

Two Women and their Monumental Brass, c. 1480

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In the late 15th century, a monumental brass was laid in the church at Etchingham (East Sussex) to the memory of two never-married women, Elizabeth Etchingham, who died in 1452, and Agnes Oxenbridge, who died in 1480. This article investigates the possible social meanings of their brass, with a particular eye to Alan Bray's recent interpretations of other funeral monuments dedicated to same-sex couples.

IN the eastern Weald of Sussex in the late 14th century, Sir William Etchingham built a church. His project was both parochial and familial, expressing on the one hand the newly achieved independence of Etchingham parish, and on the other the proud standing of that parish's chief family. Parishioners were doubtless grateful for the new church and churchyard, for it enabled them to bury locally, rather than carrying their dead to the old mother church in Salehurst, almost an hour's walk to the south-east. But their new building was as much a church of the Etchingham family as it was of Etchingham parish. Sir William filled his church with stained glass that spoke more about social power than holy piety: the coats of arms in the windows celebrated the Etchinghams, saluted Edward III and his kin, and simply revelled, as Nigel Saul has noted, in 'heraldry for heraldry's sake'. With somewhat similar intent, Sir William also ensured that his church had a chancel big enough to serve as a new family mausoleum for generations to come.¹ Buried there in 1389, he is commemorated in a monumental brass that still reminds us of his praiseworthy efforts as a church-builder. Another brass, from 1444, remembers the next two generations of Etchinghams — Sir William's son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. A fragment from a third, laid in 1486, commemorates his great-grandson. A fourth Etchingham brass stands somewhat apart from this dynastic series. Lying in the south aisle instead of the chancel, it remembers not a male heir but a daughter, and an unmarried one at that: in the early 1480s, a brass was laid in the church in memory of Sir William's great-granddaughter (or possibly, great-great-granddaughter) Elizabeth Etchingham who had died in 1452. The brass joined her in perpetuity with another unmarried daughter of another east Sussex dynasty, Agnes Oxenbridge who died in 1480.

This joint Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass might represent a form of Christian memorial that we are just beginning to understand. In 2003, Alan Bray argued in his posthumously published *The Friend* that Europeans have long celebrated intense, same-sex friendships and that the Christian church has long accommodated these friends in rituals that both bound them together in life and buried them together in death.² Funeral monuments provided much of Bray's best evidence. He opened his book with a close study of a 1391 tomb from Galata (near Istanbul) that commemorates the English knights William Neville and John Clanvowe, whose arms

are impaled together on the monument in the manner of a married couple, and he also briefly considered a few other medieval monuments, including an early-15th-century monumental brass in Merton College that jointly remembers John Bloxham and John Whytton. But most of Bray's examples are modern, as perhaps dictated by the survival pattern of monuments: Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, 1619; Christ's College, Cambridge, 1682; Westminster Abbey, 1710; Launceston, Cornwall, 1731; Hereford Cathedral, 1746; Wiveton, Norfolk, 1795; and of course, the joint tomb of John Henry Cardinal Newman and Ambrose St. John at Rednal, Worcestershire, 1890. Bray, who wrote about the history of homosexuality before it was fashionable to do so, was at pains to stress in *The Friend* that these monuments celebrate emotional intimacy and friendship, not necessarily sexually expressed love.³ However one understands the relationships celebrated in these tombs, Bray has brought them to our attention and in so doing, has added a new genre — same-sex burials and memorials — to our study of English burial monuments. The brass that commemorates Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge augments the sparse medieval evidence for this genre, extends it more fully to relationships between women, and advances its appreciation in perhaps the most tradition-bound sector of medieval archaeology: the study of monumental brasses.⁴

THE BRASS⁵

THE brass (Fig. 1) survives in its complete form, although it is impossible to know whether its position on the floor of the south chancel is original. Embedded in a slab of Purbeck or possibly Sussex marble, the brass shows two women, hands raised in prayer and turned in semi-profile towards each other. Elizabeth Etchingham, on the left, is considerably the smaller, and she is shown with hair loose, flowing down her shoulders to her hips. Agnes Oxenbridge, on the right, is half-again as large, and her hair is tightly coifed but not covered. Both have the high foreheads then fashionable, with hair held back by narrow bands decorated with a triangular ornament. They are identically dressed — a light chemise covered by a low-necked gown, gathered at the waist, flowing in rich folds to the floor, and trimmed at the collar and sleeves with generous panels of furs.⁶

The brass was executed in a London workshop whose products are identified, in the classifications now widely accepted in studies of monumental brass, as Series 'F'.⁷ The figures produced by this workshop in the last quarter of the 15th century are distinctive for often being posed in semi-profile (rather than an older, front-faced style that emulated the position of effigies on three-dimensional stone monuments) and for often adopting what Robin Emmerson has characterised as a 'jaunty attitude' of leaning slightly away from the centre of the composition.⁸ As was common, the artisans of the 'F' workshop sometimes used patterns for non-essential elements of their compositions; thus, the dress of Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge is found again in at least one other Series 'F' product, a memorial laid c. 1485 to an anonymous couple in Little Hadham, Hertfordshire (Fig. 2).⁹ Although families sometimes took repeated commissions to the same workshop, this is the only Series 'F' brass at either Etchingham or Brede (the family church of Agnes Oxenbridge).

The brass is an integral composition, but the inscription plate somewhat separates the two women. Under Elizabeth Etchingham four Latin lines state her burial in that place and identify her as the first-born daughter of Thomas and Margaret Etchingham, giving her date of death as 3 December 1452. Under Agnes Oxenbridge



FIG. 1. Memorial Brass to Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge, Etchingam, East Sussex, c. 1480

runs another Latin inscription of similar length, noting her burial there, identifying her as the daughter of Robert Oxenbridge, giving her death-date as 4 August 1480, and soliciting God's mercy on behalf of *both* women.¹⁰ The two columns are separated by a thin vertical incision in the brass plate. Separated double-column inscriptions are not unknown on late-medieval brasses, but the inscriptions of married couples usually read as a single entry. Treated as one under English law, 'man and wife' usually remained much the same in brass memorials.¹¹ Elizabeth Etchingam



FIG. 2. Memorial Brass to an Anonymous Couple, Little Hadham, Hertfordshire, c. 1485

and Agnes Oxenbridge are joined in their memorial inscriptions not to each other but to their respective natal families: only the final plea for divine grace embraced them both.

The brass is small. At a little less than 600 mm in height and 450 mm in width, it is less than one-quarter the size of the memorial placed in 1444 to Elizabeth Etchingam's likely father and grandparents.¹² It is a rare example for its time of a palimpsest; on the reverse is an inscription to Thomas Austin, son of a London mercer, who died in 1405.¹³ Both size and recycling suggest that particular economies were taken in the production of this memorial. Although we cannot be certain that the brass's placement in the south chancel is original, such a location would be of a piece with these economies, for it would have allowed these women to be remembered without affording them premier space in the chancel.

This description comprises all we know for certain about this monumental brass and the women it commemorates. Some scholars have interpreted the brass as a monument to two dead children; some have seen it as two discrete brasses rather than

