both in metal and stone, is consistently the common *textura* or Gothic *quadrata*, with square terminals set obliquely at the tops and bottoms of every vertical stroke, thus making it virtually impossible to distinguish i, m, n, u and v. The

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[9] Illustrated in J. Alexander and P. Binski, *Age of Chivalry* (1988), item 679.

[10] The brass is illustrated in *Earliest Eng. Brasses*, fig. 43; the surviving praescissa inscription in F. Havergal, *Monumental Inscriptions in the Cathedral Church of Hereford* (1881), plate III.

[11] Illustrated in *Monumental Brass Soc. Bulletin*, 81 (May 1999), 431.

lettering varies little between the late 14th and mid 16th century, as may be seen by comparing the inscriptions on the Goring brass and that to Margaret Bewforest and her two husbands at Dorchester, 1523 (Fig. 4). Close analysis of the exact letter forms, however, has made it possible to be precise about the dating and provenance of these inscriptions.[12]

From the mid 14th century onwards, the majority of inscriptions are in Latin, nearly all with highly conventional wording. Of the 500 sepulchral inscriptions in the county, two-thirds begin simply *Hic jacet* (Here lies), whereas most of the remainder, nearly all later than 1470, begin *Orate pro anima* (Pray for the soul). Virtually all end *cuius anime propicietur Deus* (May God have mercy on his soul), a stock formula which was standard in England and practically unknown in any other country. A typical example is the little brass at Wardington (Fig. 5), while an unusual example, now badly worn, is on the alabaster slab to Bishop Smith at Dorchester Abbey, 1518: *Hic iacet dominus Rogerus quondam Prior prioratus de Ranton in Comitatu Stafordie, postea Abbas Monasterii de Dorchester, Lincolnensis Diocesis, necnon Episcopus Lidensis; cuius anime propicietur Deus. Amen* (Here lies Sir Roger, once prior of Ranton Priory, Staffordshire, then abbot of the monastery at Dorchester, in Lincoln diocese, and also bishop of Lydda; may God have mercy on his soul). English prose inscriptions, becoming increasingly common after the last decade of the 15th century, follow exactly the same pattern. Very few end without a prayer for the soul. The information between the stock beginnings and endings is nearly always confined to the name of the deceased and the date of death. Biographical information may extend to a father's name, and a title or occupation, but nothing more. As a result there are many damaged inscriptions where the stock phrases can be made out, even

Fig. 3. Brass of Elizabeth Shilford, 1401/2, Goring.
Rubbing by author.

[12] See S. Badham, 'Monumental Brasses and the Black Death – a Reappraisal', *Antiq. Jnl.* 80 (2000), 207-47.

Fig. 4. Brass of Margaret Bewforest and two husbands, 1523, Dorchester Abbey. *Rubbing by author, supplemented with lost parts from rubbings by H. Haines (Soc. of Antiquaries, lady's head and inscr.) and drawing by J. Carter (Bodl. MS Gough Maps 227, f. 36).*

Fig. 5. Brass of Henry Frebody, 1444, Wardington. *Rubbing by author.*

with some difficulty, but the crucial information of name and date remain illegible: a curious monument painted on wall plaster at Horley consisted of a shield, probably intended for Beauchamp, and an inscription in textura of which, frustratingly, all that can be read (with great difficulty) is, *pray for the soule of....*

Any extra wording is usually confined to conventional expressions of piety or warnings of mortality, which may be used on more than one monument. At the very end of our period, even during the Catholic Reformation period under Queen Mary, some inscriptions play safe in theological controversy by omitting all reference to religion. An unusual example, in true Roman capitals, is attached to a pillar at Adderbury (Fig. 6). Its secular tone is an anticipation of the style of Elizabethan and later inscriptions.

Only 12 of our 500 inscriptions are in Latin verse, of varying quality. One of the earliest is the stone inscription in Lombardics commemorating Countess Ela of Warwick, who died

Fig. 6. Stone inscription to
Elizabeth Horne, 1554,
Adderbury. *Photograph by author.*

Fig. 7. Stone inscription to Ela, countess of Warwick, 1297, Oseney Abbey (now in Christ Church).
Photograph by author.

in 1300. It was found on the site of Oseney Abbey, and is now in the cathedral (Fig. 7). It appears to have been originally built into a wall, under a window, and marked the site of deposition of the bowels (the body itself lay in the choir under a large brass). We read *Ele de Warwick Comitisse viscera sunt hic* (the bowels of Ela, countess of Warwick, lie here), which is poor verse by any standard, but typical of the period, a 'Leonine' hexameter, with an internal rhyme. Slightly better Leonine verses can be found in the 15th century, such as those on the major New College brass to Archbishop Thomas Cranley, 1417, which begin:

Flori pontificum, Thomae Cranley Deus istum
Annuit optatum, funeris esse locum...
(To the flower of pontiffs, Thomas Cranley, God granted that this should be his resting place, as he had desired...)[13]

At the end of the 15th century, as the revival of classical scholarship began to bite, Latin verses were composed in the pure ancient style, and can almost be described as poetry, as in this very late example to a canon of Christ Church in Queen Mary's days:

Siste viam, moriture Deo, me respice, frater
  Qui sum talis eris : vermibus esca rues.
Ingenium, musae, pietas, amor, ista fuerunt
  Viventis comites, et morientis opus.
Nemo diu quaeras : cures bene vivere quivis
  Nam bene quisque potest vivere : nemo diu.
Qui sapit, assidue mortem meditetur et horam
  Cogitet extremam semper adesse sibi.
Nascitur omnis homo peccato mortuus : una
  Post cineres virtus vivere sola facit.
Vita paret mortem, mors verae janua vitae
  Mors Christi nobis vita salusque fuit.
Qui moriturus erit Christo, per saecula vivet
  Grata quies aderit, gaudia summa feret.
Cum satis cedens Coorthoppius tempore justo
  Mortuus in Christo jam tenet astra poli.
(Stay your course, thou who art doomed by God to die, look at me, O my brother! What I am, thou too shalt be, as food for worms thou shalt fall. Intellect, skill, piety and love, were my comrades in life, my work till I died. Seek for no one too long, but be concerned to live well, whoever thou art, for every man can live well, but no man for long. Let the wise man meditate constantly on death, and consider that his last hour is ever nigh. Everyman is born dead in sin, only virtue can make him live beyond the grave. Let life prepare for death, let death be the gate to true life, let the death of Christ be to us life and salvation. He who is to die in Christ will live for ever, rest will be welcomed by him, for it will bring him the greatest joys. Since Coorthorpe has yielded to the appointed time, dying in Christ let him attain the stars of heaven.)[14]

English verses, on the other hand, hardly ever rise above the doggerel:

Here lyeth Sir Richard Bewfforest
I pray Jhesu geve his sowle good Rest.

