

ELSING, NORFOLK
Sir Hugh Hastings

M.S. I
London: Hastings style¹

St. Mary
Y els 1347

Effigy of Sir Hugh Hastyngs, builder of the church, 1347, in armor, with arms on jupon and shield on arm. Mutilated single canopy with St. George in pediment; two figures on brackets representing coronation of the Virgin; eight weepers in side-shafts (two lost), all with armorial bearings on jupons. Inscription lost. On the floor of the chancel.

Certainly one of the most remarkable of English brasses, this to Sir Hugh Hastyngs, despite its mutilations, is strikingly effective, and highly individual in design, though apparently modeled on that on the tomb of the Earl of Pembroke (d.1324) in Westminster Abbey.² Lost are all of Sir Hugh's figure below the knees, two of the weepers on the side-shafts, part of the finial on which rests the crest, four shields of arms around the pediment (two of Hastings and two of Foliot), practically all of the inscription with medallions of symbols of the Evangelists in the center of each side, and a supporting angel in the upper right.³ Fortunately, the panel with Grey of Ruthin was recovered in 1905, and, in 1964, Malcolm Norris discovered in an antique shop a supporting angel that was returned to the church in 1967.⁴

The present rubbing is of a facsimile that has included the newly recovered angel, with the legs of Sir Hugh and a panel with the Earl of Pembroke reconstructed from rubbings made in 1781 and 1782 by John Carter and the Rev. Sir John Callum together with Craven Ord.⁵ As a result, with these restored portions, we can better appreciate the elaborateness of the original composition and the high quality of its execution. And, whereas the eighteenth century rubbings provide a visual picture of the brass, then nearly complete, an early fifteenth century description provides an accurate verbal description, for in 1408, Sir Edward Hastings produced as evidence before the court of Chivalry in a case against Reginald, Lord Grey of Ruthin, this memorial. On 6 August of that year, the commissioners actually adjourned to the Elsing church to view both the monumental brass and images portrayed in several windows.⁶ A detailed description in French then made provides a number of significant details. The account reveals, for example, that the plate was gilded, and the great shield held by Sir Hugh as well as the small one on the pommel of the sword were both enameled in their proper

¹Norris, I, 19; Binski pp. 119-125.

²Greenwood and Norris, p. 3. Binski, p. 119, says it was made at the same workshop that produced the cross brass to Sir John de Wautone and his wife at Wimbish, Essex (c.1347) and names it the Hastings style.

³Norris, p. 18.

⁴"Notes on Elsing Church," p. 2; Norris, I, 18.

⁵Norris, I, 18.

⁶Wagner, p. 422.

colors.⁷ Similarly, the open tracery of the canopy, the four large shields around the pediment, and much of the heraldry on the smaller figures were all inlaid with colored glass.⁸

The figure of Sir Hugh lies with his head on a tasseled, elaborately embroidered cushion, and with his feet on a couchant lion. In full armor, he wears a rounded bascinet with a visor and mail aventail attached, and, what is unusual, a plate bevor atop the mail as additional protection for the throat. As Paul Binski puts it, "Sir Hugh's frowning visage caps a body which writhes with energy, the hips pushed violently out to one side, supported on short and stocky legs."⁹ Sir Hugh's arms reveal that he wears a mail hawberk below his shortened surcoat, which is emblazoned with the arms of Hastings: Or, a maunch Gules, with a label of three points Argent.¹⁰ The shield strapped to his left arm and the pommel of his sword replicate these arms. The maunch, one should note, is itself elaborately decorated with a vine of leaves. Half-plates of armor additionally protect upper arms and forearms, and roundels and besagews, according to the French account, are buckled to the hawberk.¹¹ There are no gauntlets on his hands.

An elaborately decorated bawdric or belt, buckled and loosely worn from the hips, supports a now mutilated sword on his left side. Sir Hugh's thighs are protect by cuisses, called "quisceaux" and described in the French account as "plate dorrez," suggesting that they are basically of plate, probably a form of brigadine where plates were riveted to a canvas base and then covered with velvet or silk.¹² Round studs, one should note, apparently protrude through the cloth. The leg harness is entirely of mail with rowel spurs attached around the insteps.