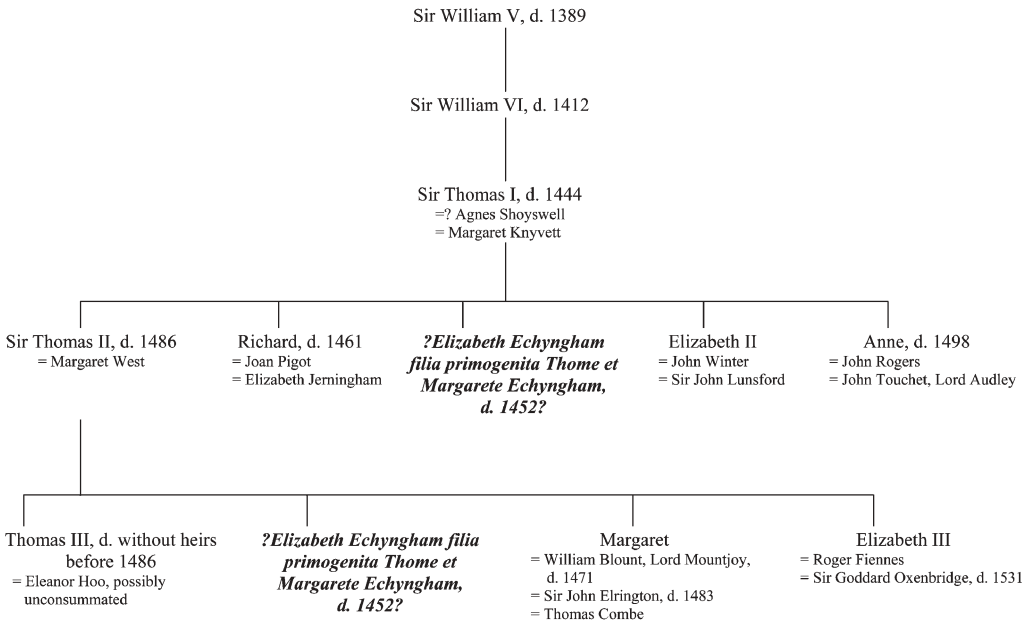


FIG. 3. An Abbreviated Genealogy for Elizabeth Etchingam, d. 1452

the single composition it clearly is; others have tinkered creatively with the Etchingam and Oxenbridge genealogies in order to explain its existence. I offer here a new interpretation, not a certain one, for no interpretation can be certain, but one that is certainly plausible.

ELIZABETH ETCHINGHAM AND AGNES OXENBRIDGE

THE generational placement of Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge within their respective families is uncertain (Figs 3 and 4), but their families were near neighbours, with the Oxenbridge seat of Brede a mere twelve miles to the south-east of Etchingam.¹⁴ The Oxenbridges were of newer vintage, but they had long moved within the ambit of the Etchinghams. In 1388, a Robert Oxenbridge had been among the ‘friends and associates’ who followed William Etchingam V’s lead in swearing support for the Merciless Parliament, and in the next generation, Elizabeth Etchingam’s grandfather (or possibly great-grandfather) Sir William VI had included Agnes Oxenbridge’s father (or possibly grandfather) Robert Oxenbridge among the seven trustworthy men to whom he enfeoffed his estates.¹⁵ By the middle of the 15th century the Oxenbridges, like the Etchinghams, had multiple properties and interests in Sussex, Kent, and beyond. The families would eventually be joined in marriage at the end of the 15th century, when Elizabeth Etchingam’s niece (or possibly sister), Elizabeth III, married Agnes Oxenbridge’s nephew (or possibly brother) Goddard; because the Etchingam male line had failed by that point and Elizabeth III was a co-heir with her sister Margaret, several Etchingam manors were to be absorbed into the Oxenbridge estate through this marriage. But this anticipates our main story,

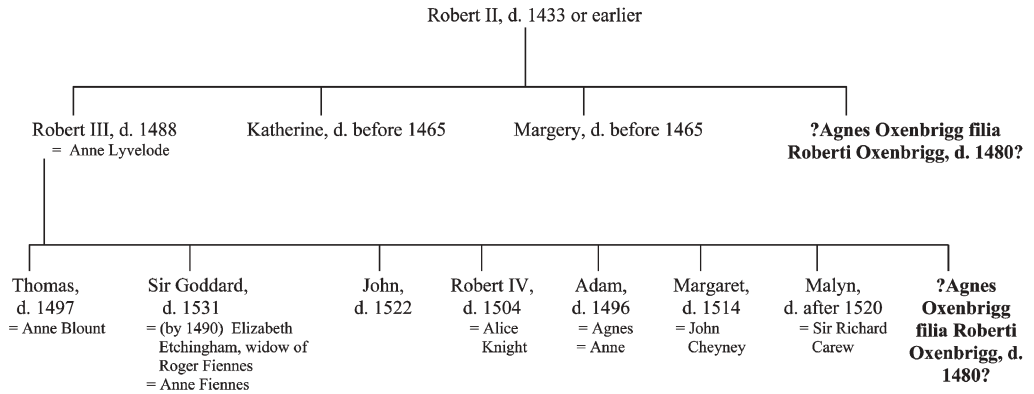


FIG 4. An Abbreviated Genealogy for Agnes Oxenbridge, d. 1480

because the Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge commemorated in the brass knew each other decades before their families' fortunes were linked by that union.

Women are most often remembered in genealogies when they marry and produce heirs for the next generation. Childless wives, children who die young, and unmarried women matter little in the tales of male lineage and descent that were the stuff of family remembrance in the 15th century and beyond. We have no evidence that Elizabeth Etchingham or Agnes Oxenbridge ever married, and their brass memorial gives us two good reasons to suppose they never did. Husbands are almost always specified on women's grave inscriptions, but none were noted here; similarly, the depictions of the women — Elizabeth Etchingham with long flowing hair and both with uncovered heads — bear the then-conventional signs of unmarried status.¹⁶ Thus, it might be no surprise that a genealogy commissioned by an Oxenbridge descendent in 1600 entirely ignores Agnes and also fails to include Elizabeth among the Etchingham branch into which the family intermarried.¹⁷ Indeed, everything we now know about Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge comes from their brass; to date, no other documentary references have been found. What, then, can we know about them?

The monument's information on the parentage of Elizabeth Etchingham (*filia primogenita Thome et Margarete Echyngham*) allows her to be placed in one of two generations of her family: her parents were either Sir Thomas I (d. 1444) and Margaret Knyvett, or Sir Thomas II (d. 1486) and Margaret West.¹⁸ Each couple produced a better-documented daughter named Elizabeth — I will call them Elizabeth II and III — who married and produced children. The Elizabeth commemorated on the brass might have been identified there as her parents' first-born daughter in order to distinguish her from this namesake sibling, but in any case, parents giving the same forename to two children was not then as odd as it seems today; in Norfolk at roughly the same time, John and Margaret Paston named their first son John and did the same with their second son a few years later. In other words, we cannot conclude that the presence of two Elizabeth Etchinghams in one generation proves that the elder died before the younger was named, as living siblings could and did share forenames.¹⁹

We can estimate Elizabeth Etchingham's age of death only roughly, but if the child of Thomas I and Margaret Knyvett, she would have been in her twenties when she died in 1452; if the child of Thomas II and Margaret West, she would probably have been less than ten years old.²⁰ It has long been conventional to assume the younger option, making Elizabeth Etchingham an early-dying daughter of Thomas II. Spencer Hall put her there in his 1801 genealogy, and although F. H. Suckling extensively revised Hall's work in 1905, he left our Elizabeth Etchingham where he had found her; no one has suggested otherwise since. In terms of funerary custom, this is not implausible. Children were sometimes remembered in individual brass or stone monuments, and perhaps Thomas II and Margaret West were, like other parents who erected such memorials, deeply moved by the loss of a young child. In an iconographic sense, this genealogical placement is also plausible; although the effigy shows Elizabeth Etchingham as a full-grown woman, deceased infants and children were sometimes depicted on monuments as more mature than their actual years. Elizabeth Etchingham's relatively smaller size — she is shown at about two-thirds the size of Agnes Oxenbridge — could also suggest a death before maturity, for, as Sophie Oosterwijk has shown, some (but not all) diminutive effigies remember children.²¹ But it is just as plausible to place Elizabeth in the earlier generation, allowing for the possibility that she died as a young adult.²² Three points argue in favour of this second option. First, as I will explore more fully below, Elizabeth Etchingham's relatively small size on the brass does not necessarily indicate death in childhood, but might instead indicate that she died as a nubile maiden, especially as compared to her later-dying contemporary Agnes Oxenbridge. Second, because adults were remembered with funeral monuments much more often than children, the default assumption in analysing medieval memorials must be that the deceased was full-grown.²³ And, third, because Elizabeth must have made an exceptionally strong impression during her life (so strong that someone was willing to invest in a memorial to her almost three decades after her death), an earlier birth and longer life seem likely.

