

LATIN ON BRASSES

The black letter inscriptions on memorial brasses are often difficult to decipher and when in addition they are in Latin, recorders may begin to feel frustrated. However these inscriptions tend to follow set patterns, when you have some idea what the words might be, they become much easier to work out.

First a few conventions. Latin had no **j** and no **v** so **i** and **u** are used both as vowels and consonants. Brass or latten and lettering were expensive, so space-saving abbreviations were used, but unfortunately for us, the abbreviations were not standardized and variants will be found. English names were Latinized and should be given in English at the top of the item and in the translation. The one thing that most people remember from school Latin is that endings change to show subject, object, of, to, etc. so that the spelling of a word may not be exactly the same as that found in the dictionary. Latin had two words for *and*, *et* and *– que* which was attached to the second of the words joined and is often abbreviated to a fancy **q**. The marks placed above letters (tittles) usually **~** or **˘** represent omission marks and must be written in. In the explanation below the letters frequently omitted are bracketed.

- 1 The three commonest openings are *hic iacet here lies*, *hic sepultus est here is buried* and *ora/te p(ro) aīā* (i.e. *anima*), *pray for the soul of*; the latter will change the ending of the name to *-ī*, *-æ* or *-is* to represent *of*.
- 2 Then will follow the name followed by his rank (see the list below) and sometimes a place prefaced by *de, of*. Occasionally *filius*, *son of*, follows and frequently *et uxor* (or *con(iun)x*) *eius* or *sue*, *and his wife*, with her name and possibly *filia/hæres*, *daughter/heir* of, etc.
- 3 *Who died* is *qui ob(iit)* or *quæ* for a woman and the day of the month *ivº* (*quarto*, the small *o* is the equivalent of *-th*), month and year of our Lord – *an(n)o dñi*. Sometimes a Saint's day is given instead of a month and date.
- 4 Almost always the inscription ends with the formula on whose soul(s) God / the Lord have mercy *Amen*, *cui(us)* (pl. *quor(um)*) *aīā* (pl. *animabus*) *p(ro)pitiatur dñs / dñm amē(n)*. Surprisingly it seems not to have mattered abbreviating *deus* or *dominus*, *God* or *Lord*. Once or lately *rector of this church*, *quondam* or *nup(er)* *rector huius ecclesiæ* is common on brasses of priests.

If this pattern does not work, consider whether the inscription is in Norman French, which is usually guessable as a phonetic version of modern French, e.g. *ris* for *six*. The longer inscriptions of later monuments and ledger slabs vary enormously, some basic and others being in extremely elegant Latin using all the literary tropes.

NB When typing up the finished Record DO NOT attempt to reproduce lettering styles using computer fonts. Non standard fonts corrupt when the document is converted to a PDF file.

armiger – esquire	cancellarius – chancellor	comes – count
consul – counsellor	decanus – dean	dux – duke
elemosynarius – almoner	generosus – gentleman	miles – knight
corpus pl. corpora – body/ies	miserere – have mercy on	mensis – month
comitatus – county	qui quidem – which same	dies – day

*Orate p' aīabu' Rogeri Legh et Elizabethæ ux'is sue qui quidem Rogerus obit
viiº die Novembris An' dñi mº dº viº Elizabeth vero obit vº die Octobris A'dm
mccccxxxixº quor' aīabs ppitiatur deº.*

Translation:

Pray for the souls of Roger Leigh and Elizabeth his wife, which same Roger died on the 7th day of November in the year of our Lord 1506, but Elizabeth died on the 5th day of October in the year of our Lord 1489, on whose souls God have mercy.