Monumental brasses were produced in large numbers from the 13th through the 17th centuries and serve as a fascinating window into the social, political, and religious worlds of those eras. Inscriptions accompanying the engraved figures document the development of language and spelling as well as the religious beliefs of the deceased and their families. The figures themselves illuminate the history of heraldry, the development of genealogy, and the ever-changing patterns of costume. In the brasses, the depictions of armor, while sometimes inaccurate due to artists’ unfamiliarity with the subject, are of equal interest to historians as almost no complete suits from the period survive.

These brasses served three major functions: to elicit prayers for the soul of the deceased from passersby and family, to preserve the familial memory of the deceased, and to attest to the deceased’s social status and accomplishments.

Before the appearance of monumental brasses in England during the latter portion of the 13th century, Anglo-Saxon grave markers had been decorated only with abstract designs. During the 12th century, marble effigies as well as effigies on incised slabs began to appear, mainly over the tombs of major ecclesiastical figures and high-ranking nobles. These
effigies assisted in establishing the identity and lineage of the deceased, perhaps in response to a change in the concept of purgatory. Previously, the inhabitants of purgatory had been viewed as an undifferentiated group awaiting the Last Judgment. However, the Church doctrine that became elaborated during the early 13th century held that masses were to be celebrated for both the living and the dead, allowing for remission of sentences for the latter. Thus, in an era of limited literacy, figured tomb decorations (including heraldic symbols) became particularly desirable, fostering images which would remind the visitor to pray for the deceased and thus diminish the soul’s time in purgatory. The prayerful posture of those depicted was seen as prompting such intercessory requests, and inscriptions imploring such prayers soon appeared.

By the late 13th century, metallic and Limoges partial enamel inlays appeared, gradually giving way to incised figures and inscriptions on full sheets of “brass.” The actual material used does not have the same ingredients as modern-day brass and was termed “latten,” a mixture of copper and zinc, with smaller, varying amounts of lead and tin. Original production was centered in northern France and Flanders and was comprised of very thick and expensive plates destined only for the memorialization of senior ecclesiastical figures and very high-ranking members of the royal and knightly classes. One of these brasses is represented in this collection – that of Bishop Iso von Wölpe of Verden, Germany. Dated to 1231, it is the oldest extant brass in Europe. The earliest English brasses date from the last quarter of the 13th century. In this exhibit, the brass of John d’Abernon II, dated around 1327, is a fine example of early English work.

The increasing use of brass in place of stone reflected the lack of durability, expense, and large space requirements of the latter and the permanence, bright and lustrous appearance, and more reasonable cost of the former. Expensive Flemish brasses were soon superseded by locally produced English brasses which were thinner and consisted of small plates, joined together on a marble base. These less expensive, locally produced brasses became increasingly popular among the knightly class, and, by the middle of the century, the tombs of middling gentry also featured brasses. This expansion of the market in brasses provides us with a much more comprehensive view of late medieval and early modern English society.

Production of brasses advanced rapidly during the next two centuries. A large number were placed not only in cathedral chantries but also in parish churches and monastic institutions where many had been interred in order to receive regular masses and intercessory prayers. Both vandalism and poor maintenance slightly lessened their number, but the middle of the 16th century brought the beginning of the widespread destruction of all effigial monuments. Political and pecuniary interests prompted Henry VIII to acquire and close first the lesser (in 1536) and then the greater (in 1539) monasteries.

Much more widespread destruction took place during the brief reign of Edward VI whose regime subscribed to Protestant beliefs which denied the concept of purgatory and the need for intercessory prayers.
Following the dictates of the Second Commandment, the expanding Protestant community saw any image within church confines as papist and thus one that required destruction – a movement of authorized iconoclasm. Following a brief respite from further destruction during the reign of Mary Tudor, the decimation of brasses resumed briefly under Elizabeth I, who, by 1560, ordered a halt to the vandalism. Regrettably, the iconoclasm continued, albeit at a lesser pace, until the ascendance of Cromwell during the English Civil War, at which time the destruction became institutionalized. The Puritan revolution did not tolerate figural memorials and found inscriptions requesting prayers for the dead to be offensive to God. Those brasses which were subsequently produced contained inscriptions describing the good works, fame, character, and achievements of the deceased as well as expressing hope for the coming Resurrection – all in keeping with Protestant doctrine. Post-Reformation brasses were frequently produced by the spoliation of earlier memorials, with the original material becoming palimpsests with the new message engraved on the reverse side. Brasses continued to be produced in large numbers through the 17th century, finally giving way to ledger stones in outside cemeteries during the early 18th century, in part due to a lack of space within churches.

In the first half of the 17th century, the depredations attendant on the Thirty Years’ War caused similar destruction of Continental brasses, leaving most of the few remaining to be done away with during the Napoleonic wars, when the metal was melted down and used for weaponry. The 18th and early 19th centuries marked a further loss of English brasses due to neglect, the sale of the metal for funds, and destruction caused by renovations. Although the Anglo-Catholic revival of the 19th century led to a resurgence in the use of memorial brasses, the World Wars contributed further to their devastation. At present not a single memorial brass is said to exist in France, and only a few score have been left intact on the entire continent.

It has been estimated that only about 3,000 medieval brasses remain in England, representing a very small fraction of the original number. Most of these are to be found in small parish churches, perhaps owing their survival to having rested in out-of-the-way sites.

