Monumental brass

Place of origin: England (possibly, made)
France (possibly, made)
England (engraved)

Date: 1498 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Brass, cast and engraved

Credit Line: Given by Capt. C. J. P. Cave

Museum number: M.5-1943

Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 10, case 9

Public access description

This rectangular brass plaque is inscribed in Latin: Pray for the soul of Robert Gylmyn who died in the year 1498. This plaque would have been set into an indent in Gylmyn's tomb slab, probably below his effigy. It is all that remains of the monumental brass of Robert Gylmyn of Seasalter parish, near Whitstable, in Kent. The old St Alphege's Church in Seasalter, where Gylmyn was buried, was built in the early 12th century, but all except the chancel and sanctuary was pulled down in 1845, when a larger church was built nearer to Whitstable town centre. The plaque was probably removed and sold at the time of the demolition. Gylmyn's will specifies 12d. for "a stone 6ft by 2ft 6 ins. wide to lie on me in the Church: Robt Gillmyn 1498". Robert Gylmyn was a local benefactor who also provided for repairs to the church, aims including bread and ale for the poor, the maintenance of a light to guide ships, and repairs to a road. This brass inscription is a rare example, where both part of the memorial survives as well as the accompanying will.

Memorial brasses usually had an inscription naming the person commemorated and asking for prayers for their soul. The belief that prayers from the living could hasten the progress of a soul through Purgatory was fundamental to pre-Reformation Christianity. Inscriptions on memorial brasses can be important sources of information about status and social aspirations.

Memorial brasses were made throughout Europe from the 13th until towards the end of the 17th century, and again in the 19th century. English brasses survive in far greater numbers than those in continental Europe, and commemorate a broad cross-section of society: bishops, knights, esquires, merchants and prosperous farmers.

Descriptive line
Inscribed brass plaque from a monumental brass to Robert Gylmyn who died in 1498, made in England, 1498, originally from Seasalter parish Church, Whitstable, Kent

Physical description
Brass, inscription plaque from a monumental brass, rectangular, cast and engraved, the surface pitted. Two fixing holes have later been infilled with a differently coloured copper-alloy.

Dimensions
Height: 6.3 cm, Width: 30.1 cm, Depth: 0.6 cm, Weight: 0.64 kg

Museum number
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Object history note
This rectangular brass plaque with engraved inscription is all that remains of the monumental brass from the tomb of Robert Gylmyn (also Gilman and Gillman) of Seasalter parish near Whitstable in Kent. Gylmyn died in 1498. In his will (dated 5th August 1497 and proved 28th July 1498, Archdeaconry Court of Canterbury Registers, Vol. 7, fol. 44) he left 12d. to have within "a competent tyme after my decease ... a stone 6ft by 2ft 6 ins wide to lie on me in the Church: Robt Gillmyn 1498". This plaque, as well perhaps as an effigy of him, would have been set into an indent in the tomb slab.

A brass memorial was one means of preserving Robert Gylmyn's memory. He also provided for several others in his will including; "To the reparation of the body of the church for my sepultur there to be had 6s.8d. to the reparation of the body of the church where most needed 5 marks ... 4 new torches for his burial 18s. ... executors to spend in masses dirges, alms to the poor in bread, ale and other charitable deeds of mercy on day of burial, for his soul, his father's and his mother's and all Christian souls 40s.". He also left "To the repair and amending of the high way from St. Peter's Chapel unto a barre called Cushmanede in the parish - 20d." as well as 6d. for the maintenance of a beacon shrine, called "Our Lady of Borstall", set up for the guidance of sailors, and a further 6d. for the maintenance of the "Our Lady of Hokday" light in the church.

The old St Alphege's church in Seasalter was built in the early 12th century but all but the chancel and sanctuary was pulled down in 1845 when a larger church was built nearer to Whitstable town centre. The plaque was probably removed and sold at the time of the demolition.

This brass was sold in Canterbury in 1894 and was bought by F. Baker of Middlesborough. It was later acquired by Mr O.J. Charlton of
Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It was given to the Museum in 1943 by Captain C.J.P Cave of Stoner Hill, Petersfield (RP: MA/1/C793). Cave was a member of the Monumental Brass Society and first offered it in a note of 20 February 1943: ‘... I have a small rectangular plate 12” x 2 1/2” with the inscription "Orate p aia Robti Gylmyn qui obiit Ao dni MoCCCXXXXviio". It came to me from the sale of O.J. Charlton, one of our fellows.’

Historical significance: Inscriptions on memorial brasses are important sources of information about status and social aspirations. They are one of the few examples of medieval art that is consistently dated. This is a rare example where not only does the memorial survive but so do parts of the accompanying will.

**Historical context note**

Memorial brasses were made throughout Europe from the 13th until nearly the end of the 17th century. The practice was revived in the 19th century. Brasses were fitted onto the lids of tombs and memorial slabs to commemorate the lives of the deceased. Brass or latten (copper alloy) memorials gradually superseded stone memorials.

English brasses survive in greater numbers than those in Europe, partly because they commemorated a broader cross-section of society. Bishops, knights, esquires, merchants and prosperous farmers made up the clientele. The wealthiest ranks of society opted for more elaborate monuments. In Europe, however, the brass was the preserve of the aristocracy.

The brass as a raw material was imported from Europe, especially Cologne. By far the greatest number of brasses are found in the eastern counties, particularly Kent, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, close to ports with connections to Germany and the Netherlands. English brasses in the 13th and 14th centuries can be identified by the fact that the figure commemorated, and its accompanying inscription, is usually cut out to the outline whereas the European examples are more often engraved on a plain rectangle.

**URL**

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O128304/monumental-brass-unknown/