The effigy of Sir Hugh lies beneath a superb and very elaborate canopy. The oculus or center of the pediment shows St. George on horseback killing, not the usual dragon, but a half-beastlike figure, probably a representation of Satan. His shield, incidentally, is heart-shaped in the continental fashion. Immediately below in the central cusp of the pediment, the soul of Sir Hugh, represented by a nude figure, is shown being borne upward by two angels. The pediment itself is ogival in shape, with a semi-circular arch, rows of quatrefoils in the soffit, and elaborate tracery surrounding Sir Hugh's head.

Springing from the pediment are two brackets, one now partly mutilated, on which the coronation of the Virgin Mary is depicted, and surmounting the now missing finial is Sir Hugh's helm with his crest, described in the French account as "le test dune bogle dune oue les cornes goules et une wrethe de goules entour la colle," that is, a

⁷Wagner, p. 425.

⁸Norris, I, 18.

⁹Binski, p. 120.

¹⁰Wagner, p. 423. This is a translation of the French description: on a gold field is a red sleeve with a silver label of three points. The French account describes the surcoat as a "cote d'armes."

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 426.

bull's head with red horns, and a wreath of red around the neck.¹³ An angel holding a censer in the right hand is in the upper left corner, but a similar one in the upper right is now lost.

Forming the side-shafts of the canopy are individual plates with figures of Sir Hugh's friends and relatives and his companions in the French wars. To the left, from top to bottom, these mourners are King Edward III; Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick; Edward le Despenser (now lost); and, Roger, Lord Grey of Ruthin. To the right, again from top to bottom, are the figures of Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster; Laurence Hastings, Earl of Pembroke; Ralph Lord Stafford; and, Almaric, Lord St. Amand. Each shaft was once surmounted by a smaller, narrower tabernacle with a weeper and a pinnacle on either side. Now only the tabernacle with a weeper remains on the right shaft.

One should note that each of the plates comprising the side-shafts shows the figure beneath an elaborate ogival canopy with a steep gable and a grid of window tracery behind. The background, too, of each figure is filled with elaborate diapering, that of each pair left and right alike, but each pair differing from the others.

Lost are four shields laid around the pediment, two of which, according to the French account, displayed the arms of Hastings, and two those of Foliot: "le champ est de goule oue une bande d'argent,"¹⁴ (i.e., on a red field is a silver bend).

Finally, a marginal inscription with emblems of the Evangelists in the center of each side is now lost. One small section remains, however, with the words "iour de" (i.e., day of) in French. However, Wagner provides a Latin version of the inscription as follows:

Hic iacet humatus Hastyns Hugo veneratus
Ymodum fari potuit, petijt tumulari Luce
ter x mense Julij mors hinc terit ense
Anno fertur in M ter C quater x quoque
Septem Vos qui transitis Christum rogitare
velitis, Hunc ut saluet ave Finis sit cum pater Ave.¹⁵

Partially translated:

Here lies buried the venerable Hugh Hastings
. . .
. . .
. . . died the 30 July . . .
in the year 1000, 300, 40 and
seven. You who pass by . . .
. . . with the father. Hail!

¹³Wagner, p. 423.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 424.

The effigy of Sir Hugh Hastyngs is 64 1/2" (163.8cm) high. The extant canopy measures 35" x 100" (86.9cm x 254cm), the angel in the corner, 5 1/2" x 7 1/4" (14cm x 18.4cm), and the portion of the inscription, 6 5/8" x 1 1/4" (16.8cm x 3.2cm).