The story is much the same with Agnes Oxenbridge (*filia Roberti Oxenbrigge*), for there are two Roberts in the Oxenbridge line who could have been her father.²⁴ In his extensive genealogy of the Oxenbridge family published in 1856, William Durrant Cooper placed Agnes as the daughter of the Robert Oxenbridge III who died in 1488, but she could easily have been this Robert's sister — and both of them the children of Robert Oxenbridge II who died before 1433.²⁵ If placed in this earlier generation, Agnes Oxenbridge would probably have been in her fifties when she died in 1480; if placed in the later generation, possibly thirty years of age. Although both options are plausible, the earlier makes slightly more sense for it better accommodates the timing of Agnes Oxenbridge's death in 1480 (her proposed siblings dying before 1465 and in 1488) than does the later option (most of her proposed siblings dying some two decades after 1480, and one surviving another fifty years). More than likely, then, Agnes Oxenbridge was the daughter of Robert II, born c. 1425; she would therefore have been in her twenties when Elizabeth Etchingham (perhaps a child but also possibly in her twenties) died in 1452; and she would have reached her fifties by the time she herself died in 1480, just eight years before her brother Robert III.

ARISTOCRATIC MAIDENS²⁶

MOST daughters born into the late-medieval aristocracy married, but singleness was not unknown. The Etchinghams and Oxenbridges doubtless expected their daughters

to marry at a young age, and, if widowed, to marry again: in Barbara Harris's recent estimate for daughters of peers and knights, 94 per cent made their careers as wives, mothers, and widows. But a small minority did not. Of these, very few went into convents. As Harris has put it, 'neither they nor their families considered the religious life an attractive alternative to marriage'.²⁷ If the daughter of a knight or peer did not marry, she could expect, on the one hand, to be provided with some financial independence by her parents, and on the other hand, to pass her life as a dependent within the household of her parents and later, their heirs.

Well-born daughters (and sons) were usually raised at home until adolescence, when they were placed by their parents in other households where they continued their education, expanded their friendship networks, and enhanced their marriage prospects.²⁸ Because these adolescent placements critically advanced families as well as individuals, parents strove to put their children into the best possible households. In 1469, for example, the widowed Margaret Paston sought to place her daughter Margery in a much grander establishment than her own — with the Duchess of Bedford, or the Countess of Oxford, or 'some other worshipful place'. Social advancement was not the only motivation — as Margaret Paston reported of her relationship with her daughter, 'we be either of us weary of the other' — but it was a vital one.²⁹ Once placed, adolescent girls were sometimes treated as quasi-daughters and sometimes more as servants. They attended on the mistress of the household, aiding her in health or illness and accompanying her on travels; they took on such household tasks as sewing and gardening; they possibly did some cooking; and they generally honed their skills in the daily occupations of aristocratic women. They were usually not alone, but instead part of a loosely supervised group of girls (and boys) of similar ages and backgrounds; from this group often grew the long-life friendships that so sustained elite society.

Some daughters married so young that they were never placed out; others married directly out of household placements, and still others returned after a few years to their natal households where they remained until marriage. Many married in their late teens, but some waited until their twenties or later. Aristocratic marriages were seldom, of course, matters of pure personal choice; compatibility was important in marriage, but so, too, were practical considerations. Did the marriage advance family interests? Was it socially suitable? Were the financial arrangements adequate?³⁰ Whether married or not, daughters received concrete support from their parents. Marrying daughters took dowries into their marriages, and their not-marrying sisters received from their parents a different sort of endowment, in the form of cash, goods, annuities, or other resources that, although sometimes less valuable than a dowry might have been, enabled a never-married daughter to manage her own living expenses. Daughters sometimes seem to have actively chosen not to marry, and some parents readily provided for such choices. In his will of 1504, for example, Thomas West, Lord de La Warre, kinsman of the Elizabeth Etchingham commemorated on the brass, provided 800 marks for his eldest daughter Eleanor; she was to receive it as a lump-sum dowry if she married or in eight annual installments of 100 marks if 'she be not disposed to marry'.³¹ Although a never-married life was an option for Eleanor West and some others like her, it was a matter of happenstance for many other women who found themselves unable to marry through family situation, personal health or simple ill-fortune. When they wrote their wills, these women most often identified themselves as 'maidens' or 'singlewomen'; the term 'spinster' then still designated a woman who made her living by spinning wool into thread.³²

Whether single by choice or chance, these never-marrying women seldom, if ever, established their own, separate households, perhaps because their own income was insufficient to maintain a proper standard of living or perhaps because it was more suitable to remain part of a larger household. Most died where they had been born; even as the main residences of their families passed from parents to inheriting brothers, to nephews, or even to widowed sisters-in-law, they stayed put. Well-born singlewomen thus made good use of the strong social expectation that heirs would provide affectionate support for non-inheriting kin, but they were not heavy burdens: they paid their own way, they helped administer households and estates, and they comprised the aristocratic equivalent of a reserve labour pool, available to step in whenever wives fell ill, or mothers died young, or family commissions needed to be personally delivered.

These, then, were the conventions that shaped the world of Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge. We can be cautiously confident that the two were friends from childhood, for it would have been exceptional if all the Etchingham and Oxenbridge children had not known each other well. In the provincial world of the Sussex-Kent Weald, the fortunes of the Etchinghams and Oxenbridges rested as much on social connection as on land.³³ Both girls would have been prepared during childhood for placement in another household, and their experiences in this adolescent interval are today a critical unknown. Perhaps the two girls found themselves contemporaries in a third household, grander than either the up-and-coming Oxenbridges or more established Etchinghams. Or perhaps Agnes Oxenbridge was placed by her striving parents in an Etchingham household that included a stay-at-home Elizabeth, who was a nubile maiden of Agnes's own age or a frail and soon-to-die child. We do not know, because no records survive. We are just as uninformed about what happened next. In the usual course of events, young aristocratic women either married or returned to their natal homes after their sojourns away. Elizabeth Etchingham, if she lived into her twenties, as seems likely, would have watched one or both of her sisters marry, while passing the last years of her life in a household newly headed by her brother Thomas II. Agnes Oxenbridge, who lived almost three decades after Elizabeth Etchingham's death, would have spent almost all of her adult life in a household headed by her brother Robert III and his wife Anne Lyvelode. But either woman might have lived elsewhere, even several places over the years, and it is even possible that Agnes Oxenbridge lived at Etchingham, where she might have been welcomed, after 1452, as either the intimate friend of a deceased sister or the fond nurse of a deceased daughter.

WHO COMMISSIONED THE BRASS?

THE remembrance of Elizabeth Etchingham in a memorial erected almost thirty years after her death was unusual, but not unprecedented. Parents sometimes added long-dead children to their own memorials; most conjugal brasses commemorated one spouse who had died years before the other; and some brasses celebrated long-dead ancestors in acts of family pride.³⁴ Elizabeth Etchingham was likely buried in her family church when she died in 1452. When Agnes Oxenbridge died in 1480, she would normally have been treated similarly — that is, buried in her family church at Brede, nestled among her parents and siblings. We do not know where she was living at the time, an especially important lacuna because people were sometimes buried where they died, especially at times of plague or other contagion. Because most

aristocratic singlewomen resided in their natal homes, Agnes Oxenbridge most likely died at Brede, but she might have lived elsewhere, possibly even Etchingham. If so, burial at place of death was not an invariable practice, and transport of bodies to family sepulchres was also common. It would have been a small matter to bring her corpse the twelve miles back to Brede. Wherever Agnes Oxenbridge breathed her last, we do know this: her body was taken to Etchingham church, buried next to Elizabeth Etchingham, and commemorated with a joint monument. Who made this decision and why?