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[13] The entire text is given in *Oxf. Jnl of Monumental Brasses*, i, 45.
[14] Verses now missing are from A. Wood, *History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*, ed. J. Gutch (1786), iii, 489.

at Dorchester Abbey, 1510 (Fig. 8), although one major Middle English poet, Peter Idle, composed his own epitaph in his unusual seven-line stanza, on a brass almost totally lost from the same church:[15]

Ye that behold and see this dedely grave
We beseche for cheryte hartily to praye
To (th)e lord of mercy ouere soules to have
That be here covered under clottes of claye.
Deth from nothing ascape may
Hath of Perse Ideley & his two wives
By his Dreedful office sesid ouere lives.

A set of macaronic verses, mixing English and Latin, formerly existed on brasses at Witney and Great Tew (Fig. 9), and can still be read at Northleach and Luton:

Man in what state that ever thou be,
Timor mortis should trouble thee:
For when thou least wenyst, veniet te
Mors superare, so thy grave grevys
Ergo mortis memorare.[16]

Monumental brasses and incised slabs are familiar, and well studied. Many other sepulchral inscriptions are lost without trace, for they were ephemeral in their choice of material, like the fragmentary painted inscription at Horley already noticed. Most stone effigies must have had painted inscriptions, of which no traces remain on any of the Oxfordshire effigies. It was also probably common for simple memorial inscriptions to be cut on the outside walls of churches near churchyard burials. The building stones used locally are too friable to survive long, and most medieval buildings must have been refaced more than once, but a good example remains at Chedworth in Gloucestershire, and there are records of many of these external inscriptions on the greater English cathedrals.[17]

2   DONOR INSCRIPTIONS

A clear majority of medieval inscriptions are sepulchral, and they are extremely useful in that most of them are dated precisely, thus providing parallels for dating other types of inscription. Donor inscriptions can be very similar in character and wording, claiming responsibility for some building or work of art, and inviting prayers for the well-being or for the soul of the donor. Most of these were in stained glass, and the majority of them are lost, but they were diligently recorded by the early antiquaries. The windows of New College still invite us, eighteen times, to pray for the soul of William of Wykeham, but the most blatant example of self-promotion, in fact the second most arrogant monument I know in Europe, is in Merton College. Here Henry de Mamesfield gave windows to the chapel depicting twelve apostles and twenty-four Henry de Mamesfields, each equipped with a text, *Magister*

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[15] Illustrated in *MBST*, xvi (2002), 380.

[16] Lost inscriptions from *Oxon. Parochial Collections*, 345 (Witney) and 309 (Tew), with early 19th-century rubbing in Soc. of Antiquaries' collection.

[17] See for example R. Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments*, ii (1799), pl. xv, p. xxxii (Canterbury); S. Brown, *Sumptuous and Richly Adorned* (R.C.H.M. 1999), 189 (Salisbury).

Fig. 8. Brass to Abbot Richard
Bewforest, *c.* 1510, Dorchester
Abbey. *Rubbing by author.*

Fig. 9. Brass of William and Agnes Busby, 1513, Great Tew. *Rubbing
by author, lost border inscription traced from rubbing in library of Soc. of
Antiquaries.*

Henricus de Mamesfeld me fecit.[18] A fragmentary window from St. Thomas's church, now in the chapter house at Christ Church (Fig. 27), names Robert Catton, prior of Norwich, as donor; it originally included his rebus, a cat on a ton.[19]

In two cases surviving brasses lie in front of windows depicting the same persons as donors, with similar inscriptions to those on the brasses. At Waterperry the original brass to Thomas Curson and his family (a dreadful composition by the amateur engraver I call the 'drunken marbler'[20]), lay in the south aisle in front of a window showing the whole family at prayer. The inscription from the brass is lost, but the window inscription runs:

> *Pray ye for the soule of Walter Cursson and Isabeil his wife, whose goodys as well the roofe of this churche and the rooffe of this the lordye Ile and the covering of leede of all the same as also this wyndow were made, whose bodies rest yn the Augustyne Freers churche yn Oxforde, which Walter died the vii day of Apryle yn the yere of our Lord God M ccccc xxvii, on whose soules God have mercy.* [21]

A slightly better brass, of second-hand materials, was laid in the Austin friary in Oxford, but brought to Waterperry at the dissolution, thus leaving the church with three memorials to the same persons.

At Heythrop, the brass of John and Eleanor Ashfield is set on a tomb immediately in front of a new south window, which depicts them kneeling above an inscription in almost exactly the same words as are on the brass: *Orate pro animabus Johannis [Ashfield et Elianore uxoris eius qui istam fenestram] fecerunt anno domini M CCCCC [xxii de quibus animabus propitietur deus amen]; Of your charite pray for the soules of John Aschefeld esquyer and Elenor hys wyf... on whose soules Jhesu have mercy.* (Figs. 10 and 11; the odd reading *de quibus* instead of *quorum* appears to be the error of a 20th-century restorer.) Both inscriptions are in Gothic textura, but the lettering is not identical, showing that glass painters and brass engravers could each have their own pattern books. (In contrast, Roger Greenwood and Sally Badham have pointed out that brasses and stained glass in Norwich and York sometimes use the same pattern books for their inscriptions as well as their imagery.[22])

The makers of brass monuments naturally used the same lettering style for other artifacts in the same material. The chapel lectern in Merton College has an inscription inviting prayers for the soul of the donor, John Martock. Similar lettering is found on his memorial brass of 1503 at Banwell in Somerset.[23] Clearly the same London workshop made both brass and lectern.