Sir Hugh Hastyngs came from a very powerful Norfolk family. His father, John, the second Baron Hastyngs (1262-1313), was much trusted by Edward I and served the king both in France and Scotland. Indeed, at one point, he even put himself forward as a claimant to the Scottish throne. Said to be mild and gracious in personal affairs, in battle he was termed daring and reckless. He married twice, and by his death in 1313, was a very wealthy man, possessing estates in ten counties.¹⁶

It was to John's second wife, Isabel, the daughter of Hugh le Despenser, Earl of Winchester, that our Sir Hugh was born c1307. What we know of his life primarily concerns his immediate family and his exploits abroad. He married Margery, the elder daughter of Sir Jordon Foliot, through whom he acquired the estates of Gressinghall and Elsing, where he was later to build the Elsing church.¹⁷

For much of the last seven years of his life (he died at the age of forty), he was fighting abroad in Edward III's wars with France. He served in Flanders in both 1340 and 1342, though he was summoned to Parliament in late February of the latter year. The following year he was back in Flanders and saw active service in Brittany.¹⁸ Accompanying the Earl of Derby (later Lancaster) to Gascony in 1345, he took part in operations in Bergerac and Auberoche and was at the siege of Aguilon in 1346.¹⁹

That siege may have been his last for he died in 1347, apparently on 30 July. Margery survived Sir Hugh by two years, leaving a son Hugh, who may have been the Sir Hugh who served in Spain with John of Gaunt in 1367.²⁰

The smaller effigies in the side-shafts, sometimes called "weepers," are actually figures representing Sir Hugh's friends and relatives. All, one should note, are presented with hips thrust to one side, giving the figures an elongated "S" shape. All, too, wear the short surcoat, and all, unlike Sir Hugh, have metal greaves and sabatons with sharp prick spurs.

Given priority of place at the top left is the figure of King Edward III. Like all other figures, he is in armor, yet he has no sword or scabbard at his side; instead, he carries a naked sword erect, the symbol of royal power. On his head is the royal crown, and on his surcoat the quartered arms of France (1 and 4) and England (2 and 3).

¹⁶"Hastings, John (1262-131)," *DNB*, IX, 130-31.

¹⁷"Hastings, Sir Hugh (1307?-1347)," *DNB*, IX, 129. In the church once there was this inscription: "Yis church hathe been wrowt by Howe de Hastyng & Margaret hys wyf."

¹⁸Hartshorne, p. 32.

¹⁹"Hasting, Sir Hugh," p. 129.

²⁰*Ibid.*, This Sir Hugh died in 1369.

Immediately below is Thomas Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick, standing before a diapered background, a visored bascinet on his head, a lance with banner in his right hand, a sword at his side, and on his surcoat, his arms: Gules, a fess Or between six cross-crosslets Or.²¹

One of the great warriors of his day, Thomas Beauchamp served the King in wars in both Scotland and France. At Crecy in 1346, he fought under the Black Prince and is reported as making deadly use of his battle-axe there and ten years later at Poitiers. He died of the plague in France in 1369, but is buried at St. Mary's Church, Warwick, in an alabaster tomb that has thirty-six weepers and shows him clasping the hand of his wife Katherine, the daughter of Roger Mortimer, the first Earl of March.²²

Missing is the figure of Edward le Despenser, the Earl of Winchester, and Sir Hugh's cousin,²³ but the French account describes him as an armed knight bearing the arms of the Lord Despenser on a coat and a shield, and holding in his hand a large "baston," a thick staff about four and a half feet long with a heavy head somewhat like a mace.²⁴

Edward le Despenser's ancestors, though fortunate in marriage, sometimes met an unfortunate end. Both Hugh le Despenser the Elder and the Younger, for example, married respectively the daughters of the Earl of Warwick and the Earl of Gloucester, yet both were executed for treason, the father at Bristol in 1326, apparently under shockingly barbaric circumstances, and the son the same year at Hereford. Hugh the Younger left two sons. The elder, another Hugh, married Elizabeth, the daughter of William Montacute, the first Earl of Salisbury, but he died without children in 1349. The younger, Edward, died in 1342 but left a son, Edward le Despenser, the person represented here. He, too, participated in a number of French campaigns, among them Poitiers in 1356. Summoned to Parliament in 1357, he was made a Knight of the Garter. He died in 1375.²⁵

The bottom figure is that of Roger, Lord Frey of Ruthin. It was this section that for many years was in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The figure, with its bowed head and long hair and beard, seemingly shows an old man, yet Lord Frey was scarcely forty-five in 1347 when Sir Hugh died. His crossed arms rest on top of a pole axe to which a shield seems to be attached. His surcoat, too, is emblazoned with his arms: Barry of six Argent and Azure, in the chief three torteaux.²⁶ The background to the figure consists of squares with alternating suns and wrythen designs.