In 1480, the heads of the two families, Thomas Etchingham II and Robert Oxenbridge III, were mature men, long married, and with children either married or reaching marriageable age. They were near neighbours, well-born, wealthy and possibly good friends. We do not know whether the marriage of their children, Elizabeth Etchingham III and Goddard Oxenbridge, had already taken place (our first evidence dates from 1490), but the marriage doubtless sealed a social alliance of much longer standing.³⁵ Because Thomas Etchingham II had no living sons, he might have welcomed the Oxenbridges as part of his wider kin and even as eventual heirs of some of his estate. Certainly, he accepted with good grace the burial of an Oxenbridge woman in his family church at Etchingham, for otherwise it would not have occurred. But it is hard to conceive of a circumstance in which Thomas Etchingham II *instigated* this burial, for Agnes's death demanded from him no action: she was merely the unmarried daughter of his neighbour. If the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth Etchingham III and Goddard Oxenbridge had already been concluded, she was also the aunt (or sister) of his son-in-law, a second connection but not a particularly close one: and even if she had died while living in his household, she had close kin to care for her and an obvious burial destination at Brede. Similarly, it is hard to deduce a circumstance that might have provoked Robert Oxenbridge III to bury his sister (or possibly daughter) in a neighbour's church. There was plenty of room in the family mausoleum at Brede, and since he had laid a brass a few decades earlier in memory of his unmarried sisters Margery and Katherine, he clearly harboured no objections to the burial and commemoration at Brede of never-married Oxenbridge females.³⁶

The likeliest explanation is that Agnes Oxenbridge herself requested burial at Etchingham, possibly in a will that no longer survives.³⁷ Late-medieval testators almost always requested burial in a specific location, naming a particular church and often also specifying a precise location within the church, usually close to the burials of other named individuals. Singlewomen such as Agnes Oxenbridge frequently asked to be buried near one or both parents, but some chose to lie elsewhere. In London in the second half of the 15th century, for example, fifteen singlewomen left wills that are still extant, and all asked for burial in a specific church; six also asked to be placed near a parent or parents; two asked to be placed in specific devotional locations; and one (Joan Isham) asked to be interred near (*iuxta*) the grave of a woman whose relation to her is unknown (Margery Nicoll).³⁸ Given the frequency with which burial locations were specified in wills, this must have been a common deathbed practice, even among those whose requests were not recorded in wills or whose wills have not survived. It is thus reasonable to surmise that whether Agnes Oxenbridge left a will or not, she likely requested that she be buried in a specific church and possibly a specific location within that church. Survivors and executors did not, of course, always abide by the wishes of the deceased. But the easy option for Robert Oxenbridge III would have been to bury his sister (or daughter) at Brede; the harder option, and thus one that probably carried the onus of Agnes Oxenbridge's explicit

request, was to inter her some twelve miles away, at Etchingham, in another family's mausoleum.

As to the memorial itself, the commissioning of brasses was usually left to executors or survivors, but as she lay dying or even before, Agnes Oxenbridge might have had a hand in commissioning the brass that was to be laid atop the grave she shared with Elizabeth Etchingham. Funerary monuments were not mere matters of memory and vanity to medieval people; they were also agents of salvation, a way to solicit the prayers of the living on behalf of a soul (or souls) suffering in purgatory. The Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass implies this function in its conventional call for God's mercy; other memorials were more explicit. A brass laid around 1400 in St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol still admonishes the visitor, 'You who pass by, whether old, middle-aged or youth, make supplication for me that I may attain hope of pardon'.³⁹ Purgatory weighed heavily on the minds of late-medieval Christians, and since monuments ensured continuing prayers, many who could afford to do so made provision for their construction before they died. Some, to be sure, made no stipulations about their monuments, and many others gave only general directions, but at least a few were picky and hands-on customers. Nigel Saul has recently found a rare contract (in draft form) that shows a patron approving drawings and specifying considerable detail—for example, that a dog placed at the feet of the effigy should have bells around its neck.⁴⁰ As J. Roger Greenwood has shown in the particular case of Norfolk, late-medieval testators sometimes explicitly specified such matters as construction material, design, inscription, cost, and even the speediness of completion. A few were even so keen to supervise their commemoration that they had their monuments constructed in advance of their deaths (either arranging to add the death date later or eschewing a date altogether). Only a small proportion of testators would have had the status and wealth to anticipate commemoration in brass, but Greenwood found 166 examples of such provision in sixty years for Norfolk alone. Nor was it a concern of men only; twenty-three women are among Greenwood's testators, including many widows, one vowess, one 'singlewoman', and many women identified solely by forename and surname.⁴¹ We cannot know whether Agnes Oxenbridge issued special instructions about her monument, but it would not have been unprecedented for her to have done so.

INTERPRETING THE BRASS

OF course, no brass was a slavish product of deathbed dictates. When Sir Thomas Stathum died in 1470, he carefully specified a memorial brass that would show him and his two wives kneeling in prayer to the Blessed Virgin and St Christopher, surrounded by their heraldic arms. The brass survives today, and it follows his instructions in many respects, except that it shows Sir Thomas and his wives *recumbent* rather than kneeling.⁴² Sir Thomas could state his wishes in detail, but any monument, his included, was the result of a negotiation between the wishes of the deceased, the actions of his or her agents, and the abilities of the engravers.⁴³ All of these interests were tempered, of course, by the practical matter of cost. We know that some people specified quite complex and distinctive monumental schemes, but we also know that workshops often recycled designs and that a few might have even used stock figures, simply filling in name and date when an order arrived.⁴⁴ Somewhere in between these two extremes labored executors, heirs, children and other bereaved, most of whom likely aimed to respect the wishes of the deceased in as

efficient and economical a manner as possible. Some survivors sought out good work, as we know from John Paston I's letter (*c.* 1449) about a commission for his brother's tomb; he maligned an engraver in St Brides as 'no clean portrayer' and urged that the monument 'might be portrayed by some other man'.⁴⁵ Survivors also sometimes directly supervised the execution of brasses: Norris has reproduced two medieval miniatures that show a widow, accompanied by her daughter and son, inspecting a half-completed monument and talking with the foreman about specifics of its design.⁴⁶ The Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass, then, was a collective product. Perhaps Agnes Oxenbridge left express instructions, but the actual production of the brass likely resulted from a collaboration among her survivors (especially Robert Oxenbridge III), the man in whose church it was to be laid (Thomas Etchingham II), and the London workshop 'F' to which the commission was given.

As a product of so much collaboration, the memorial brass to two women laid in Etchingham church within a year or two of Agnes Oxenbridge's death was likely a scandal to no one. But it nevertheless presented some creative challenges. Memorial brasses were not designed as portraits of individuals, but instead as statements of the status of the deceased — lineage, rank, achievement, occupation, social connection, *and* marital status.⁴⁷ In memorials to married couples, husbands and wives customarily took the positions of their respective families on armorial bearings — the husband on the right (*dexter*), the wife at his left (*sinister*) hand. As viewed by observers, the husband stood on the left, the wife on the right. The engraver doubtless knew the convention for spouses, but this particular commission broke the mold. Where should Elizabeth Etchingham stand and where Agnes Oxenbridge? Perhaps Elizabeth Etchingham was assigned the husbandly spot because the brass was destined for her family church or because her family was of more ancient origin; perhaps it seemed best to give that position to the smaller female figure, as it presented less of a potential insult to husbandly prerogatives; perhaps the placement was more random.

A brass that commemorated two maidens so far apart in age at death also seems to have prompted some creative tinkering. Elizabeth Etchingham's smaller size could indicate that she died as a child, but most diminutive children on 15th-century brasses were 'weepers' — that is, mourners, usually offspring, who created a sort of perpetual funeral cortege for the main person or persons commemorated. This is not the case for Elizabeth Etchingham, nor is it likely that her small size was meant to indicate that only her heart was interred.⁴⁸ A third possibility is that the imbalanced figures were a cost-cutting measure, especially because the brass's re-use of materials from an earlier monument suggests that such economies were of some urgency. But a fourth possibility returns us to the all-important matter of status, albeit a status that historians are just beginning to recognise: the designers of the brass might have particularly wished to distinguish Elizabeth Etchingham's younger maidenhood from the older maidenhood of Agnes Oxenbridge. Although both women died without ever taking husbands, they were very different sorts of maidens, according to the standards of the time. As Kim Phillips has shown, maidenhood was especially associated with youthfulness, with nubile women who were not yet married. In late-medieval culture, this youthful maidenhood was considered the perfect age for women, a telling contrast to the perfect age for men — *iuventus* — which corresponded with middle age.⁴⁹ Women who remained unmarried into middle age were beyond their prime and might have been subject to social ridicule in ways that anticipated the 18th-century's stereotype of the 'old maid'.⁵⁰ The designers of the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass

clearly used hairstyle to express this difference between younger and older maidens: Elizabeth Etchingam's flowing hair shows her as a youthful maiden, and Agnes Oxenbridge's coifed hair and uncovered head tell us that she was older, but still maidenly. Perhaps they also used relative size to the same end, differentiating the smaller, nubile maiden from her larger, middle-aged companion.⁵¹

The designers of the brass also had to express the relationship that caused these two women to be remembered together, and their decisions in this regard are especially intriguing. Monumental brasses were not free-form designs, but they were not entirely constrained either. Stock effigies, standard poses, and workshop patterns helped engravers accomplish their designs quickly and well, but these artisans did much more than the medieval equivalent of cut-and-paste. They used these aids, but neither invariably nor slavishly, and almost always with an eye to the wishes of the deceased or their agents. Each brass was a unique result of this creative mingling of standardisation and execution, workshop and commission. In the case of the Etchingam-Oxenbridge brass, its design suggests that no one — whether Agnes Oxenbridge in pre-mortem requests, or Thomas Etchingam II and Robert Oxenbridge III acting as survivors, or the artisans who worked in the 'F' workshop — shied away from representing Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge as a couple. They might even have designed the monument, perhaps in an effort to explain the joint commemoration, with special emphasis on a warm intimacy between the two women.