A much earlier donor inscription is that on the bell at Caversfield (Fig. 12). As well as a conventional prayer text, professionally cast in the usual manner, we have a second inscription roughly scratched onto the inside of the cope before casting. To a large extent it is inside-out. It is in what I call 'Romanesque' lettering, a stage in the development of the Lombardic, where true Roman forms are gradually being infiltrated by Uncial forms. It appears to read:

HVQ QARQAT SIBILLA Q V[X]OR EI[V]S H TIMPPANA FECERVNT ECPONI
Hugh Gargate, Sibillaque uxor eius, haec tympana fecerunt exponi
(Hugh Gargate and his wife Sibyl had these bells cast).

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[18] Frequently illustrated, e.g. in R.C.H.M. *Oxford*, pl. 148.

[19] BL, MS. Harl. 964, f. 95; BL, Add. MS. 11,610, f. 68.

[20] See J. Bertram, 'Oxfordshire Style A – The Drunken Marbler', in *MBST* (forthcoming).

[21] Illustrated in G. Lambourn, *The Armorial Glass of the Oxford Diocese* (1949), pl. 59.

[22] See R. Greenwood and M. Norris, *The Brasses of Norfolk Churches* (1976), esp. 28; S. Badham, *Brasses from the North-East* (1979), esp. 18.

[23] Illustrated in *MBST*, ix (1960), 376, pl. I (lectern), pl. II (Banwell brass).

Fig. 10. Brass of John and Eleanor Aschefeld, 1521, Heythrop. *Rubbing by author.*

Fig. 11. Detail of painted glass window to John and Eleanor Aschefeld, 1522, Heythrop. *Photograph by author.*

Foundation stones and other building inscriptions seem to be less common in southern England than elsewhere, but there are a few notable examples. At Glympton is another inscription in Romanesque lettering, telling us that the church dedication feast is to be kept on 15 March: *DEDICATIO HVIVS TEMPLI IDVS MARTII.* The lettering looks mid 13th-century, and must be later than the early 12th-century arch respond to which it is attached (Fig. 13). An inscribed stone was laid in the foundations of Cardinal College in 1525;[24] it must now be far underground, but is represented by the equivalent stone from Cardinal Wolsey's other institute, Ipswich College, now in the chapter house (Fig. 14). It is well cut in an eccentric script much used for stone and wood inscriptions between about 1480 and 1550. The Germans call it *früh-humanistische Kapitalis* – I tend to abbreviate that to 'humanist' script, since its use coincides with the humanist period in literature. Brasenose displays an inscribed foundation stone of 1509, but it is clearly a modern reconstruction.

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24 Wood, *Hist. and Antiqs. of Univ. Oxf.* (ed. Gutch), 421.

Fig. 13. Dedication inscription, 13th century, Glympton. *Tracing by author.*

Fig. 12. Inscription on bell, *c.* 1200-19, Caversfield. *Tracing from rubbing in library of Soc. of Antiquaries.*

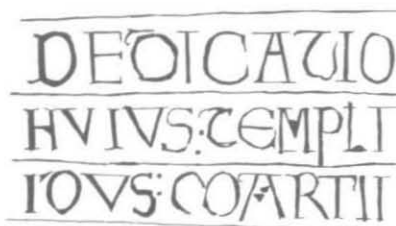Fig. 14. Dedication inscription, Ipswich College (now in Christ Church). *Photograph by author.*

Another much renewed building inscription is on the outside of the south transept window at Burford. It asks prayers for the parents of John Leggare who rebuilt the window: although it must date from the 1460s, it is in an unusual type of Lombardic script. Most of the stones, if not all, have been replaced over the centuries, but it appears that the original letter forms were copied.

An unusually early use of brick for lettering has recently been uncovered at Chazey Court, Mapledurham, where the initials H A are worked in blue brick against the red, along with the more common diaper work and some damaged letters that could be R B. The A has the characteristic heavy top-bar of 'humanist' lettering. H A is presumably Henry Annesley, who lived at Mapledurham in the first half of the 16th century[25] (Fig. 15).

Abbot Bewforest, whose brass at Dorchester we have already noticed, provided new choir-stalls for his abbey in about 1510, on the end of which is carved his crosier and his name (Fig. 16). Like nearly all medieval inscriptions in wood, the letters are left raised above the surrounding background. Another donor's name on a Dorchester inscription is on one of the bells, given by Ralph Rastwold (Fig. 25).

[25] He is mentioned in the 1574 visitation as the father-in-law of John Stompe of Newnham Murren (Harl. Soc. *Visitations of the County of Oxford* (1871), 121), and a small cross-brass to an infant son Richard, last seen at Mapledurham during the Civil War, must have dated from about 1530 (BL, MS. Harl. 965, f. 26). [Since writing the above, the building has been dated by dendrochronology, and at least the upper part was constructed in or after 1611: so unless the plinth is earlier, the inscription may not be medieval after all.]
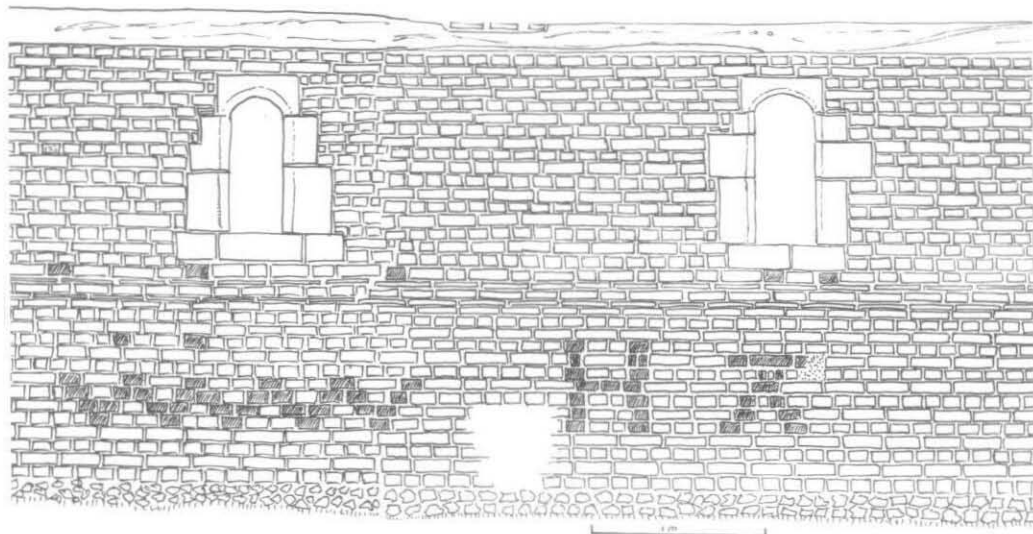
Fig. 15. Initials in red and blue brickwork, *c.* 1530, Chazey Court, Mapledurham. *Drawing by author.*

