

Sally Badham and Paul Cockerham (eds), *'The beste and fayrest of all Lincolnshire.'* *The Church of St Botolph, Boston, Lincolnshire, and its Medieval Monuments*, BAR British Series 554 (Oxford: Archaeopress 2012), xii and 266 pp., numerous diagrams, plans, b/w and colour illustrations throughout, ISBN 978-1407-398339, £44.00 (pb).

Visualising the former splendour of worn memorial slabs that have mostly lost their original inlays might seem an impossible task. Yet in this volume such slabs in the church of St Botolph in Boston have been admirably used to help reconstruct a medieval community and its *memoria* culture. In the earlier Middle Ages Boston was a thriving mercantile town that benefited from its Hanseatic trade connections and although its economic importance dwindled in the fifteenth century its mercantile elite continued to commission memorials to themselves to be laid in the various churches of the town, but especially in the floors of St Botolph's.

Besides an introduction and conclusion by the two editors, the present volume comprises essays on the town's economic and social history (Stephen Rigby); the architectural history of the church (Linda Monckton); the religious guilds, their members and activities (Sally Badham); and their monuments, both those still extant and those known to have been lost (Badham, Paul Cockerham, Derrick Chivers and Mark Downing). A case study by Jessica Freeman of the surviving brasses of Walter Pescod (d. 1398) in Boston and Simon Seman (d. 1433) in Barton-upon-Humber helps us relate these two merchants' effigial images and epitaphs to their careers and activities, although we lack other biographical information and also their wills. These ten chapters are followed by an Appendix with detailed catalogues of each brass, indent, effigial slab, cross slab and relief effigy (pp. 172-225); the 1978-83 survey of the floor monuments in the church by Brian and Moira Gittos (pp. 226-35); and a list of Bostonian wills referenced by Badham in her two essays. There is also an extensive bibliography and a helpful index.

The Boston merchants' trade connections with Flanders probably inspired the import of Flemish incised slabs of Tournai marble of which there appears to have been an unprecedented number once in the town's churches. Another factor was probably that these products were cheaper to commission over there and transport to Boston by sea, especially as some merchants were ship owners themselves. Among the most impressive to survive at St Botolph's church is a large slab that commemorates a foreign Hanseatic merchant, Wessel de Smalenburg (d. 1340), although it does not belong to this church: it was originally laid down in the Grey Friars' church. The fashion for incised slabs with inlays for especially faces and hands – now mostly lost, so that the surviving slabs only show ghostly outlines – was superseded in the late fourteenth century by a trend for brasses, but in both cases the preference was for less obtrusive floor monuments over

sculpted effigial tombs, perhaps because the nave was so much compartmentalised by screens to accommodate the many guild chapels. The religious guilds played a key role in the spiritual life of its members but also in the communal life of the town, and the rows of large polished slabs with gleaming inlays in the main walkways of the church would have helped parishioners remember the dead. The slabs themselves featured inscriptions with details of the deceased, but also effigial representations and merchant's marks to denote their identities. Also important is the emergence of joint brasses to husbands and wives who evidently wished to be seen and commemorated as couples.

This lavishly illustrated and well researched volume is a welcome addition to *memoria* studies. It manages to reconstruct not just the original appearance of the monuments that were once such a prominent feature in the church, but also the people that commissioned them, the community to which they belonged, and the way these memorials were meant to function before the Reformation, as well as how they fared thereafter. Boston's remote situation probably helped safeguard the town's monuments against the worst iconoclastic excesses at the Reformation while the community itself also seems to have been unusually keen to preserve its civic heritage. Yet much has been lost since, even in very recent times, thanks to ignorance and a failure to understand the importance of what still remained, for as late as the 1980s some slabs were resigned to the skip in the course of building work at St Botolph's. One can only hope that this clear, accessible and methodological study of the monuments in Boston helps raise an awareness of how even the most worn memorial slabs can provide evidence of the medieval *memoria* culture and highlight the need to preserve what remains of such evidence in Britain and beyond.

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