The close relationship between Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge is suggested, of course, by the simple fact of their joint brass. Almost all brasses with multiple figures depict either married couples (sometimes married triplets — usually, a husband and his two wives) or parents and children. Siblings were sometimes remembered on the same monument and so too were clerics, perhaps for reasons of economy, but, aside from an incomplete palimpsest in Narborough, Norfolk, and another incomplete monument in Long Melford, Suffolk, I have not yet seen another brass that features two unrelated laywomen.⁵² Peter Coss has explored how the development of joint effigies from the late-13th-century represents 'a celebration of marriage',⁵³ and certainly such joint designs had come by the 15th century to symbolise the marital relationship as it was then ideally conceived — a union sanctified by God, supported by families, and marked by fidelity and common purpose. In this context, the joint effigies of Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge could not but have evoked a close relationship; like a husband and wife, they were shown sharing a monument in perpetuity. But their relationship was emphasised in other aspects, too, for they were also shown facing each other, moving towards each other, and looking directly into each other's eyes.

The mutual regard of Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge owes something to design developments that were extraneous to them. Through the 13th and 14th centuries, most English monumental brasses showed their subjects faced fully forward, as if lying on a tomb. In the last third of the 15th century, however, more brasses began to show effigies in semi-profile, usually turned towards another figure. This turn was more marked in women than men, and it has sometimes been attributed to the desire to show to better effect the more elaborate headdresses of the era; once women were shown in profile, it is said, men then turned towards them too, as a 'common courtesy'.⁵⁴ Although neither Elizabeth Etchingam nor Agnes Oxenbridge wore headdresses that demanded special display, the semi-profile design is also

particularly associated with the 'F' workshop that produced their memorial. But there is more in the semi-profile turns of the Etchingam-Oxenbridge brass than can be explained by fashion or workshops alone.

First, the development of the semi-profile turn in late-15th-century brass design could express deference as well as design developments and workshop style. It is no accident that wives turned first towards husbands, even when they were not encumbered with difficult-to-portray headdresses. Other household dependents also took this deferential turn — in one brass from 1477, for example, a son turned towards his front-faced father.⁵⁵ I cannot claim to have seen more than a portion of the brasses that survive from these late-15th-century decades of transition to a fully developed semi-profile style, but I have not found a single design in which the husband is turned towards a wife who faces to the front. This deferential twist makes good sense in terms of both contemporary social standards and artistic composition; the inward turn of the wife or child draws the viewer's eye towards the more important patriarch who gazes steadily forward. The Little Hadham brass (Fig. 2) from the same workshop as the Etchingam-Oxenbridge composition and very like it in many respects exemplifies the subtle personal politics at play in this new style of semi-profile turns: both husband and wife turn, but he a bit less so and she a bit more fully.⁵⁶

Second, by the time of the Etchingam-Oxenbridge memorial, brasses were expressing more familial intimacy than before. By the 15th century, brasses often featured children — lines of sons and daughters, living and dead, who attended on their parents in eternity.⁵⁷ Brasses were also more regularly expressing emotional ties between those parents, stressing in new ways an ideal of mutual affection between husbands and wives. Richard II had specified in 1395 that his joint tomb with his beloved Anne of Bohemia show their effigies joined, with their hands clasped. Marital affection was also expressed by physical closeness, gestures, and inclination of the figures, but by the 1480s, the most common way to denote conjugal love on brasses was to turn the wife towards her husband or, sometimes, both spouses towards each other.⁵⁸ As Paul Binski has noted of a similar but more muted trend in the middle of the 14th century, 'The turning of figures on their axis enabled the intimacy of marriage to be expressed'.⁵⁹ We can be particularly confident about the affective force of the semi-profile turn in the late 15th century because clients and engravers had a less intimate option: complex headdress and semi-profile effigies could be successfully shown on brasses of couples praying towards a devotional object placed between them.⁶⁰ Such brasses were not nearly as common as monuments in which one or both partners turn directly towards each other.

Because the shift to semi-profile figures had only just begun — and fitfully so — by 1480, the designers of the Etchingam-Oxenbridge brass had many choices about how to arrange Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge on their joint memorial. They could have portrayed both women faced to the front in what was still the most common effigial pose; they could have portrayed one faced front and the other in deferential turn; they could have shown both in profile, praying towards a cross, altar, or other object placed between them. They chose to show both women turned with equal force towards the other, in a pose that evoked the newly stylish and intimate turn of marital brasses. To be sure, the artisan who produced this brass used a pose that was common in the 'F' workshop, but it was not the only pose available, and neither that artisan nor anyone else seemed to have considered this affective turn unsuited for a female couple or unseemly for their families.

The designers were, however, prevented from evoking intimacy in another aspect of the brass's construction, for Elizabeth and Agnes stand somewhat apart in their memorial. Instead of touching each other or standing a mere few (proportional) inches apart, as was common with married couples, they stand at a considerable distance. This gap was necessitated by other elements of the composition: simply put, in order to accommodate an inscription underneath two small but full-length effigies, each figure had to balance on its own end of the inscription block. A commission for a small brass, such as this Etchingham-Oxenbridge monument, offered engravers little flexibility as to the size of the inscription and more flexibility with regard to the figures, which were often shown as semi-effigies in order to fill more fully the space atop the inscription. If full-length effigies were used — presumably because the deceased or their agents specifically required it — the effigies became smaller in relation to the plate and more separated on it.⁶¹ We cannot know how this combination of lengthy inscription, full-length figures, and small monument came about to produce the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass. Perhaps Agnes Oxenbridge specified full-length figures but left insufficient money for a larger brass. Perhaps Robert Oxenbridge III wanted full-length figures in a larger monument, but Thomas Etchingham II was unwilling to offer the space. Perhaps something else altogether. But the combination of small size, full-length effigies, and inscription left the engraver with no choice: the figures had to be separated in order to balance the composition.

Faced with this design necessity, the engraver seems to have tried to bridge the resulting gap in three small but significant ways. First, although the 'F' workshop was distinguished for the 'jaunty' pose of its figures who often lean away from each other, there is no such jaunty distancing in the effigies of Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge.⁶² Second, the gowns of Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge were arranged in such a way as to suggest movement towards each other. Women's gowns on late-15th-century brasses always fall in deep folds; so deep, stable, and balanced that they seem to root the women to the ground rather than propel them in one direction or another. In fact, as Emerson has noted and illustrated, the artisans at the 'F' workshop usually produced gowns that strongly suggested immobility, with heavy, sharply angled draperies whose bottom folds meet at the wearer's centre of gravity.⁶³ In the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass, however, the folds of the gowns do not converge to stabilise their figures, but instead flow uninterruptedly towards the centre of the composition; they show movement — Elizabeth Etchingham moving to her left towards Agnes Oxenbridge, and Agnes Oxenbridge moving to her right towards Elizabeth Etchingham.⁶⁴ And third, in the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass, the two effigies are unmistakably looking at each other, Elizabeth Etchingham raising her chin and Agnes Oxenbridge looking down. In most other brasses from the late 15th century, husbands and wives look generally towards each other but not so fully that their eyes lock. The effect of these last two elements of the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass can be appreciated by contrast with the Little Hadham brass (Fig. 2) that was executed just a few years later at the same workshop and that borrowed so closely the gowns on the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass. With the bottom of her gown more stabilised by both horizontal folds and other folds that push away from the centre, the Little Hadham wife is shown scarcely moving towards her husband, and he is depicted very firmly standing in place. Because the Little Hadham husband also turns only slightly towards his wife, he looks into the distance, as she also seems to do. Compared to this married couple, Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge were shown more mutually engaged — moving towards each other and gazing directly into each other's eyes.