3   MAKER'S NAMES

Although inscriptions commonly claim that the donors 'made' whatever it was they gave, we must not imagine that they were the actual craftsmen involved. Nevertheless, medieval craftsmen, despite popular conception, were not above signing their work. Some artifacts were signed with symbols or emblems rather than words, but bell founders were quite uninhibited in displaying their names, possibly because so few people would ever actually climb up and read the inscriptions. At Ambrosden, for example, we read *Petrus de Weston me fecit*, a name which appears on several 13th-century bells in southern England (Fig. 17).

Another, more accessible, advertisement appears on certain 14th-century floor tiles, found at Thame Abbey and also at Notley in Buckinghamshire, where the inscription *Ricardus me fecit* is pressed into the red clay and inlaid in white, duplicated many times, and therefore obviously done with a wooden stamp (Fig. 18).

Even wrought iron, that intractable medium, could be stamped with the maker's name. The clock-frame at East Hendred (formerly Berkshire) has an inscription in capital letters made up of dots punched with a small round punch: it reads *IOHN SEYMOUR WANTAGE 1525*. A much more professional iron worker's stamp can be seen at Windsor, where the elaborate wrought ironwork on the doors to the chapel of Henry III is signed by the maker, *Gilebertus*. Jean Geddes has identified him as Gilbert de Bonnington, the archbishop's moneyer at Canterbury, and pointed out that all coins had to be stamped with the moneyer's name in exactly the same way as this ironwork is.[26] Few doors have been as well preserved as these at Windsor, and where the iron was exposed to the weather other examples of this technique may well have been obliterated by rust and repainting.

[26]   J. Geddes, *Medieval Decorative Ironwork in England* (1999), 156, 385.

Fig. 16. Inscription on choir stalls, *c.* 1510,
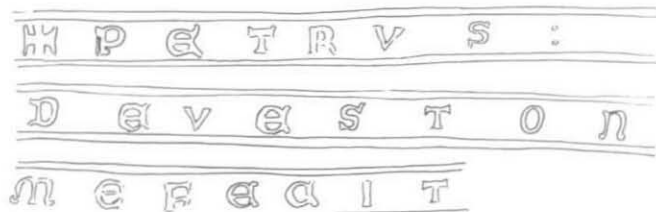Dorchester Abbey. *Photograph by author.*

Fig. 17. Inscription on bell, 1336, Ambrosden. *Tracing from
rubbing in library of Soc. of Antiquaries.*

Fig. 18. Inscription on tile,
early 14th century, Thame
Abbey. *Tracing from Loyd
Haberley, no. cxxxix.*

4   LABELS

Another category of inscription is that of a simple identifying label attached to a figure or a coat of arms. The fact that these labels are so common implies that literacy must have been more widespread than usually imagined, especially when the label is attached to a coat of arms, which was supposed to be an essentially non-verbal form of identification. It is not always easy to tell from antiquarian sources whether the labels actually existed in stained glass or wall-paintings, or whether they are just the note-taker's own identifications, but two glass shields at Kingham were certainly labelled in Lombardic letters, *WARWIC* and *PEMBROKE*, probably early 14th century. At Rousham was a window with a shield and inscription, *Haec sunt arma Domini Thomae Chaworth, militis*, to commemorate the marriage of that knight with Isabella de Aylesbury; he died in 1458.[27]

The practice of labelling shields became much more common after the medieval period. However the outstanding medieval example is the series of Garter stall-plates in Windsor, where gilded copper plates with enamelled shields were made to commemorate every knight. The name, and occasionally more information, is inscribed beneath the shield. Connected with the same Order, naturally, are the many cases of the inscribed Garter shown encircling a shield. One of the earliest examples in glass is at Stanton Harcourt, *c.* 1470-84. Such gartered shields appear in the windows of several college halls or chapels at the very end of the medieval period, as Henry VIII tried to stamp his mark on almost all the colleges: a rare example in carved wood is on the panelling at Magdalen.

Figures of saints, historical characters, or personifications, often needed labels. On an early series of limestone carvings in the Cotswolds we find labels in bold Romanesque lettering, like the *Sagittarius* on the tympanum at Kencot (Fig. 19). Not far away in Gloucestershire the font at Southrop has figures of the virtues, labelled in clear, trampling on their opposite vices labelled in reversed lettering. Similar lettering appears on a font at Hook Norton, identifying Adam and Eve, and, again, Sagittarius, while the virtues and vices appear again on another font at Stanton Fitzwarren, Wiltshire, very similar to the Southrop one, though without the boustrophedon inscriptions. Such simple labels are found on innumerable stained-glass windows, usually below the figures of saints, such as Oxford's foundress, St. Frideswide, shown near her own shrine on a window between Sts. Catherine and Margaret (Fig. 20). The latter two saints were well known, and had standard attributes by which they could be identified without words, but St. Frideswide, even in her own church, needs identification. So also do Sts. Germanus, Alphege and Brice at New College, and St. Sidwell in All Souls, who could never be identified by attribute alone. In these great windows all the saints and other characters were clearly labelled, and in New College their initials were powdered over the backgrounds to the figures as well.[28] An earlier example at Dorchester, under a splendid early 13th-century roundel, reads *SANCTVS BERNIVS*; evidently even the painter was unfamiliar with the name of Dorchester's patron, so labelling the image was obviously necessary (Fig. 21). The earliest Oxfordshire inscription in Gothic textura, in the praescissa form, is on a window at Chinnor of 1326, where St. Lawrence with his gridiron needs no label, but St. Alban does.[29] At Adderbury and Bloxham the saints depicted on the reredos and screen were originally labelled, but the lettering was diligently scraped away by 19th-century restorers.