Themes

The twenty-three brass rubbings presented in this exhibition have been divided into five sets, each highlighting a theme reflected in that group. The set located in the Sharpless Gallery of Magill Library, serves as an introduction to the exhibit located in four campus buildings. The dates of these six brasses span nearly four centuries, thus providing a temporal overview of the art form. The remaining four groups concern the themes of family and marriage, identity and self, power and social rank, and, finally, spirituality and the afterlife.
The frequent depiction of husband and wife side by side underlines the importance of family and lineage. However, the marriage bond, most often represented in brass as singular and eternal, sometimes misrepresented the actual circumstances. Joan, Lady of Cobham, was married five times and is buried between two of her husbands in a tomb commissioned by her daughter Joan, Lady Cobham’s sole surviving heir. Yet Lady Cobham is pictured on the monument with ten children which one scholar argues she did not have. Groups like this were simply the stock way to represent children. For the women being memorialized, children were an important consideration, but attention was also given to their natal families, emphasizing the economic and social power they brought to their marriages. This was especially true for heiresses who transmitted not only their families’ lands and fortunes to husbands but also the histories and reputations of their natal kin. Even in the case of Eleanor de Bohun who at the age of nine married a royal prince, her identity with the Bohun family remained very strong her whole life.

Family and Marriage
Like the brass of Sir John II, his father, Sir John III’s brass was originally dated differently. Scholars believed Sir John III to be Sir John II; however, the monuments have been re-dated. Sir John III’s monument was done in the Seymour style which produced sophisticated, elongated brasses. Sir John’s slightly protruding hip and his gaze which travels over the viewer’s shoulder contribute to the detached, cooler sense of the monument. The tomb inscription is very brief: “Sir John D’Abernoun, Knight, lies here.” Sir John III held manors and served as a knight retainer of the Clare family as his ancestors had done since the Norman Conquest. Sir John III obtained local notoriety as Sheriff of Sussex. Some of his other duties included collecting money on properties for the defense of England and surveying the forests in Surrey. Sir John’s armor is one of the first representations of plate mail, though such armor had been in use on the battlefield for some time. He married Maud Giffard, heir of William Giffard. Sir John lived into old age, passing on his estate to his grandson William in 1344-45. There was a family connection with the Dominican friars in the larger town of Guilford. His mother Constance was on their list for memorial prayers as were two men named John d’Abernon, likely Sir John and his father.

Philippa Carew
Date of Death: 1414
Location: Beddington, Surrey, England
Church of St. Mary the Virgin

Others, like Mercy Hayme, mother of Philippa and the rest of the children on this monument, could not be confident that any of their children would survive. Childhood deaths were common in the medieval period, but distinctions were made between older children and those who died in the cradle. Philippa survived longer than her many brothers and sisters who died in infancy. This may explain why Philippa is the chief figure memorialized while her thirteen siblings are named and pictured in half-effigies at the frame of the monument. The inscription on the tomb reads: “Here lies Philippa, daughter of Nicholas Carew and Mercy, his wife, who once [lived] with her brothers and sisters whose names are sculpted below.”
The pressure and anxiety to have heirs was significant, especially for a woman like Joan who had been raised by her grandfather to carry on the Cobham legacy as the only inheritor. Lady Cobham’s daughter and her husband, Sir Thomas Brook, commissioned the monument which was inscribed: “Here lies Joan, Lady of Cobham, formerly wife of Sir Reginald Braybook, knight, who died on the day of St. Hilary, Bishop. A.D. 1433, on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen.” The tomb also attests that Lady Cobham bore children, fulfilling her duty as a wife, and affirms the continuity of the Cobham line within the Brook family through heraldry. The monument suggests Joan had a large family as she is pictured with many children. However, only the one daughter also named Joan, survived to be Lady Cobham’s heir. The scholar Nigel Saul has argued recently that Lady Cobham had far fewer sons and daughters than depicted on the tomb. Possibly these are representations of groups of children that came ready made from the brass workshop; or they may be “a concealment of failure” with the end of the Cobham line (Nigel Saul, Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England).

Lady Cobham’s married life was tumultuous as she had five husbands, many wedded to the wealthy heiress by the arrangement of the king. One of her more famous husbands, Sir John Oldcastle, was the inspiration for Shakespeare’s character Falstaff. Sir John was hanged in 1417 for plotting against the king, having previously been found guilty of heresy because of his connection with the Lollard movement. Oldcastle’s death is indicative of the fragile political and social environment of the time.

Sons and Daughters of Joan, Lady of Cobham

Date of Death: January 13, 1433
Location: Cobham, Kent, England
Church of St. Mary Magdalene

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Lady in a heraldic mantle
This noblewoman’s identity is unknown because the inscription for her tomb has been lost. The heraldry on her mantle, rampant lions, proudly proclaims that she belongs to a magnate family, the most powerful group of nobles. The three wounds with drops of blood on the lions’ shoulders could be the arms of either the Bulbeck or Robsart family. Costume with heraldic devices was popular on 15th- and early 16th-century nobles’ tombs, with husbands wearing decorated tabards and wives dressed in figured mantles or robes, often with the natal families’ arms on their left side and their husbands’ on the right in the place accorded greater honor. See the tomb of Lady Catherine Howard (engraved circa 1535) for a similar heraldic mantle, but one that displays the arms of four families. Scholar Susan Crane argues that such symbolic clothing and the ritual performances which they marked served to define not just the family and the social group but also the person. There is further differentiation in this woman’s presentation: she wears a gable headdress covering her shoulders and a pleated barbe covering her neck. The barbe was prescribed for widows in mourning.