²¹Waller, p. 9. On a red field is a central gold band between 6 gold crosses with limbs crossed.

²²Hartshorne, p. 34.

²³Sir Hugh's mother was Isabel, the daughter of Hugh le Despenser. Despenser arms: Quarterly Argent and Gules, fretty Or over all a bend Sable (Brooke-Little, p. 58).

²⁴Wagner, pp. 423, 427. The figure was missing in 1782. The figure of Lord St. Amand also carried the "baston."

²⁵Hartshorne, pp. 34-35.

²⁶Brooke-Little, p. 388. Six bars alternating silver and blue, with roundels (usually red) in an upper horizontal band.

Roger de Grey was the younger son of John de Grey, second Lord Grey of Wilton by his second wife. He succeeded his father in 1318 and sat in Parliament in 1322. He fought in the Scottish war in 1341, and, in 1345, he went to France, probably serving with Lancaster in Gascony that year and at Crecy the next. Married to Elizabeth, the daughter of John Hastings by his first wife Isabel, and Sir Hugh Hastings' half-sister, he was therefore Roger de Grey's brother-in-law. Roger died in 1353.²⁷

The right shaft of the canopy is now complete with four figures, at the top, Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster. Bareheaded, he, too, seems old but could not be more than forty-eight in 1347. On his surcoat are the arms of England with a label of France.²⁸ His left hand holds a lance and his right his helm with mantling and a crest of a lion. Like the figure of Edward III across from him, he stands before a diapered background of leaves and vines.

Aside from Edward III, Henry Plantagenet is perhaps the most important figure here, a great leader in the wars against Scotland and France. He fought in Scotland in 1333 and, in 1337 and 1338, served in Flanders. By 1341 he was back in Scotland, now as captain-general of the army, but by 1345 he had returned to Aquitaine as captain of the king's forces. In Gascony the same year, his forces took Bergerac and Dordogne by assault. The following August 1346, he joined the Black Prince at the battle of Crecy before returning to Aquitaine in 1347. Two years later he was appointed captain of Gascony and Poitou to defend the province. That he was created Duke of Lancaster in 1351 did not mean an end to his military exploits for in 1356 and 1357 he conducted both land and sea campaigns in Normandy and Brittany, and served as chief negotiator of the Peace of Bretigny in 1360. He was married to Isabel, the daughter of Henry, Lord Beaumont and a cousin of Isabel, the queen of Edward II. Their daughter Blanche married John of Gaunt, whose son Henry Bolingbroke later became King Henry IV. Blanche, therefore, was the founder of the House of Lancaster, a title Gaunt took for himself.²⁹

The plate immediately below with the figure of Laurence Hastings, Earl of Pembroke, is actually a reconstruction using both the earlier eighteenth century rubbings and the description in the French account. The figure is a counterpart of that of the Earl of Warwick to the left, for against a diapered background of lozenges filled alternately with circles and quatrefoils, Hastings is depicted in a visored helmet, with roundels at the left shoulder and elbow, and a surcoat emblazoned quarterly with the arms of Hastings and Valance.³⁰ Like Sir Hugh, he has both a mail aventail and a plate bevor to protect the throat, and his left hand rests on the scabbard of the sword hanging from a belt.

²⁷Hartshorne, p. 37.

²⁸That is, 3 lions in pale (one above the other) with a label of 3 points of fleur-de-lys. The field would be red, the lions gold. The fleur-de-lys is gold on a blue background.

²⁹Hartshorne, p. 33.