[27] *Oxon. Parochial Collections*, 194 (Kingham); 248 (Rousham).

[28] Illustrated profusely in C. Woodforde, *The Stained Glass of New College, Oxford* (1951); F.E. Hutchinson, *Medieval Glass at All Souls College* (1949).

[29] Illustrated in P. Newton, *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi : The County of Oxford* (1979, hereafter *CVMAE*), pl. 23.

Fig. 19. Inscription on tympanum, 12th century, Kencot. *Photograph by author.*

Fig. 20. Inscription below painted glass figures, 1338, Christ Church.
Photograph by author.

SANƐVS·BERNIVS

Fig. 21. Inscription below painted glass roundel, *c.* 1250,
Dorchester Abbey. *Drawing by author, including lost portion from
drawing by J. Carter, Bodl. MS Gough Maps 227, f. 47.*

Not all those depicted were saints: in the library at All Souls were figures of kings and benefactors, including Constantine and King Alfred as well as the contemporaries Archbishop Chichele and Henry VI. On some sepulchral monuments the name of the deceased appears as a simple label, immediately under the figure, complementary to the long commemorative inscription, as in the case of Thomas Sondes at Magdalen. The intention must be to draw attention quickly to the name of the deceased, in the realisation that few will bother to take the time to read the whole of the long marginal inscription.

5   CAPTIONS AND REPORTED SPEECH

Extended labels often appeared under scenes in stained glass or wall-painting, forming in effect picture-captions. Few are recorded, since the antiquaries to whom we owe our knowledge of inscriptions in glass took little interest in religious iconography, but there must have been many of these captions in Oxfordshire, as there are still, for instance, in Canterbury.

A detached caption in Dorchester Abbey, which has lost its scene, reads *Baptizat conversos ad fidem* (he baptises converts to the faith), doubtless from a series of scenes of the life of St. Birinus. It is in mid 13th-century Romanesque lettering, similar to that under the roundel of St. Birinus, and cannot therefore relate to the series of 14th-century scenes under ogival canopies which Newton illustrates from Carter's drawings.[30] The windows of Merton College library are glazed with a medley of inscription fragments, originally in the south transept of the chapel. No coherent text can be made out, but the repetition of the names *Ioseph*, and *Putifar*, and words like *clamys* and *calicem*, leave us in no doubt that the windows contained a series of scenes from the life of Joseph in Egypt.

In addition to captions, scenes may be enhanced by scrolls containing reported speech. We frequently find such scrolls in scenes of the Annunciation, where the angel Gabriel is provided with a scroll reading *Ave, gratia plena, dominus tecum* (Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee). Oxfordshire examples from the 14th to 16th centuries are at Brightwell Baldwin, Chastleton and Dorchester.[31] Anthony Wood records a window in Ewelme, without understanding it: 'the pictures of two men talking: *Tu quis es? Christus es tu? non sum ego Christus.*' Obviously this represents the interrogation of St. John the Baptist by the scribes from Jerusalem (John 1:19-20) – you would have thought even Wood might have realised that he was standing in the chantry chapel of St. John the Baptist.[32] A common occurrence was a set of apostles, each with their phrase from the Creed, sometimes accompanied by prophets with relevant excerpts from their writings. Remnants of apostles with credal texts can be seen in glass at St. Ebbe's church, Oxford, and at Combe; some fine prophets remain at Minster Lovell, whereas the outstanding set of prophets and patriarchs is in New College.[33]

Several Oxfordshire churches preserve remnants of their doom paintings, usually with appropriate scrolls: at South Leigh the texts are very clear, *Venite benedicti Patris mei* and *Discedite maledicti* (Come, ye blessed of my Father; Depart from me ye accursed), but these were very heavily overpainted in the 19th century. More authentic, though very faded, inscriptions of the same text can be seen in Beckley and Woodeaton. The latter is best known

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[30] Bodl. MS. Gough Maps 227, f. 47; *CVMAE*, pl. 31.
[31] Illustrated in *CVMAE*, pl. 19d (Brightwell Baldwin), pl. 22a (Chastleton); pl. 28b (Dorchester).
[32] *Oxon. Parochial Collections*, 138, quoted in *CVMAE*, p. 96.
[33] Illustrated in *CVMAE* pl. 25 (Combe), pl. 38 g, h (Minster Lovell); Woodforde, *Stained Glass of New College*.

for its huge St. Christopher, whose scroll assures us in French that whoever looks on this picture will not die a violent death today: *Ki cest image verra le iur de male mort ne murra*. An even more splendid St. Christopher in Horley has a speech scroll:

> *What art (th)ou & art so yinge*
> *bar I neuer so heuy a (th)ynge.*
to which the Divine Infant replies:
> *Yey I be heuy no wonder nis*
> *for I am (th)e kyng of blys.*

This looks like an extract from a play or poem.[34]

A late example of reported speech on scrolls is in the panelling of Magdalen College hall, dating from 1541. Here is a selection of scriptural scenes grouped around a portrait of the Tudor tyrant. On one panel we see St. Mary Magdalen with her sister Martha, and the Lord's words in humanistic script: *Martha, sollicita es, turbaris erga plurima. Maria optimam partem elegit* (Martha, you are anxious about many things; Mary has chosen the better part). In the Resurrection scene the Magdalen is addressed by the Lord, *Noli me tangere* (touch me not), and calling on him, *Rabboni*, while in the final panel she reports back to the apostles, *Vidi Dominum* (I have seen the Lord) (Fig. 22).