Elizabeth Burrough

Date of Death: December 24, 1616
Location: Tottenham, Middlesex, England
Church of All Hallows

This monument commemorates Elizabeth Burrough as a wife and mother of three children. The inscription reads: “Here lies Elizabeth Burrough, wife of John Burrough of Tottenham High Cross in the County of Middlesex, a man of good birth. She died on the 24th day of December in the year of our Lord 1616. She left behind two sons and a daughter legitimately conceived from the bodies of Elizabeth and her husband.” She wears a ruff around her neck with its pattern repeated on her shoulders. A headdress covers her hair, a stomacher decorates her bodice, and her pleated skirt reveals well-made shoes. In the tomb inscription, her husband is described as a gentleman, and records indicate that he was a local notable, renting a manor and 139 acres in Tottenham. He served as a churchwarden when his cousin was the vicar at All Hallows.

A marriage record for a John Burrough, gentleman, and an Elizabeth Parke, widow, in Tottenham in 1611 suggests that Elizabeth Burrough died after only five years of marriage, leaving young children for her husband to raise, likely with a new wife. The monument places John
Burrough and the three children alongside of Elizabeth, although there is no indication that any of the four was subsequently buried there. John wears a ruff, a doublet with a short collared cloak, breeches, and hose held up by garters. His two sons wear virtually identical outfits while the daughter differs from her mother in having a heart-shaped headdress. The adult-style clothing is not a reliable indicator of the children's ages. Even the large size of the daughter, compared with the smaller size of the sons, may indicate not that she was the oldest but that she survived past infancy while perhaps they did not.

Unlike many representations of children in previous centuries, the portraits of Margaret Irby's daughters are individualized according to size, hair, and angle of the face. According to Malcolm Norris, a scholar of brass monuments, the individualized nature of the monument reflects the early 17th century desire to create a more “personalized and humanizing” representation of the deceased. In a portion of the brass not included in this rubbing Margaret is kneeling before a large book, probably a Bible, with her daughters behind her, highlighting Margaret's role as the first to teach her children how to read and pray. Given that all three of her daughters preceded her in death, there is a particular poignancy in this simple portrayal of family life.

This is one of the later brass memorials and its inscription is devoid of religious sentiment (“Here under lieth the body of Margaret Irby, the daughter of Sir Edward Barkham, sometime Lord Mayor of the city of London, and late the wife of Sir Anthony Irby, of Boston, co. Lincoln by whom she had issue three daughters, Jane, Margaret, and Jane all of which died before their mother, and lie interred here.”) By 1640 the
Each of the images on the brass monuments is unique, representing an individual—sometimes particularized to suggest a portrait and other times presented as an ideal of male or female beauty. The details of clothing and armor are carefully conveyed, serving in many cases to indicate the latest excesses in fashions: for instance buttons down the sleeves of a woman’s gown or a man’s hairy head emerging from the top of a tournament helmet. While there was an appreciation for these luxuries and the personal pleasures they brought, clerics saw danger in their power to distract people from the word of God. The recognition of the individual from the group is also dramatically seen in the changing portrayal of children. On 14th-century monuments, boys and girls are

Identity and Self

Puritan movement was in full force and contributed to the decline of what was then often viewed as a papist practice. Furthermore, changing religious beliefs and constructions of social memory provided other ways to commemorate individuals’ lives.

John Hawberk, Son of Nicholas Hawberk
This brass rubbing is actually a small part of a larger monument, that of Sir Nicholas Hawberk, third husband of Joan, Lady of Cobham. Here we have their son John, who died in infancy sometime after 1405, the year they married. The diminutive figure of John is to the left of Sir Nicholas, about one fifth the size of his father. He stands on a pedestal with the simple inscription, “Here lies John, their son.” The larger monument carries this inscription:

Here lies Sir Nicholas Hawberk, Knight, formerly husband of Dame Joan, Lady of Cobham, heir of Sir John de Cobham, founder of this College, which same Nicholas died at Cooling Castle on the ninth day of October, 1407. On whose soul may God have mercy. Amen.

Hawberk’s brass monument is one of the earliest that includes the figure of a child. The depiction of children in a brass sometimes indicated the continuation of the family line. In this case, however, John was included to mourn the loss of a son who died young. This fact is made even more poignant by another brass monument in the same church, that of Joan’s previous husband Sir Reginald Braybrook, which includes similar figures of two sons, both of whom died in childhood. Scholars believe she commissioned the two tombs at the same time.

The nearly identical depiction of the sons of Hawberk and Braybrook, essentially as miniature adults praying at the feet of their fathers, presents some problems for understanding how these children might have been viewed by their elders. The subject of children and childhood in the medieval period has been explored and has provoked argument since the early 1960s, when scholars such as Philippe Ariès and Lloyd de Mause claimed that before the 17th century, childhood was not seen as a distinct time of life; rather, children were viewed as miniature adults who, as yet, showed no signs of distinct personalities.

The boys’ undifferentiated effigies in these two brasses suggest as much. More recent scholarship, however, by Sally Crawford, Nicholas Orme, and others has presented a more nuanced view of children in this period, thus challenging what we can infer from their effigies. The children’s very inclusion in the monuments to their fathers points to the attachment that the tombs’ commissioner, their mother, Joan, Lady Cobham, likely had for them. As Nigel Saul observes, after three marriages, she had yet to bear a son who lived beyond early childhood. Ultimately, her daughter Joan was her sole heir from five marriages.
Joan Skerne
Joan Skerne

*Date of Death: Before January 1431*

*Location: Kingston, Surrey, England*

*All Saints Church*

Joan Skerne was the younger daughter of Alice Perrers (d. 1400/1401) who was the acknowledged mistress of King Edward III. Most recent scholarship treats Joan and her brother and sister as the king’s children. Alice did not come from a prominent family but profited from the king’s favor to buy properties, engage in lucrative business transactions, and wield significant political influence. Upon Edward’s death, she was brought to trial for offenses against the king and people and lost all of her lands in fifteen counties. From the trial petitions and chronicles, it is evident that Alice generated great resentment because she flagrantly violated social and gender norms in her successful business pursuits. Subsequently, Alice claimed that she had not been a single woman at the trial but had been secretly married to Sir William Windsor, a royal lieutenant in Ireland, so that the court needed to take his rights into consideration. Alice, with help from Joan (and likely from Joan’s husband, Robert, a lawyer), continued to fight for restitution of her properties, even referring in her will (August 15, 1400) to manors which were wrongly held by others. Joan, as Alice’s executor, vigorously pursued a number of lawsuits including ones against Windsor’s heir and her own sister. Eventually she was able to recover properties in Oxford and in the counties of Berkshire and Essex.