³⁰*Ibid.* Valance; _____ with gold or another color pallely (i.e., a series of vertical stripes)

Laurence Hastings, Sir Hugh's nephew, succeeded his father, John Hastyngs, the half brother of Sir Hugh, as the fourth Lord Hastings and Bergavenny in 1325. Early in life, he served with Edward III in Flanders, and in 1339 was created Earl of Pembroke. Like others on this brass, he participated in the Scottish wars, took a prominent part in Lancaster's campaigns in Aquitaine and Gascony in 1345, was with him at Bergerac, and engaged in the siege of Calais in 1347. He and Thomas Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick, were brothers-in-law, for he married Agnes, the daughter of Roger Mortimer, the first Earl of March, and Warwick married her sister Katherine. Hastings died in 1348.³¹

Below Lord Hastings is the armored figure of Ralph, Lord Stafford, set against a background of crosses bottonny and the wrythen design in cusped circles. He wears a mail aventail that covers most of his shoulders, holds a lance with a pennon in his left hand, and has his shield on his hip in the continental fashion. His surcoat, too, bears his arms, probably Or, a chevron Gules.³²

The elder son of Edmund, Lord Stafford, Ralph was associated with a number of the military expeditions led by Henry of Lancaster in Scotland, Flanders, and Brittany. Appointed seneschal of Aquitaine in 1345, he participated in Lancaster's campaign in Gascony, led the attack by sea on Bergerac, and was present at the defense and surrender of Aguillon. He, too, fought at Crecy in 1346 and assisted at the siege and surrender of Calais in 1347. Made a Knight of the Garter the following year, he became Earl of Stafford in 1356, the same year accompanying Edward III to Scotland. He was one of the commissioners that drew up the Treaty of Bretigny and is said to have served in France again in both 1365 and 1367. He died at his castle in Tonbridge in 1372. Twice married, he had as his first wife Katherine, the daughter of Sir John Hastings, and as his second, Margaret, the daughter and heir of Hugh Audely, Earl of Gloucester.³³ He was therefore Sir Hugh's cousin by marriage.

The final figure is that of Almeric, Lord St. Amand, who is shown partly in semi-profile, partly in profile. He wears a rimmed iron hat, holds in his left hand an upright lance with a shield attached, and has his right hand raised to his helmet, as if in a military salute. Around his neck is a large plate gorget beneath which is a mail aventail. Like Roger, Lord Grey, to the left, he wears brigandine around the thighs, mail stockings, and half-metal greaves on the lower part of his legs. A long sword falls diagonally from a buckled belt at his waist, and his surcoat is blazoned with his arms; Or, fretty Sable, on a chief of the last three bezants.³⁴ The background consists of squares with alternating suns and wrythen designs.

³¹Hartshorne, p. 34.

³²Brooke-Little, p. 114, gives the above plus "with a bordure of the same charged with 8 mitres Argent" for Edmund de Stafford, Bishop of Exeter (1394-1419), commenting that the bordure was used freely by prelates for differencing their arms.

³³Hartshorne, pp. 35-36.

³⁴Waller, p. 9. On a gold field a series of black crossed bendlets with a black upper horizontal band charged with three gold roundels.

The son of John, the second Baron St. Amand, Almeric succeeded to his estates in 1335, and in the same year served the King in Scotland. He, too, participated in the French wars in 1342, 1345, and 1346, the year of Crecy, and was granted an annual sum of £200 in 1347 for his military deeds. In Scotland in 1355 and in France again in 1368, he also served as Justice of Ireland in 1357 and was summoned to Parliament in 1370. He died in 1382.³⁵

As is probably evident, the figures portrayed on this fine brass were selected either because they were Sir Hugh Hastings' relatives (half-nephew Laurence Hastings; half brother-in-law Roger, Lord Grey; cousins Ralph, Lord Stafford, and Edward, Lord Despenser), because they fought under Lancaster together in Gascony (Laurence Hastings and Lord Stafford), or had been at the great battle of Crecy (Duke of Lancaster, Earl of Warwick, Lord Stafford, Lord Grey, and Lord St. Amand). Finally Edward III is here as the leader of the military forces of which all of these men were a part during the Scottish and French wars.

³⁵Hartshorne, pp. 37-38.

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