6   SECULAR INSTRUCTION

There are comparatively few totally secular inscriptions. Only a few inscribed pieces of medieval college plate survive, such as the mid 14th-century horn at Queen's cheerfully inscribed *Wacceyl!* Oriel College possesses a splendid mazer, late 15th-century, with the improving verse:

> *Vir racione bibas, non quod petit atra voluptas*
> *sic caro casta datur lis lingue suppeditatur.*
> (O man, drink reasonably, not as much as dark desire demands; thus can be achieved a chaste body, and the quarrelling tongue restrained.)[35]

Similar improving verses can be seen in a window from a chamber in Merton, now in the library there (Fig. 23), which exhorts the promising scholar thus:

> *Oxoniam quaere venisti premeditare*
> *Nocte dieque cave tempus consumere prave.*
> (Consider why you came to Oxford, and be careful by night and by day to use your time well.)

More intriguing are the scientific instruments, of which the Museum of the History of Science and Merton College have major collections. Many of these are engraved in brass, the same alloy as monumental brasses, but obviously not by the same engravers, since the lettering, although in the usual Lombardic or textura scripts, is much smaller and more delicately engraved. Two remarkable astrolabes appear to have been home-made: one belonging to Oriel College is now in the museum. It is made of extremely thin plate, no more than a millimetre thick, and has no proper base plate or *mater*. On the swivelling

[34] Illustrated in *V.C.H. Oxon.* ix, frontispiece.
[35] Illustrated in H.C. Moffatt, *Old Oxford Plate* (1906), pl. xxiii (Queen's), xviii (Oriel).

Fig. 22. Inscribed panelling, 1541, Magdalen College hall.
Photograph by author.

Fig. 23. Inscription in painted glass from a chamber,
15th century, now in library, Merton College.
*Photograph by author (by permission of the Warden and
Fellows of Merton College, Oxford).*

pierced plate, the *rete*, are the abbreviated names of the months and the zodiacal signs, in Latin, and a selection of abbreviated star names, mostly in Arabic, though mercifully in the Latin alphabet: *alib, delfin, Wega, ala, hu' equi, esr', aliok, alram' can. le; yed alawe*. The script is quite unlike ordinary epigraphic scripts, and is in fact simply a scholarly handwriting. A similar astrolabe at Merton has the same handwriting, with more complicated inscriptions, such as *Circulus altitudinis et puncta umbre verse. Puncta umbre recte. Nota quod primus 4 circulorum coniunctorum deservit pro anno post bisextum; 2 2, 3 3, et 4 vero anno deserviet bisextili.* (The circle of altitude and the shadow points on the back; shadow points on the front; note that the first of the four conjoined circles serves for the year after a leapyear, the 2nd for the 2nd, 3rd for the 3rd, and the 4th for the leapyear itself.) Arabic numbers are used throughout. This also has star names and months, as well as a table of years beginning in 1350. Guenther in his definitive book on astrolabes comments, 'the most curious instrument it has been my fortune to see'.[36] These two astrolabes, it appears, were made to a specific pattern provided by the astronomer, quite possibly none other than Simon Biridanus himself.

More conventional instruments in the Merton collection include two quadrants with bold inscriptions in Lombardics, one with a scattering of Roman letter forms. On the basis of the epigraphy alone, I am tempted to doubt some of Guenther's dates, for these quadrants look as if they are mid 13th- to early 14th-century, and the second Merton astrolabe, with the inscription in Lombardics, seems mid 14th-century, in each case some 50 years earlier than Guenther suggests. The museum contains a huge collection of medieval instruments, many with the inscriptions in Arabic, but so far no systematic study of the inscriptions has been done which might enable us to give more precise dates. It might, for instance, turn out that instrument-makers regularly used forms of lettering 50 years out of date.

7   SACRED INSTRUCTION AND EXHORTATION

The borderline between secular and sacred is thin. Among what we might call 'educational' inscriptions the most basic of all appears in the windows of the chantry chapel in North Leigh church: it reads simply A,B,C,D, ... in beautifully decorated Lombardic letters.[37] When we remember that the function of a chantry priest, after he had said his daily Mass, was to teach the village children their ABC, the purpose of the inscription becomes obvious. Likewise the chaplain at Chalgrove seems to have defaced the famous 14th-century wall-paintings by writing simple liturgical texts across them; the *Pater noster* and the *Asperges* can just be made out, in a late 15th-century hand.

A very large number of inscriptions take the form of prayers and pious sentiments, both private and liturgical. The simplest of all are monograms, such as the very basic Chi-rho cut in iron on the hinges of the south door at Yarnton, probably 13th-century. Our fifth epigraphic language, Greek, is represented only here, and on the hinges of the rather later doors at Churchill, where we read *IC XC* (Fig. 24). Both forms are unusual in the west at this period: much more common are the Latinised abbreviations of the holy name, *IHS XPS* which are of course displayed in innumerable positions. The most elaborate are in the late 15th-century glass on the stairway leading up from the chapter house at St. Frideswide's. Here the characters of the monogram are made up of the crucifix with the instruments of the Passion, just as the M for Maria below forms the image of Our Lady of the Assumption.[38]

[36] R. Guenther, *Astrolabes of the World* (1932), ii, 473-4.
[37] Illustrated in *CVMAE*, pl. 40.
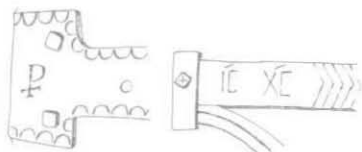[38] Illustrated in K. Ayre, *Medieval English Figurative Roundels* (2002), 107-8.