Monumental brasses are not portraits, and even when loaded with heraldry, inscriptions, and insignia specifically requested by the deceased, the dead often speak in them only as translated by the commissions of their survivors and as executed by engravers who never knew them. It is exceedingly unlikely that Agnes Oxenbridge requested a brass that would convey in each of these details an intimacy between herself and Elizabeth Etchingham. The brass is all the more interesting for this fact. When Robert Oxenbridge III and Thomas Etchingham II worked together to commission a joint monument to their sisters (or possibly daughters), they seem to have been unconcerned that most joint monuments commemorated married couples, and when they consulted with engravers on the design of the monument, neither they nor the engravers sought to relieve the intimacy of the joint composition with a design that distanced the two women — indeed, quite the opposite. Instead of altering their customary output, the artisans of the London ‘F’ workshop readily used the standard design for married couples and possibly even sought to enhance the affective power of their composition. Whatever relationship Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge developed in life, their contemporaries were happy to remember it with a memorial that evoked fidelity, intimacy, and affection.

IMPLICATIONS

ANY brass monument that has survived to this day is a lucky one. Of the roughly 150,000 brasses once laid as memorials in English churches, only about 4,000 can still be seen.⁶⁵ Some were destroyed for their seeming idolatry; some were melted for the value of their metal; and some were simply destroyed in rebuilding programs. The monument that remembers Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge has survived these depredations, perhaps because it is small, perhaps because Sussex parishioners have exceptional respect for their brasses, perhaps because the brass itself has raised few eyebrows. But the Etchingham-Oxenbridge brass has sometimes been seen as other than what it is. In the mid-19th century, Sir Stephen Glynne, an indefatigable visitor of Sussex churches, saw it as two separate brasses, and Ian Nairn made the same mistake when he surveyed East Sussex churches for Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in 1965.⁶⁶ In 1871, Edward Turner recognised the brass as a single composition, but seems to have somehow thought that it primarily commemorated the marriage of Elizabeth Etchingham III and Goddard Oxenbridge.⁶⁷ In 1903, T. C. Woodman stated unequivocally that the brass shows ‘two figures of children’.⁶⁸ And for their part, genealogists have coped with the brass by either ignoring Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge altogether or striving to minimise the possibility of a mature relationship between them. Hall placed Elizabeth Etchingham with undue certainty in such an early generation of her family that she had to have died in childhood and might not have known Agnes Oxenbridge at all. Suckling went a step further, suggesting, against all documentary evidence, that the Etchingham co-heiress Elizabeth III actually married Robert Oxenbridge rather than his brother Goddard, because this marriage could have produced a ‘daughter of Robert Oxenbridge’ with some lineage-based claim to be buried in Etchingham church.⁶⁹

It is a strain to see a single brass as two distinct compositions. It is a strain to see these two effigies of women as depicting two children. It is a strain to wedge the meaning of this brass, laid shortly after 1480, into the marriage of the co-heiress Elizabeth Etchingham III and Goddard (wishfully, Robert) Oxenbridge sometime before 1490.⁷⁰ It is much less of a strain to read straightforwardly what the design,

content and iconography of the brass have to say: the monument remembers two females who shared an affectionate relationship. The nature of that relationship is anyone's guess, although the possibilities are not infinite. Perhaps, as I have particularly suggested here, Elizabeth Etchingam and Agnes Oxenbridge shared such an intense — and possibly 'lesbian-like' — relationship in their twenties that Agnes sought joint burial and joint commemoration when she died almost three decades later.⁷¹ But it is also possible that Agnes Oxenbridge began to serve in the Etchingam household as an adolescent, never left it, and was buried alongside a child for whom she had once fondly cared. And perhaps other circumstances drew these two women together, either as contemporaries, with Agnes Oxenbridge surviving Elizabeth Etchingam by twenty-eight years, or as a trans-generational pair, with Agnes Oxenbridge both older and longer-lived than Elizabeth Etchingam.

Alan Bray argued that 'traditional society' accommodated a form of intense masculine friendship that we have since largely forgotten. He also reported, on the



FIG. 5. Civilian and Wife?

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subject of female friendship, that '[b]efore the seventeenth century I could not find it'.⁷² The Etchingam-Oxenbridge brass suggests that we should to look a bit harder and a lot earlier. For evidence of both sorts of friendship, male as well as female, monumental brasses have more to say. These brasses were exhaustively studied for information about armour, dress, and heraldry in the 19th century, and they have more recently been rigorously catalogued as to style and workshop. They have been rubbed by enthusiasts, listed by antiquarians, subjected to close, art-historical analysis, and studied for what they can reveal about aristocratic and mercantile families. Yet brasses have still more to tell us — about women, about same-sex intimacies (whether expressed sexually or not), and about a host of other matters that the field's former reputation as 'the hobby of Victorian young ladies and earnest cycling school-boys in the 1960s' might still discourage.⁷³ In the last half-century, remarkable gains have been made in understanding the techniques of brass production, the organisation of its craft, and the styles of various workshops; building on this scholarship, we can now, as I have done here, approach England's monumental brasses with new interpretative confidence and new historical questions. As a stimulus to more such research, I offer for your consideration one last brass (Fig. 5), a memorial to two men as it has been most recently reproduced in a publication of the Monumental Brass Society.⁷⁴ Clearly, there is more work to be done.

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NOTES

1. N. Saul, *Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280–1400* (Oxford 1986), 140–60 (quote at 151). In Saul's numbering of the many William Etchingams, the church-builder is William V.

2. A. Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago 2003).

3. A. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London 1982; 2nd edn, New York 1995). The interval between these two editions (the first published by Gay Men's Press and the second by Columbia University Press) witnessed the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian studies.

4. In thus characterising the study of monumental brasses, I echo the gentle critiques made by some of its leading practitioners: N. Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England* (Oxford 2001), 3–6, and J. Bertram, 'Introduction', in *Monumental Brasses as Art and History*, ed. J. Bertram (Phoenix Mill 1996), 1–23, at 2.

5. The brass is M.S. III, as catalogued in the standard reference work M. Stephenson, *A List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles* (London 1926); I use Stephenson's system to identify many of the brasses cited below.

6. Elizabeth Etchingam's effigy shows no line for her chemise, but because a rivet is inserted at that point, the absence seems incidental.

7. I am grateful to Nigel Saul for his advice on the workshops that produced the Etchingam and Brede brasses.

8. The main authorities on late-15th-century styles and workshops are: J. P. C. Kent, 'Monumental Brasses — A New Classification of Military Effigies', *JBAA*, 12 (1949), 70–97; and R. Emmerson,

'Monumental Brasses: London Design, c. 1420–1485', *JBAA*, 131 (1978), 50–78 and pls VII–XV (quote at 64).

9. M.S. II. This brass was reproduced in Kent, 'New Classification' (as n. 8), fig. 135.

10. In the left column: *Hic iacet Elizabeth Echyngham filia / primogenita Thome et Margarete / Echyngham que obiit tercio die / decembris anno domini M^oCCCC^oli^o*. In the right column: *Hic iacet Agnes Oxenbrigg filia Roberti / Oxenbrigg que obiit iii^o die augusti / Anno domini M^oCCCC^olxxx^o quorum / animabus propicietur deus amen. Hic iacet* is a conventional phrase that usually, but not always, indicates burial in that place; in any case, this brass, like many medieval brasses, might have been moved from its original location.

11. For examples of double column inscriptions with a separating line or marker, see M. W. Norris, *Monumental Brasses: The Portfolio Plates of the Monumental Brass Society 1894–1984* (Woodbridge 1988), items 76 (1391, a partial division in a joint tomb of a grandfather and grand-daughter); 90 (1399, two brothers); 178 (1456, a single effigy); 187 (c. 1460, a husband and wife).