On her tomb, Joan is presented as a wealthy, fashionable woman. The large brooches which fasten her mantle match the design of her jeweled necklace. The nets holding her hair are richly decorated with gems; the elaborate headdress is carefully arranged so that viewers can admire her fine, high forehead. Perhaps some of Joan’s concern with appearance was due to her questionable status as the unacknowledged daughter of a royal father and of a mother marked by notoriety. Joan and Robert had no known children, and Robert’s heir, his nephew William, set up a chantry at the altar of Saint James in All Saints Church for a priest to pray for the good of their souls. Since Alice Perrers had left money for the church of Upmynster and for the poor, it seems fitting that remnants of her estate also helped fund the church in Kingston upon Thames.

Robert Skerne

*Date of Death: April 9, 1437*

*Location: Kingston, Surrey, England*

*All Saints Church*

Robert Skerne was a lawyer who practiced near Westminster. His family background is uncertain, but it is likely that he had connections with the royal court in order to marry Joan Perrers, daughter of King Edward III’s mistress. He had properties in Surrey in his own
right in addition to land that he helped his wife manage. He acted as a trustee for other people's properties and served in Parliament and in other capacities that demonstrated people's faith in him. After Joan died, Skerne retired from public life and joined the confraternity of Osney Abbey, most likely as a lay associate. There he arranged payment for prayers to be said for his wife.

His memorial brass presents Skerne in simple, but high quality, civilian clothing. The fur trim on his collar and cuffs and the gold work decorations at the end of his girdle speak to his wealth. This inscription appears on the joint tomb:

This chest of marble stone holds the body of Robert Skerne, and of his wife. He was able, trustworthy, discrete, learned in law. Noble, worthy, he rejected perfidy. Constant in speech, life, feeling, thought, he wished justice to anyone in common. He promoted the unique honors of the royal law. To deceive or be deceived was hateful to him. May he rejoice in heaven who lived faithful on earth, who died on the nones of April in the year of the Lord 1437. King Jesus, have mercy on his soul.

Skerne is praised as a lawyer who was trustworthy and sought justice for all. His qualities must have been especially appreciated by Joan and her mother as they tried to regain some part of their property.

Anne Urswick

Date of Death: After 1482
Location: Dagenham, Essex, England
Church of St. Peter and St. Paul

The brass on the tomb of Lady Anne Urswick reveals how a medieval woman went about establishing her status. She is adorned in elaborate contemporary fashions, with a butterfly headdress, jeweled collar necklace, fitted corset, and plucked forehead. As the daughter of a wealthy London merchant, she acquired a higher status through her marriage to Sir Thomas Urswick, a powerful political figure. One later author compared her to the prioress of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, writing, "She hadde a fayre forehead almost a spanne brode I trow' and the lofty brow and noble countenance of Lady Urswick attract immediate attention from the spectator.”

Lady Anne and her second husband, John Palmer, made at least one claim for rights to Sir Thomas's extensive estates. The issue of inheritance was especially important to Lady Anne because her first husband’s heirs were his five daughters who needed dowries. All four of her sons had preceded their father in death. Lady Anne remarried in 1482, following her husband’s death in 1479, and consequently gained more wealth. She inherited a manor in Kent and a substantial annual income upon her second husband’s death. Her effigy, which was set in place alongside Sir Thomas’s tomb in St. Peter and St. Paul Church, immortalized her notable style and beauty.
This portrait-style monument is typical of late 16th-century brasses which attempted to provide a realistic presentation of the deceased. While Roger James is shown praying, the accompanying inscription does not request prayers from the living (“Here under lieth ye bodye of Roger James late of london Brewer whoe beinge of the age of three skore and seven departed this lyfe the second daye of March in the yeare of our Lorde one thousand five hundred foure skore and Eleaven leavinge behind him Sara his wyfe eight sonnes and one daughter”). The move away from intercessory prayer reflects the Protestant ideal that one should develop a more personal relationship with Christ. This relationship was particularly expected of the male head of the household. The individualized relationship with Christ may
have influenced the realistic style of portraiture we find in monuments. Commissioners of tombs became more concerned with celebrating the life of the individual, including his or her earthly achievements and social status, than with a collective effort to bless the soul of the deceased.

The inclusion of the shield for the Worshipful Company of London Brewers suggests James’s contemporaries valued him most highly as an influential businessman. The status of Roger James, a Flemish immigrant, as a successful merchant is confirmed by his ruff and fur-trimmed gown.

Power and Social Rank

The gentry and nobility occupied elevated social ranks and expressed their status in a variety of ways including finely wrought tombs. These monuments were costly and could be vehicles for displaying one’s sophistication as well as importance. For his monument, Sir John Cobham placed a special emphasis on his achievements by specifying that he be depicted holding a building he had commissioned. Clerics in high offices also memorialized their status, both familial and hierarchical, and their activities, ranging from building projects to the offering of the Eucharist.

In other situations, power is notable by its loss. Eleanor de Bohun, a fabulously wealthy heiress from the high nobility, married the youngest son of King Edward III; yet in her monument, she is dressed simply as a widow because she withdrew from public life when her husband was killed on the order of his nephew, King Richard II. Throughout the Middle Ages the transitory nature of power was symbolized by the popular wheel of fortune motif. It serves as a reminder of the anxiety people felt about potential misfortunes which might come about through competition with neighbors, children’s deaths, political disgrace, or any number of other circumstances.

Iso von Wölpe

Date of Death: 1231
Location: Verden, Hanover, Germany
Church of Saint Andrew

Bishop Iso von Wölpe (ca. 1170–1231) rose to a position of considerable power in the early 13th-century Holy Roman Empire. Beginning in 1205, as prince-bishop of Verden, a town in what is now the northwest German state of Lower Saxony, he wielded great spiritual and secular authority during a time of immense political and religious tumult. In his role as prince-bishop, Iso enjoyed imperial immediacy, meaning he was an elector of the Holy Roman Emperor and, by default, operated largely independently of the emperor (and to an extent, the
Iso von Wölpe
iso von Wölpe, thirty-first bishop of Verden ruled for 26 years. He built the monastery of Saint Andrew. He was the first to fortify Verden. He gave up the lordship of the city and besides relinquished control of the monks’ goods. Having bought the patrimony of Westen for 500 marks and more, he donated it to Saint Mary. He died happily in the year of the Lord’s incarnation MCCXXXI on the nones of August.

His effigy shows him dressed in full liturgical vestments: he wears an alb, dalmatic, chasuble, pallium, and on his head, a miter. The subdued patterns decorating his priestly garments bring the viewer’s eyes up to meet Iso’s strong gaze. A crosier, a symbol of the bishop’s role as shepherd of his flock, leans against his right side. In each hand he holds a model of a building: in his right, St. Andrew's Church, which he founded in 1220, and in his left, the city wall of Verden, which he commissioned during his episcopate and which demarcated what would later become the town’s boundaries. This representation aptly illustrates his power as both religious and lay ruler over the town.

**John d’Abernon II**

**Date of Death:** circa 1325  
**Location:** Stoke d’Abernon, Surrey, England  
**Saint Mary’s Church**

Until recently, this brass was believed to represent the first Sir John d’Abernon and was dated to 1277. It was regarded as the earliest surviving brass in England. However, recent studies have established that the brass dates from the 1320s and hence represents John d’Abernon II, rather than his father. The monument was done in the distinct Camoys London style, recognized for its sleek military design, which aided scholars in properly dating the monument. Its brief inscription reads: “Sir John D’Abernoun, Knight, lies here. God have mercy on his soul.” The d’Abernons, a knightly family, held lands in Surrey since 1086. Sir John II went to court over a dispute with a neighbor who had accused him of appropriating land. Sir John was sued and, after accusing his neighbor of perjury, Sir John was jailed. The monument provides one of the earliest examples of chain mail armor before the switch to plate mail. Sir John’s monument also demonstrates the importance this lesser known gentry family placed on commemorating their kin.
Sir John Cobham, the third Lord Cobham of Kent, was a soldier and diplomat who took an active interest in building. Among his impressive projects were defensive crenulations on Cooling Castle and the foundation of a chantry college for chaplains in conjunction with the church at Cobham. Unlike the colleges we think of today, the goal of this college was to have priests offer masses and say prayers for the benefit of those living and deceased. John Cobham was also heavily involved in politics before he was exiled late in life for sentencing two men to death without King Richard II’s permission. The new king, Henry IV, recalled Cobham from exile and restored him to favor. John commissioned his own brass forty years before he died probably to assert his social prestige as the founder of a college and to remind the priests of their duty to pray. The tomb inscription reads: “From earth I was made and [lived] on earth and to earth am I returned John of Cobham, founder of this place that was previously named. May the Holy Trinity have mercy on my soul.” Cobham’s personal choices in his self-presentation further Nigel Saul’s idea that John Cobham believed “piety and lineage” were connected, making religion intrinsic to the family and to the social order as represented by those who prayed, those who fought, and those who worked.

Sir Thomas Urswick began what would become a distinguished career in politics as a lawyer in Lancaster. He was appointed as Common Sergeant of London on June 27, 1453, and quickly moved up the ranks to become Recorder of London on October 3, 1454. He was knighted and appointed Chief Baron of the Exchequer on May 22, 1471, in return for his loyalty to the Yorkist king, Edward IV, during the War of the Roses. Along with the usual fee, he received 110 marks and two robes a year, marks of favor which underline the significance of the fur-lined judicial mantle on his brass tomb. Sir Thomas’ legal services and political loyalty were handsomely rewarded, and the inventory of goods in his twenty-room estate is substantial. His collection of books included a copy of *The Canterbury Tales* and the French edition of Froissart’s *Chronicles*. The inheritance of this impressive estate was complicated since Sir Thomas’ four sons predeceased him, leaving his five daughters.
as heirs who are depicted on a smaller portion of the tomb’s brass. Sir Thomas’ second wife, Anne, has a brass of her own displaying the new fashions she favored for herself and her older daughters. Her style complements his professional robes and reflects the family’s power and social status.

John Leventhorp

Date of Death: August 6, 1510
Location: Bishopsgate, London, England
St. Helen’s Church

The inscription on John Leventhorp’s tomb proudly identifies him as an usher of the chamber who was privileged to have direct access to the inner apartments of the royal court of King Henry VII (“Here lies John Leventhorp, Esquire, one of the four Keepers of the Chamber to King Henry VII, who died August 6th, 1510. To whose soul God be gracious. Amen.”). He is dressed in full armor with a rigid breastplate and pieces for protection at the neck, arms, elbows, thighs, and feet. He carries both a dagger and a long sword. His head rests on a decorative helmet that he would have worn in tournaments rather than in battle. The crest, in the form of a human head, may portray a wild man, a popular figure in late medieval art and literature representing the animal side of human nature. Despite Leventhorp’s attendance at the royal court, scholars do not know much more about his life or his family connections. Two shields on his tomb, now lost, would have contributed such information. The tomb inscription’s closing prayer was defaced during the Post-Reformation period.

Spirituality and the Afterlife

The inscriptions on many brass monuments ask the passersby to pray for the salvation of the deceased. Those souls in purgatory benefited from the prayers of the living and the intercession of saints. Lay people’s religious concerns took new forms in the 14th and 15th centuries with the widespread use of books of hours. With them, gentry and nobles could recite prayers in a regular cycle as did monks and nuns, reflecting on spiritual truths and preparing themselves for the afterlife. On their tombs they represented themselves attentively in prayer, a witness to their piety and a reminder to the living of their duty as well as their own ultimate fate. In later years, the Puritan movement profoundly shaped religious beliefs and practices. Changes are evident in the way some tomb inscriptions were written and by the way others were defaced. The personal responsibility that Protestantism emphasized is captured in Margaret Irby’s monument where she and her daughters pray before a Bible which she used to teach her children.
Maud Cobham
Date of Death: 1380
Location: Cobham, Kent, England
Church of St. Mary Magdalene

Maud, wife of Sir Thomas Cobham of Randall, stands with hands clasped in a prayerful attitude. She represents an increased concern among the laity in the 14th and 15th centuries for a direct involvement in religious practices. The laity, as evinced in Maud’s rubbing, modeled the piety of monks, whose daily liturgical offices brought them into close contact with the divine, and emphasized the emotional tie between the believer and the divinity.

Maud Cobham’s brass was renovated in the 1860s under the direction of antiquarian J. G. Waller, who added two shields, representing the families of William Pympe and the Cobhams of Randall. More recent scholars do not believe that Pympe was Maud’s father, and identify Thomas Morice, a wealthy London lawyer, as her father. Lawyers had gained a reasonable amount of respect by this time, and respect was especially due to Morice because he had both riches and properties, elevating Maud to a higher social status. Thomas Morice held land in various parts of the country including north Kent. Maud’s marriage to Sir Thomas Cobham possibly came about because both families were land owners in Kent. Sir Thomas was of the highest level of gentry, a position that led to his capture by rebels in the peasant revolt of 1381. Sir Thomas escaped and helped suppress the rebellion. The marriage of Maud Morice and Sir Thomas Cobham benefited both partners as Maud brought land and wealth and Sir Thomas brought a distinguished name from a long line of Cobhams.

On the tomb, Maud Cobham’s image conveys a sense of serene orderliness, dressed richly with rows of buttons and a sleek headdress. The tomb inscription, “Here lies Lady Maud de Cobham who was the wife of Sir Thomas de Cobham, and who died the ninth day of April in the year of Grace 1380” is in the French then spoken by the nobility and gentry rather than in eccelesiastical Latin.

Eleanor de Bohun
Date of Death: October 3, 1399
Location: London, England
Westminster Abbey

Eleanor, a member of the high nobility, was the daughter of Humphrey (IX) de Bohun, earl of Hereford and Essex. When her father died, she and her younger sister became heireesses to extensive lands and were considered great prizes in marriage. At around the age of nine she was wed to Thomas of Woodstock, Edward III’s youngest son, who at nineteen needed resources to establish a princely
household. Thomas played important roles in warfare and politics, but he became estranged from his nephew, Richard II, over peace with France and punishment of the king’s favorites. Scholars believe that Richard II was responsible for Thomas’s arrest and murder while in custody in 1397.

Eleanor’s wimple modestly covers her neck and chin, indicating her widowhood. One tradition maintains that she withdrew to Barking Abbey after her husband’s death, but records document that she also reclaimed property and travelled to her estates. She assured her children’s future and the memory of the Bohun family by rendering homage to Richard II for her lands and thereby receiving an annuity from the king. In her will she bequeathed family manuscripts to her children, including a psalter with her father’s arms in the form of a swan enameled on the clasps. She also specified that her funeral hearse be accompanied by fifteen old, poor men who would pray for her, her husband, and all Christians.

The brass monuments for Eleanor and her husband gave viewers very different impressions. Hers portrays an austere widow, while her husband’s magnificent brass (now lost) proudly portrayed him as a member of the royal family. He was presented in the robes of the Order of the Garter surrounded by family as well as the Holy Trinity and saints. The inscription on Eleanor’s tomb does emphasize family and rank: “Here lies Eleanor de Bohun, daughter and co-heir of the honorable knight Sir Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton, and Constable of England, wife of the mighty and noble prince Thomas of Woodstock, son of the excellent and mighty prince Edward, King of England, the Third since the Conquest, Duke of Gloucester, Earl of Essex and Buckingham, and Constable of England, who died 3 October in the year of grace 1399.” Like many other brass monuments, Eleanor’s tomb has a decorative canopy framing her figure. The slender columns, with triple arches and delicate Gothic details, provide support for six heraldic shields (one now missing) and three medallions. Some shields carry the arms of two families (impaled) or four (quartered) united by marriage. The shields represent the arms of Thomas of Woodstock (upper left), Woodstock impaling de Bohun quartered with Hereford (upper right), deBohun (center left), de Bohun impaling Fitzalan quartered with Warenne (center right), Milo, Earl of Hereford (lower left), and the earl of Essex (missing on the lower right but reported by earlier observers). The medallions on the gothic arches include the Bohun swan and two lions’ heads.

### Johann Rode

**Date of Death:** 1477  
**Location:** Bremen, Bremen, Germany  
**Cathedral of Saint Peter**

Johann Rode was the provost of the Cathedral canons in Bremen from 1460 until his death in 1477. The canons were priests assigned to the cathedral and were responsible for mass and other liturgical ceremonies. Rode is dressed in Church vestments including
the chasuble, an outer robe decorated by ornamental bands. His hair is tonsured, marking a cleric’s dedication to the Church. A chalice for the Eucharist rests upon his chest and likely represents his burial with one. Scholars identify the brass as one of three surviving tombs (the others in Finland and Poland) coming out of a Flemish workshop. Production flourished in Flanders because of access to raw materials and a network of waterways to transport the finished works.

Rode held a series of increasingly responsible positions within the Church hierarchy, starting as a canon at the collegiate Church of Saint Ansgar in Bremen in 1426. He moved to Rome to serve as a chief notary and later an editor of papal bulls at the Curia. In 1457 he returned to Germany as the cathedral provost in Hamburg. In 1460 Pope Pius II charged Rode with negotiating a long-running dispute between the town council of Lüneburg and local clergy over economic issues including the local saltworks. It would take the King of Denmark and Sweden to bring the conflict to a close two years later. Rode, in assuming the leadership of the canons at Bremen in 1460, reunited with two of his brothers among the canons, and a third who served twelve years as a city councilor, as well as his nephew Johann who was later prince-archbishop of Bremen (1497–1511). Rode came from a prominent bourgeois family whose members sought advancement in both the secular and sacred world. The landed nobility tended to disparage such families, but they often found success. The family coat of arms, depicted at Rode’s feet, acknowledges the importance of kin; however, greater emphasis is placed on his identity as a priest bringing the gift of salvation to the people.

**Heinrich Spiegel zum Desenberg**

*Date of Death: 1380*

*Location: Paderborn, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany*

*Cathedral of Saint Mary, Saint Liborius and Saint Kilian*

Heinrich Spiegel zum Desenberg was the bishop of Paderborn, a city in northwest Germany, from 1361 until his death in 1380. Born to a prominent noble family, Heinrich began his clerical career as a monk in the Benedictine abbey at Corvey, where he was elected abbot in 1359. In early 1361, with the resignation of Balduin von Steinfurt as bishop of Paderborn, Pope Innocent VI appointed Heinrich as his successor.

Over the course of his nineteen-year tenure, Heinrich shifted the focus of the bishop’s office from the divine to the secular. In 1370, he transferred his spiritual duties to a suffragan, or subordinate bishop, so that he could concentrate on his temporal rule; this was a common practice among late medieval bishops. That same year, he was appointed marshal of Westphalia, a position that involved protecting the interests of the archbishop of Cologne, who happened to be a relative of his, through
political and military means. Consequently, Heinrich was able to expand his authority and territory. He held that position until 1377.

Bishop Heinrich’s brass monument stands in the nave of the Paderborn Cathedral. His effigy is dressed in full bishop’s regalia, and the richness of his vestments suggests an emphasis on his authority rather than his spirituality. In one hand he holds a crosier, a symbol of the bishop’s role as shepherd of the flock, and in the other, a book, presumably the Bible. Under his feet are a lion and, interestingly, a knight, perhaps signifying the knight’s warring or political persona, reinforcing the inscription on the monument, a “friend of peace.”

Resurrection Brass

Date: circa 1500
Location: London, Middlesex, England
Church of All Hallows by the Tower

Instead of displaying a man or woman, this brass depicts the risen Christ emerging from his tomb while holding a cross. The armored soldiers who cower below him carry a variety of weapons intended for close combat. Brass monuments of this sort were generally placed above church altars. However, this image of the Resurrection may have originally been part of a structure that served both as a tomb and as an Easter Sepulcher for Holy Week, around which a priest and attendants enacted the events of Christ’s burial and his Resurrection. The tomb possibly was located in the Royal Lady Chapel (near the All Hollows Church) and may have belonged to Sir Robert Tate, the lord mayor of London, who died in 1488. The choice of such a symbolic brass monument in conjunction with an Easter Sepulcher tomb marks his religious devotion and spirituality. Originally part of a set of five, this Resurrection brass was saved through the efforts of William Penn’s father, Admiral William Penn, who had been baptized at All Hallows, when he used a series of controlled explosions to halt the flames that raged through the church during the Great Fire of London in 1666.

The Process of Brass Rubbing

The technique of reproducing the image of a monumental brass is known as “brass rubbing.” Brass rubbing has been practiced at least since the 17th century as reflected in such Dutch paintings as Van Vliet’s church interior with the detail of children making a rubbing. Antiquarian interests spurred an initial enthusiasm for this activity during the 18th century, fortunately so, as many brasses have been lost in the intervening years. Brass rubbing became increasingly popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and interest peaked in the 1960s. This
popularity led to increasing concern about maintaining the condition of the brasses, particularly as indiscriminately frequent rubbing was found to cause loosening of the brasses and damage to the plates. By the mid-1970s, many churches and cathedrals had banned this practice. Some institutions established rubbing centers, providing replicas of brasses, as well as supplies, to paying visitors.

Brass rubbings are created by laying a sheet of paper atop a brass, fixing it with masking tape, and rubbing the paper with one of a variety of materials. This process is similar to rubbing a pencil over a piece of paper placed on top of a coin. While chalk and graphite have been used, they were not found to produce clear and sharp facsimiles. During the 19th century, a form of “heelball” (so named for its use in blacking the heels of shoes) was introduced, allowing for the production of crisply defined images. Heelball was initially introduced in “cake” form — similar in size and shape to a large bar of soap. Subsequently, smaller, stick shapes came into use, and many colors were added to the available palette.