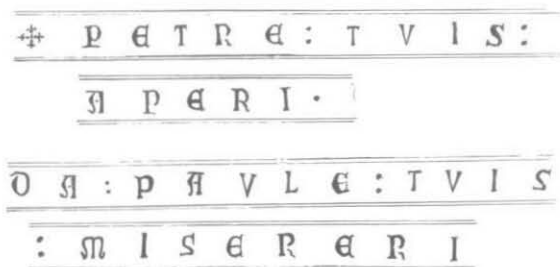Fig. 24. Sacred monograms cut on iron hinges at Yarnton (left) and Churchill. *Drawings by author.*

Fig. 25. Inscriptions on bells, *c.* 1350 and *c.* 1375-1400, Dorchester Abbey. *Drawing by F. Sharpe, and tracing from rubbing in library of Soc. of Antiquaries.*

An enormous variety of monograms, both sacred and secular, are found in the complex vaulting of the Divinity School. Here are personal mottos, short prayer texts, and the initials of benefactors carved into an intricate pattern. There are over 90 inscriptions on this one ceiling.[39]

The *ihs* monogram is often found powdered across a background in wall-paintings, such as those at Horley, Chalgrove, and Ewelme. On the ceiling of the Ewelme chantry chapel are carved angels holding the same sacred monogram in wood. Longer texts are written along the tops of the walls, although badly garbled by 19th-century restorers. It is curious how ignorant of the scriptures the clergy of that period could be, for these texts, once deciphered, are familiar passages from the New Testament, such as *Et donavit illi nomen quod est super omne nomen, ut in nomine Ihesu omne genu flectatur celestium, terrestium et infernorum* (Phil. 2:9-10). Yet the restorer, under the direction of the then rector of Ewelme, made complete nonsense of the inscription in 1843.[40]

Among prayer texts are many hexameter verses on bells, such as the two from Dorchester: *Protege Birine quos convoco sine fine* (O Birinus, protect endlessly those whom I call together) and *Petre tuis aperi, da Paule tuis misereri* (Peter, open to thine own; Paul, grant that

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[39] All are described and illustrated in H.E. Legge, *The Divinity School Oxford* (1923).
[40] See J.A.A. Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme* (2001), 159-65; pl. 66 (angels), pl. 73 (wall-paintings).

thine own shall find mercy) (Fig. 25). One of the old bells now at Magdalen College echoes the famous epitaph of Fair Rosamund: *Sum Rosa pulsata Mundi Katerina vocata* (I am called Catherine, the stricken rose of the world), and the most famous of all is the one on Great Tom, which despite many re-castings seems to be authentic: *In Thome laude resono Bom Bam sine fraude* (In praise of Thomas I ring 'ding dong' without deceit).[41]

A curious couplet, which is probably 12th-century and may be our earliest post-Conquest inscription, runs round the font at Nuffield:

> *Fonte sacro lotum vel mundat gratia totum*
> *vel non est sacri mundacio plena lavacri.*
> (Unless it is grace that totally cleanses one who is washed in the sacred fount, there is no real purification in the sacred bath.)

It is in rather rough Romanesque lettering, with several drastic contractions, which have made the inscription difficult to read (Fig. 26). A similar inscription exists at Lullington, Somerset.

An even more difficult inscription, just over the border in Gloucestershire, is cut on the abacus of the chancel arch in Clapton on the Hill. In unusual letters it probably reads:

> *Qui ter devote Pater Ave genebus ipse*
> *Dixerit, en merces sit sibi mille dies.*
> (He who recites the Pater and Ave devoutly on his knees, three times, shall have a reward of a thousand days.)

The offer of an indulgence, though common on sepulchral inscriptions as we have seen, is not often still found written up, however obscurely, on the wall of a Protestant church building.

Fig. 26. Inscription on font, 12th century, Nuffield. *Tracing by author.*

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[41] For a complete catalogue of Oxfordshire medieval bells, see F. Sharpe, *Church Bells of Oxfordshire* (Oxon. Rec. Soc. xxviii, xxx, xxxii, xxxiv, 1949-53).

Liturgical Texts

Scriptural texts found on inscriptions are most often quotations from the liturgy, for the words of the Mass and Office were so familiar to Catholic Englishmen that they could be chosen for inscriptions in many media.[42] The text of the Mass itself is not as often quoted as one might expect, although we do find *Gloria in excelsis Deo* appropriately sung by the angels on the early 16th-century embroidered frontal at Forest Hill. Another Mass text is used for the chalice and paten of 1527 at Trinity College, said to have been given by the founder from the plunder of St. Alban's Abbey, which should read: *Calicem salutaris accipiam, et nomen Domini invocabo* (I will receive the chalice of salvation, and will call on the name of the Lord).[43] The goldsmith has, however, written *nomine Domine*, an indication that the actual craftsman might not be as fluent in Latin as the patron who ordered the work. Another inscription that garbles the Latin even worse is on the floor tiles at Marston, where Loyd Haberley suspects we have an attempt at writing *Ave Maria*. The existence of so many inscriptions implies that a significant proportion of the population could read, but it does not follow that they could all read Latin. Nevertheless it is startling to find such an illiterate inscription so late, for the tiles must be early 16th-century. Tiles from the same stamp are found also at Magdalen College and Long Wittenham.[44]

A more coherent liturgical inscription is on the 15th-century window at Newington, where a long scroll curling up from a donor figure gives us the last verse of the Easter compline hymn:

Gloria eterno patri
et Christo vero Regi
Paraclitoque sancto
et nunc et in perpetuum. Amen.
(Glory to the eternal Father, and to Christ, true King, and to the holy Paraclete, both now and for ever. Amen.)[45]

The liturgy most often quoted is the Office of the Dead, the *Placebo* and *Dirige* which were familiar to every devout layman from their primers. This brings us back full circle to monumental brasses, for it is the prayer-scrolls depicted on these that give us the greatest variety of texts.

Thus we find the second antiphon of the second nocturn of matins on brasses at Haseley, 1527, and Stoke Lyne, 1524: *Delicta juventutis mee et ignorancias meas ne memineris Domine* (O Lord, remember not the sins of my youth and my ignorance), followed by the response after the ninth lesson, *libera me Domine de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda* (Deliver me, O Lord, from death eternal in the day of wrath). Another part of the same responsory is found at St. Aldate's, 1522 and in Thame, 1508: *Nunc Christe te petimus miserere, quaesumus, qui venisti redimere perditos, noli damnare redemptos* (Now, Christ, we beseech thee, have mercy; thou who camest to redeem the lost, condemn not those thou hast redeemed).