12. An illustrated survey of the brasses in Etchingham church is available in C. E. D. Davidson-Houston, 'Sussex Monumental Brasses, Part II', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 77 (1936), 131–94, at 167–174. The monuments at Brede are described in eadem, 'Sussex Monumental Brasses, Part I', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 76 (1935), 46–114, at 89–90.

13. The palimpsest was first described in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 10 (1858), 210. See also J. Page-Phillips, *Palimpsests: The Backs of Monumental Brasses*, 2 vols (London 1980), item 33L1. Page-Phillips discusses the relative paucity of palimpsests in 14th- and 15th-century brasses at I, 17.

14. The genealogies provided here focus only on essential details for the immediate generations in which Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge lived. Because forenames repeat in both families across many generations, I have adopted the following conventions. For Etchingham males, I carry on the numbering scheme begun by Saul, *Scenes* (as n. 1), 2; for Oxenbridge males, I use the numbering scheme found in Mavis Mate, *Daughters, Wives and Widows after the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350–1535* (Woodbridge 1998), xii; for the three Elizabeth Etchinghams, I distinguish the Elizabeth Etchingham remembered on the brass from her possible namesake siblings, Elizabeth II and III.

15. N. Saul, 'The Sussex Gentry and the Oath to Uphold the Acts of the Merciless Parliament', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 135 (1997), 221–39, at 227–28; Saul, *Scenes* (as n. 1), 62–63.

16. Like all conventions, there were exceptions: a few never-married women are depicted on brasses with their hair bound up (as in the case of Agnes Oxenbridge) or partially covered, and a few wives are shown with flowing hair. For examples of maidens with their hair constrained or covered, see: Katherine Stockett (c. 1420), Lingfield, Surrey, M.S. V; Susan Arderne (c. 1450), Leigh, Surrey, M.S. II; Katherine Lambe (1514), Leeds, Kent, M.S. II. For an example of a wife with flowing hair, see Joan, wife of Nicholas Kniveton (c. 1475), Mugginton, Derbyshire, M.S. I.

17. East Sussex Record Office, ACC 7007: Pedigree or Descent of the Ancient Family of the Oxenbriggs, 1600.

18. For the genealogy of the Etchinghams, see S. Hall, *Echyngham of Echyngham* (London 1801); F. H. Suckling, 'Some Notes on Barsham iuxta Beccles, Co. Suffolk', *The Genealogist*, 21 (1905), 124–42, 243–50; Mate, *Daughters* (as n. 14); and C. C. Smith, 'The Descendants of William Echyngham' available at <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/s/m/i/Charlotte-C-Smith/index.html> (accessed 30 October 2007).

19. The custom owes a great deal to the practice of naming a child after a godparent. Some parents seem to have selected godparents with an eye to bestowing unique names on each of their children, but other parents were content for two children to share the same name. For a brief summary of the literature on this subject, see N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven 2001), 36–38.

20. Suckling, 'Barsham' (as n. 18), 245, deduced from inheritance records that Thomas II was born c. 1425. If Elizabeth were his sibling, that rough date would work for her as well. If on the other hand she were his daughter, she would likely have been born after c. 1445.

21. S. Oosterwijk, "'A Swithe Feire Graue': The Appearance of Children on Medieval Tomb Monuments", in *Family and Dynasty in Late Medieval England*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, IX, ed. R. Eales and S. Tyas (Donington 2003), 172–92. Most diminutive effigies of children depict 'weepers' — that is, subsidiary figures on a monument dedicated to the memory of another person. Oosterwijk suggests that most miniature effigies of dead adults were associated with burials of body parts (usually hearts and entrails), but some of her evidence on this point is more suggestive than definitive.

22. It is unfortunate that Thomas I's 1444 will (printed by Suckling, 'Barsham' (as n. 18), 247) names only one of his then-living children, his heir Thomas Etchingham II.

23. Oosterwijk, 'Appearance of Children' (as n. 21), has recently raised awareness of memorials to children, but these still constitute only a handful of the monumental brasses that survive for late-medieval England.

24. W. D. Cooper, 'Notices of Winchelsea in and after the Fifteenth Century', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 8 (1856), 201–34 includes an extended discussion of the Oxenbridge generations, 213–32. See also Mate, *Daughters* (as n. 14).
25. This was first suggested by W. Slater, 'Etchingam Church', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 9 (1857), 343–60, at 353.
26. I have drawn here especially on the work of B. J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450–1550* (New York 2002), esp. 49–52, 88–98. See also Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London 1992), and Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England 1000–1500* (Phoenix Mill 1998). These authors use 'noble' and 'aristocratic' to refer to the landholding elites generally — from knights to magnates — and I have adopted that convention here.
27. Harris, *Aristocratic Women* (as n. 26), 88.
28. See especially K. M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270–1540* (Manchester 2003), 109–20.
29. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Part 1, ed. N. Davis (Oxford 1971), no. 201. Here and elsewhere, I have silently modernised spelling.
30. Writing to his mother in March 1477 on behalf of a proposed marriage for his brother John III, John Paston II neatly summarised these considerations: the proposed bride was young, well-born, and well-mannered; she and John III loved each other; and her parents had provided amply for her marriage. *Paston Letters* (as n. 29), no. 304.
31. Harris, *Aristocratic Women* (as n. 26), 89.
32. J. M. Bennett and C. Whittick, 'Philippa Russell and the Wills of London's Late Medieval Singlewomen', *The London Journal*, 32 (2007), 251–69. Russell identified herself as a 'singlewoman'. For more on singlewomen, see J. M. Bennett and A. M. Froide ed., *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800* (Philadelphia 1999); A. M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford 2005); C. Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford 2007).
33. Saul, *Scenes* (as n. 1).
34. On delayed commemorations, see M. Norris, *Monumental Brasses: The Craft* (London 1978), 65–66.
35. For 1490, see the case cited in J. Biancalana, *The Fee Tail and Common Recovery in Medieval England, 1176–1502* (Cambridge 2001), 407.
36. M.S. II, conventionally dated as c. 1500. I am grateful to Nigel Saul and Sally Badham for their assistance in re-dating this brass probably to the 1450s, and in any case no later than 1465.
37. Few wills survive for medieval Sussex, except those proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.
38. Bennett and Whittick, 'Philippa Russell' (as n. 32), 258. For Joan Isham's will, see London, Guildhall Library, MS 9171/6, fol. 46v.
39. Norris, *The Craft* (as n. 34), 60.
40. N. Saul, 'The Contract for the Brass of Richard Willoughby (d. 1471) at Wollaton (Notts.)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 50 (2006), 166–93.
41. J. R. Greenwood, 'Wills and Brasses: Some Conclusions from a Norfolk Study', in *Monumental Brasses*, ed. Bertram (as in n. 4), 82–102. Greenwood does not offer a figure for the total number of wills he surveyed, but he included those filed in the Norwich Consistory Court from c. 1495 to c. 1555, as well as a 'smattering' of wills found in other jurisdictions. A total of 166 wills over sixty years for one county might not seem very many (fewer than three per year), but the general population was much larger than the will-making population which was itself much larger than the brass-commissioning one. As J. Middleton-Stewart has put it, 'If the will-making population was the upper one-third of society, the class represented by figural brass would be barely 10 per cent of that one-third': *Inward Purity and Outward Splendour: Death and Remembrance in the Deanery of Dunwich, Suffolk, 1370–1547* (Woodbridge 2001), 273. See also R. H. D'Elboux, 'Testamentary Brasses', *Antiq. J.*, 29 (1949), 183–91, and Norris, *The Craft* (as n. 34), 90–91.
42. Norris, *The Craft* (as n. 34), 90 and fig. 72. Since most wills and brasses have not survived to this day, it is now rare to find an extant brass that is described in an extant will. For another example, see the case of Sir John de St Quintin who in 1397 left 20 marks for the construction of a brass commemorating himself and his two wives; the resulting monument shows only one wife. H. Haines, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses*, single vol. reissue of 2 vols published in 1861 (Bath 1970), lviii. I have particularly relied here on Norris's discussion of the possibilities and constraints of brass design, for which see *The Craft* (as n. 34), 88–108.
43. Medieval engravers were known as 'marblers', in part because engraving initially began with brass letters embedded in marble pavements and in part because brasses were set into marble slabs. I use the less confusing 'engravers' here.

44. On the use of stock figures, see Norris, *The Craft* (as n. 34), 88–89. For a critique of one piece of Norris's evidence, see R. Emmerson, 'John Lorymer's Stock: "marbylle stonys and laten wurke therto belonging"', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 13 (1983), 304–05. Saul, *Death* (as n. 4), 228 also notes that 'Each of the main workshops carried its stock effigial types'.

45. *Paston Letters* (as n. 29), no. 37.

46. Norris, *The Craft* (as n. 34), 88 and pls 9 and 10. Norris did not fully identify the manuscript, noting only its date (c. 1320) and depository (British Museum, now Library); neither I nor the curators at the British Library have not been able to identify his source.

47. S. Badham, 'Status and Salvation: The Design of Medieval English Brasses and Incised Slabs', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 15 (1996), 413–65. Badham does not include marital status in her discussion, but wives, widows, and maidens were usually differentiated by headdress, hair, and inscription.

48. For these two interpretations of diminutive effigies, see Oosterwijk, 'Appearance of Children' (as n. 21).

49. K. M. Phillips, 'Maidenhood as the Perfect Age of Woman's Life', in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. K. J. Lewis, N. J. Menuge and K. M. Phillips (New York 1999), 1–24.

50. On the development of the 'old maid' stereotype in the 18th century, see S. S. Lanser, 'Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid', in *Singlewomen*, ed. Bennett and Froide (as n. 32), 297–324, and Froide, *Never Married* (as n. 32), 154–81. For an example of the ridicule to which older maidens could be subject long before the 18th century, see *Songs and Ballads*, ed. T. Wright (London 1855), item XXIX: a singlewoman's lament with the refrain 'For I have been a maiden so long, that my time is passed before I shall begin'.

51. For another example of an attempt to represent the special status of an *older* virgin, see the memorial to Katherine Stockett (c. 1420) in Lingfield, Surrey, M.S. V, as illustrated and discussed in Saul, *Death* (as n. 4), 181–83. The matter of relative size merits more attention. Oosterwijk, 'Appearance of Children' (as n. 21), has rightly called our attention to its usefulness in depicting children. But size also sometimes denoted relative status among adults. See, for example, the larger and more distinguished central brother in the monument to three brothers in Letheringham, Suffolk (c. 1490–98), discussed in J. M. Blatchly and J. R. Greenwood, 'A Norwich-Style Brass to Three Wingfield Brothers once at Letheringham, Suffolk', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 12 (1978), 300–11. See also Thomas Chibnale and his two wives at Astwood, Buckinghamshire (1534), discussed in J. Coales, 'Two Discoveries at Astwood, Bucks.', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 12 (1976), 185–89.

52. Sibling brasses include: a brother and sister from Sherborne St John, Hampshire (M.S. I, c. 1390); two brothers, both clerics, from Dronfield, Derbyshire (M.S. I, 1399), this can be seen in Norris, *Portfolio Plates* (as n. 11), pl. 90; three brothers from Letheringham, Suffolk (1490–98), Blatchly and Greenwood, 'Norwich-Style Brass' (as n. 51); two sisters from Barnes, Surrey (M.S. I, 1508); two married sisters from Beddington, Surrey (M.S. VI, 1507). For two clerics, see Norris, *Portfolio Plates* (as n. 11), pl. 204 (c. 1465). As to the palimpsest reverse from Narborough, Norfolk (M.S. VII, c. 1390/1420), two women are shown in the reconstruction given in Norris, *Portfolio Plates* (as n. 11), pl. 100, but see also Page-Phillips, *Palimpsests* (as n. 13), pl. pp. 117–18 (fragments 277L1–277L10); these fragments could be part of a monument that once showed a husband and his two wives. The early-15th-century brass in Long Melford (M.S. I) shows two females but lacks an inscription; they are commonly taken to be unmarried sisters of the Clopton family.

53. Coss, *The Lady* (as n. 26), 84.

54. Haines, *Manual* (as n. 42), clxxi. See also F. H. Crossley, *English Church Monuments A.D. 1150–1550* (London 1921), 249.

55. Standon, Hertfordshire, M.S. III, 1477. An engraving of this brass can be seen in J.G. and L. A. B. Waller, *A Series of Monumental Brasses from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (London 1842), item 47. See also the brass of the three Wingfield brothers in Letheringham, Suffolk in which the most distinguished is in the centre, somewhat larger, and observed by the other two brothers who turn towards him. Blatchly and Greenwood, 'Norwich-Style Brass' (as n. 51).

56. On this point, see also Coss, *The Lady* (as n. 26), 84–104.

57. Oosterwijk, 'Appearance of Children' (as n. 21); Saul, *Death* (as n. 4), 114–16; Badham, 'Status' (as n. 47), 426–29.

58. Coss, *The Lady* (as n. 26), 73–114; see also Saul, *Death* (as n. 4), 195–98.

59. P. Binski, 'The Stylistic Sequence of London Figure Brasses', in *The Earliest English Brasses: Patronage, Style and Workshops, 1279–1350*, ed. J. Coales (London 1987), 69–131, at 102.

60. For examples, see Norris, *Portfolio Plates* (as n. 11), pls 107 (1408), 157 (1437), 168 (c. 1445).

61. To see the different compositions achieved by placing two semi-effigies, as opposed to two full effigies, atop a small inscription plate, compare in Norris, *Portfolio Plates* (as n. 11), pls 126 (1418) for two semi-effigies and pls 203 (1474), 204 (c. 1475), 245 (1493), and 246 (1496) for full effigies.

62. Emerson, 'Monumental Brasses' (as n. 8), 64.
63. *Ibid.*, 60–65.
64. Some other Style 'F' monuments also have folds that suggest movement; see the memorial to John and Elizabeth Payne, Hutton, Somerset (M.S. I, 1496), described (223–26) and reproduced (pl. LXXXII) in A. B. Connor, *Monumental Brasses in Somerset* (Bath 1970).
65. For these figures, see Crossley, *Church Monuments* (as n. 54), 247.
66. V. J. Torr ed., 'Sir Stephen Glynn's Notes on Churches', *Sussex Notes and Queries*, 16 (1963–67), 200. Glynn acknowledged that the 'legend' was on a single plate. I. Nairn and N. Pevsner, *B/E Sussex*, 497.
67. E. Turner, 'Brasses in Sussex Churches', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 23 (1871), 128–91, at 155.
68. T. C. Woodman, *The Sussex Brasses* (Hove 1903), 20–21.
69. Suckling, 'Barsham' (as n. 18), 246, n. 4.
70. As late as 1997, a conservation report reproduced the two effigies as two separate figures, rather than a composite whole. See B. Egan, 'Conservation of Brasses 1994–1995', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 16 (1997), 73–75, at 74.
71. For the analytical usefulness of the term 'lesbian-like', see my "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 (2000), 1–24.
72. Bray, *The Friend* (as n. 2), 11.
73. Bertram, 'Introduction' (as n. 4), 2.
74. Norris, *Portfolio Plates* (as n. 11), item 57. In earlier reproductions of this brass, including the reproduction on which Norris drew for his compilation, it was always labelled as 'two civilians'. The Freudian slip of this re-labelling in 1988 suggests to me that someone somehow assumed that any joint effigy *must* remember a married couple, and in an ironic twist, this new label accords well with the self-understanding of 21st-century advocates of gay marriage, some of whom refer to their partners as 'wives' or 'husbands'. For more on brasses and other medieval monuments that commemorate male couples, see Bray, *The Friend* (as n. 2), esp. 13–19, 78–86. In addition to looking for same-sex tombs, we might also examine requests for joint burial. Joan Isham's request to be buried near Margery Nicoll is one example; see also Barbara Harris's observation that both the duchess of Norfolk (1506) and Jane Talbot (1505) asked to be buried near Anne Montgomery (Harris, *Aristocratic Women* (as n. 26), 204).