As may be seen in this collection, gold and silver heelball used on black paper provide a particularly attractive image, though often not as sharp as that produced with the harder black material.

Heraldry in Monumental Brasses

Heraldry developed in 12th-century Europe as a system of coats of arms to identify family membership through insignia, colors, and an agreed upon set of rules. Over time the system was elaborated to represent marriage, holding office, and inheritance in part through dividing the shield into the appropriate subsections. On brass monuments, heraldry was displayed in a variety of ways, including shields, crests on helmets, armorial collars, and badges. Men and women also wore heraldic clothing which became increasingly common from the 1460s into the 16th century. Armorial signs on brass monuments were sometimes filled in with colored waxes or enamels, as can still be seen in the shield that John d’Abernon II bears on his tomb. His family arms, a gold chevron on an azure field, evidently refer to the earls of Clare and Warenne from whom the d’Abernons held their land.

A woman often included the arms of her natal family on her monument in addition to those of her husband. The shield might be impaled (divided in half) with the full insignia represented on each side, the husband’s on the dexter (right) for greater precedence, and the wife’s family on the sinister (left). This emphasis on the patriarchal was sometimes changed, especially if the wife was an heiress. For example, there are six shields on Joan, Lady Cobham's tomb: three represent her natal family, one signifies her daughter and son-in-law, and two identify her first two husbands. The Tudor period saw an increased interest in heraldry while many of the political and social structures that supported aristocratic life were undergoing significant changes.
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In May 2013 students and Libraries staff began working together on the brass rubbings exhibit. The content team researched the brass monuments, the individuals represented, and the practice of commemoration. At the same time team members developed their knowledge in history, religion, and other fields in order to contextualize the brasses. As students moved from one monument to the next, they asked questions that shed light on medieval and Early Modern people’s practices and beliefs. The researchers met regularly to discuss findings and analyses, and they developed the exhibit themes together as a group. The student and staff member working on the manuscripts and fictile ivories identified potential artifacts and then together examined items for inclusion. Students had the experience of conducting research at an advanced level, writing descriptions and making arguments for a campus audience and a wider public, engaging in project management, and working as a team.

The mobile application team planned and designed a web-based digital version of the exhibit that provides supplemental information about the monumental brasses and their contexts. The website, based on a map of the campus, guides users to rubbings located in four other buildings. At the same time users can query the digital images for more information and see pictures of the churches, tombs, family arms, and other artifacts associated with the brasses. The two students developed the site using jQuery Mobile, a web programming language based on Javascript and optimized for mobile browsers, to build the web pages. The students, neither having previous experience in web or mobile development, learned to organize data which would be used to create dynamic web content, write code to generate that content in a visually-appealing way, and manage a large technical project over a defined period of time.

Donors

Maxine and David Cook ’64 made the brass rubbings in Germany in 1971 and the United Kingdom in 1973. In 2013 they donated the David C. Cook HC’64 and Maxine Cook Collection of Monumental Brass Rubbings to Magill Library for use in teaching and research.

Student Contributor Statements

Mohamed Abdalkader is a senior Computer Science and Political Science double major. He joined the mobile application team in September.

Rachel Davies is a sophomore with interests in literature and performance. The project has broadened and confirmed her interest in research.
and the humanities. The brass rubbings have shown Rachel that art can provide new and exciting insights into the lives of those represented. Working with the talented individuals on this project has taught Rachel the value of collaboration: share your ideas with others, and you will come to a stronger conclusion. Rachel is grateful to Margaret Schaus who went above and beyond to provide supervision and input. She is also appreciative of Terry Snyder, Jeff Tecosky-Feldman, and Phil Bean for their advice, support, and organization of the internship funded by the John P. Chesick Scholars Program.

James McInerney is a senior at the University of King’s College in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A history major, James plans to pursue an MA in museum studies. His work as a research assistant for the exhibit has proven a valuable introduction to the sort of work he hopes to do for a career. He particularly enjoyed the chance to explore Haverford’s extensive special collections in search of material to supplement the rubbings themselves. James thanks everyone involved in the exhibit for the opportunity to contribute and for their warm reception. Margaret Schaus, without whom he would have been totally lost, deserves particular thanks.

Karl Moll is a senior Computer Science major and Political Science minor. He worked on the development of the mobile website, concentrating mainly on dynamically loading exhibit content to keep the website running responsively for users. He learned Javascript, JQuery Mobile, HTML, CSS, and XML while working on this project, all of which will likely serve him as he applies for jobs as a software engineer. Working on this project this summer encouraged Karl to explore user interface and web design as possible career paths following graduation.

Blair Rush is a sophomore. He assisted in the design and building of the mobile website for the exhibit. Creating this project allowed him to learn different programming languages and understand how to develop and troubleshoot a project from beginning to finish. These experiences have led him to want to dig deeper into Javascript and other languages in computer science.

Shannon Smith is a junior English major and Anthropology minor. She assisted with content research for this exhibit while working for the College Communications Office this summer. Studying the stories behind each tomb led her to explore the implications of politics, religion, and gender roles. She previously held a marketing internship with Historic Bethlehem Museum and Sites. These experiences have sparked her interest in writing about history, art, and culture.

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The Haverford College Libraries extends its appreciation to Bryn Mawr College Special Collections, the Swarthmore College Library, and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library of the University of Pennsylvania.

Maxine Cook rubs a portion of a brass monument which had been moved from the church pavement to the wall.
Lasting Impressions:
Monumental Brass Rubbings

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