The Miserere psalm (50/51), which features at lauds of the dead, as indeed at daily lauds, is well represented, with parts of the opening, *Miserere mei Deus secundum magnam*

[42] See E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992), for an analysis of the familiarity of lay people with liturgical texts.
[43] Illustrated in Moffat, *Old Oxford Plate*, pl. lxxv.
[44] L. Haberley, *Mediaeval English Pavingtiles* (1937), pl. clxxxix.
[45] *CVMAE*, 155, pl. 39.

misericordiam tuam (Have mercy on me, O Lord, according to thy great mercy), at All Souls, 1490, New College, 1427 and 1441, All Saints, Oxford, 1500, Aston Rowant, 1445, and Horley, 1416 and 1436.

An extract from the eighth matins reading, from chapter 19 of Job, is found at New College and St. Aldate's: *Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei, quia manus Domini tetigit me* (Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me). The most famous text from Job 19, however, is not found in the version used for the eighth reading, but in that used for the responsory after the first: *Credo quod Redemptor meus vivit, et in novissimo die de terra surrecturus sum, et in carne mea videbo Deum Salvatorem meum. Quem visurus sum ego ipse et non alius : et oculi mei conspecturi sunt* (I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that in the last day I shall arise from the earth, and in my flesh I shall see God my Saviour; whom I myself shall see, and none other, and my eyes shall behold Him). Extracts from this are found in Oxfordshire at New College, St. Peter le Bailey, Oxford, and Souldern, whereas the other version, *Scio quod...* is used at Waterperry, 1535, but throughout put into the plural.

Other prayer scrolls for figures on brasses and donor figures in windows include invocations from the Litanies: *Pater de Celis Deus, miserere nobis* (God the Father of heaven, have mercy on us), at Horley, 1521; *Fili redemptor mundi Deus, miserere nobis* (Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us) at Horley again, and at Thame *c.*1500; most commonly *Sancta Trinitas unus Deus, miserere nobis* (Holy Trinity One God, have mercy on us), at Brightwell Baldwin, *c.*1455, and six other places; and *Sancta Maria, Ora pro nobis* (Holy Mary, pray for us) on a window of 1519 from St. Thomas's church, now in the cathedral chapter house (Fig. 27).

Fig. 27. Inscription below painted glass window, St. Thomas's church, 1519, now in Christ Church chapter house. *Photograph by author.*

A variety of other invocations, addressed to Christ, the Virgin Mary and other saints, are culled from various places in the primer and other popular devotions. These were familiar prayers, which the deceased would have used themselves, and which they would expect the reader to recognise and be able to recite. Their variety, even within the limits of the county of Oxford, is astonishing, after finding the main inscriptions on brasses so formulaic and predictable. Elsewhere in England the variety continues, so that a complete corpus of prayer texts from scrolls on brasses would comprise hundreds of texts. It will be a long task to identify the source for each.

Prayers and blessings are common on inscriptions of all kinds. There is, however, one recorded curse on an Oxford inscription. The carved wooden screen was still in position in the chapel of Durham College in 1646 when Dugdale recorded the inscription,

Terras Cutberti qui non spoilare verentur
Esse queant certi quod morte mala morentur, MDXVIII.
(Those who are not afraid to despoil the lands of Cuthbert should be clear that they will die an evil death).

By 1660 the screen had been abolished, and the wood used to construct a stool for the organist, for Aubrey and Wood found the inscription there. Wood comments, 'wee may observe that either St. Cuthbert was an angry saint, or else the monks used much to curse in his name.'[46]

St. Cuthbert, by all accounts, was indeed jealous of his church and its possessions, but all the saints in the calendar would be hard put to it to punish all those who committed vandalism or desecration of the church art of the Middle Ages. Of the inscriptions I have quoted half have disappeared altogether, and many of the remainder are badly mutilated. Few inscriptions in glass survive the ravages of neglect, weather and small boys with catapults; brasses fall victim to asset-stripping in the parish's ceaseless quest for ready cash. Wall-paintings, once deprived of their protective whitewash, fade rapidly to nothing, and bells have so often been melted down under the euphemistic term of 'recasting'. The lost inscriptions are known to us from the notes taken by many Oxford antiquaries, both before and after the Civil War: William Dugdale, Richard Symonds, Matthew Hutton, John Aubrey, Thomas Dingley, and of course the inimitable Anthony Wood. Their notes, among other things, reveal that comparatively little was lost during the Civil War – most of what Symonds saw in 1644 was still there for Hutton to record in 1660 – but of course none of these antiquaries have any record of what was destroyed in the great iconoclasm of the late 1540s. Only John Leland gives us a glimpse of the time before that holocaust, and he recorded so frustratingly little of what he was the last to see.

CONCLUSIONS

Over 700 medieval inscriptions are known from Oxfordshire: probably a mere fraction of what once existed, but a sufficient sample to give us an idea of what men considered important to record, and what men were able to read. The task of finding them and recording them has been complex; some remain virtually illegible, others are inaccessible. There are undoubtedly many more inscriptions that I have not yet discovered, hidden in unlikely places. The brickwork inscription at Mapledurham Chazey was only revealed as ivy

[46] Bodl. MS. Dugdale 11, f. 148v.; cf. A. Clark (ed.), *Wood's Life and Times*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xix, 1891), 424.

was stripped off a wall; I only discovered the extraordinary inscription on the clock high in the tower at East Hendred by the felicitous chance of meeting the churchwarden who was so eager to show it. Even if it could be compiled, a complete catalogue of the medieval inscriptions in this, just one of England's historic counties, would fill more than a thousand pages, and demand several hundred illustrations. In the present mood of this country about culture and history, such a publication is inconceivable, and it may be that the best that can be done in the near future is to make the recorded information available in photocopy form in a major library, or maybe in electronic form.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS