

WESTLEY WATERLESS, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
[Sir John Creke and wife Alyne] M.S.I

Parish Church
D wes-w [1325]
Rev. 1330-45

London: Seymour style¹

Effigies of Sir John Creke, c.1325, in armor, and his wife Alyne [Clopton or Chamberleyne, with maker's mark in lower left corner. Double canopy, six shields, and marginal inscription lost. On the floor of the south aisle.

This brass to Sir John de Creke and his wife Alyne is justly famous, for not only is it the earliest extant brass depicting a couple; it also shows a significant transitional phase in the development of armor in the fourteenth century, and is one of several which bear a craftsman's mark.² Although much has been lost of the original brass, the two effigies remain, and in good condition. Both are represented full face in a position of repose with hands raised in the attitude of prayer, Sir John with his feet resting on a facing lion, Alyne with hers on what seems to be a longhaired lap-dog.

Sir John Creke, to the right, wears a pointed bascinet fluted on top and with a projection there for a scarf or feather. To the bascinet, an aventail of mail is attached, not at the lower rim, but higher up, for one can identify both the staples to which it is attached and the cord passing through the staples to be secured at each end. Although the mail here and elsewhere on the brass is represented as if it were banded, actually it was constructed so that every circular ring had four others linked through it.³ Although the basic armor is still mail, clearly it has been modified and various layers of protective clothing are being worn. Since the mail protecting the neck is now attached to the bascinet, the hauberk or shirt of mail must be separate. It is now clearly shorter, coming to a point in front, and reaching only to the middle of the forearms. Chausses or stockings of mail are still worn on legs and feet, but additional protection is now given at certain points by the addition of metal plate. Jointed plates on the feet with rowel spurs attached at the insteps, half-greaves or coverings for the shins, half-rerebraces on the upper arms, tubular vambraces under the hauberk on the forearms—all are new. And other protective devices have either been retained or modified. The poleyns on the knees may be either of boiled leather or metal plate. The padded cloth aketon that prevents chafing is still beneath the hauberk, and just above it is the scalloped and decorated hem of the coat of plates (the cuirie). The sleeveless surcoat or coat-armor of cloth worn over the rest, however, now reaches just to the knees in back and is very short in front, falling not much lower than the hips. Encircling the surcoat is a narrow belt, and below, an ornamented sword belt, apparently affixed at the right hip, supports the long sword in front toward the knight's left side. The small heater-shaped shield,

¹Norris, *Memorials*, I, 314, figure #19. Norris dates the brass no earlier than c.1335. Goodall dates it c.1340, and Binski, pp. 108-10, c.1340-45.

²Others are at Higham Ferrers, Northants. (d. 1337) and Stoke D'Abernon, Surrey (d. 1339-50)

³Blair, p. 20.

now no longer concave, faces front and is suspended from a guige or thin strap slung over the right shoulder. As one would expect, it displays the Creke arms: Or, on a fess Gules, three lozenges vair.⁴

To the left, Sir John's wife Alyne has a wimple around her head and throat over which she wears a veil that falls to the shoulders. If one looks closely, one can see that she wears her hair in vertical braids, a fashion popular to the end of the century and an early version of the crespine headdress. Over a close-fitting kirtle, she has on a sleeveless overgown with slits extending to the waist and decorated at all hems with a simple engrailed pattern.⁵ Its bottom hem is tucked up on her left side to reveal part of the kirtle beneath, and a mantle, apparently lined with vair (a fur), is worn over it and fastened across the breast by a short tasseled cord. Like the overgown, it, too, is gathered up, here by her left arm.

At the very bottom left corner of the effigy of Alyne de Creke is a monogram, probably of the engraver, consisting of a backward letter "N" with a small mallet above it, a half moon on one side and perhaps a sun or star on the other. Waller conjectures that it may be the badge of a guild of masons, but Goodall believes this is unlikely.⁶ The effigies of both Sir John and Alyne de Creke are 61 1/4" (163.2cm) high. One should compare the effigy of Sir John with that of the third Sir John D'Abernon at Stoke D'Abernon, Surrey, since, except for Sir John Creke's rowel spurs, the two are practically identical and almost certainly from the same workshop.

Lost from the brass are a double canopy, six shields, three above and three below the figures, and a marginal inscription. According to a Harleian manuscript, the shields displayed the following arms: that above Alyne de Creke, a bend between two cotises dancetty,⁷ arms borne by both Clopton of Suffolk and Chamberleyn of Cambridgeshire; the second above, the arms of Ermyn of Northamptonshire: Ermine, on a chief _____, a lion passant Or;⁸ and on the third above, the arms of Creke: Or, on a fess Gules, three lozenges Vair.⁹ On the three shields below the figures, the first to the left showed two bars, on a chief three mullets (family unidentified),¹⁰ and the other two are similar to the first shields above.

⁴Waller, notes to figure #8. On a gold field is a red horizontal band charged with three lozenges in the vair pattern.

⁵That is, one with a line composed of semicircles, points outward.

⁶Goodall, p. xii, in Waller. Binski, p. 110, points out that the same plater's mark is found on the Seymour brass at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire.

⁷Waller, notes to figure #8. The shield has a diagonal band with smaller bands on either side in the dancetty pattern—usually three indented "teeth."

⁸*Ibid.* On an ermine field a chief is charged with a gold lion, three paws on the ground, right one raised, head forward, tail curved.

⁹*Ibid.* On a gold field, a central horizontal band is charged with three lozenges in the vair pattern.

¹⁰*Ibid.* The shield displays two horizontal bars with three stars in the top horizontal band.

An inscription in French in raised letters was recorded as reading,

+ Ici gist le corps Sire Iohan de Crek et de Dame
Alyne sa feme de quy almes Dieu eyt mercy.¹¹

Translated:

Here lies the body of Sir John de Creke and of Dame
Alyne, his wife, on whose souls may God have mercy.

According to Waller, the Creke surname came from two townships in Norfolk known as North and South Creak, at the former of which the family had possessions as early as the second half of the twelfth century.¹² The genealogy of the Crekes is very confused. Our Sir John de Creke, however, is clearly the son of Walter de Creke, though when the family came to Cambridgeshire is not clear.

Westley Manor, which was to become the seat of the Crekes, was held in the twelfth century by Agnes de Valognes who granted it to her granddaughter Gunnore. In 1212, Gunnore's husband, Robert Fitz Walter, was lord and on his death in 1235, the lordship descended to the Fitz Walters. However, in 1227, the manor was subinfeudated to Christine, the daughter of Gunnore and Robert, who held it with her second husband, Raymond de Burgh. In the mid-thirteenth century, John de Burgh, a son of Raymond's uncle Hugh de Burgh, sold Westley to Walter de Creke, Sir John's father. Since Sir John was in possession in 1299, Walter must have died in the preceding year or years. A colorful tradition portrays Sir John as the winner of a trial by combat with Sir Thomas de Burgh for the rights of control over Brinkley Common.¹³ Sir John served in a number of posts. In 1305 he was appointed assessor and collector for Cambridgeshire; in 1307, 1311, and 1319, he held the office of Sheriff of the counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon; at various times he served as a justice appointed to suppress illegal meetings which, at a time of tension between the king and the barons, occurred frequently, and, by virtue of his knighthood, he was returned as Knight of the Shire to Parliament.¹⁴

In the early 1320s, a brief civil war broke out in which Sir John and Walter de Creke, perhaps his son, seem to have joined the forces of the Earls of Lancaster and Hereford to ravage the estates of Edward II's favorites, for they are among those named as having entered the manor of Soham in Cambridgeshire belonging to Hugh le Despenser, Earl of Winchester, "breaking into the houses, carrying away horses, cattle, sheep, and swine, and destroying the parks and trees, with the goods and chattels of the said Earl."¹⁵ Whether or not Sir John and others were ever tried is uncertain, for

¹¹ Waller, notes to figr0.0e0.080 1TEMC /P MCID 18 BDC BTEarl."

these were the times when the power of the barons made it difficult to punish offenders. In June 1322, Sir John was summoned to military service against the Scots, but, despite his participation in the upheavals, pleaded age and infirmity as reasons for not attending. That December, however, he was once again appointed assessor and collector of Cambridgeshire, and in 1324 he again represented the county in Parliament and was appointed to take measures to preserve castles and fortresses in anticipation of an attack by the French. Although he is assumed to have died in 1325, that date has never been exactly confirmed.¹⁶

Sir John was twice married. His first wife, Alyne, was, as the arms indicate, of either the Clopton or the Chamberleyn family. His second wife, Joan or Johanna Scherwynd, the widow of _____ Breton, survived Sir John several years. Walter de Creke, perhaps (as noted above) his son, is named several times in public records between 1329 and the date of his death on 7 May 1352; and another Sir John de Creke, who since he is described as "Master" must be an academic, in 1353/54 sold Westley Waterless.¹⁸

As with most early brasses, scholars today question the traditional dating of this memorial. If, as they contend, the style of the brass precludes a date before 1335, why was the brass not engraved until a decade or more after Sir John's death, and why does it show only Sir John's first wife Alyne, since by 1335 his second wife Joan had also died? Perhaps research will provide answers to these questions. Meanwhile, on stylistic grounds, Paul Binski has argued that the brass was engraved c.1340-45.¹⁹

¹⁶Waller, notes to figure #8. And see Binski, p. 108.

¹⁷Waller, *op.cit.*

¹⁸Goodall, p. xii, in Waller

¹⁹Binski, pp. 108-10.

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