

ART. I.—*The Common Seal of the Borough of Appleby.*

By W. H. ST. JOHN HOPE, M.A.

Read at Appleby, July 4th, 1893.

SO little is known about medieval seals, chiefly in consequence of the difficulty of access to any collection or series of examples available for systematic study, that it is often a matter of surprise, even to antiquaries, to find in some out-of-the-way place an exceptionally fine example of the skill and ingenuity of our forefathers in the art of designing and engraving seals.

To a Londoner the town of Appleby may be regarded as a somewhat out-of-the-way-place, but to the members of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society it is an important centre of many noteworthy antiquarian remains.

It may however be news even to the members of the Society that among the civic insignia of the borough of Appleby there is an exceptionally fine and interesting common seal, entitled to a high place among the noteworthy municipal seals of this country.

Following the almost universal custom of municipal seals, the Appleby seal is circular in form. It is also, as is not unusual in early examples, formed of two matrices, a seal and a counterseal, both of the same size. The principal use of a counterseal was to make more difficult the fraudulent removal of a seal to another document; a process not so easy, if not almost impossible, to effect when the cords or parchment tags by which the seal was appended passed between a double impression. Whereas it was not very hard in a singly impressed seal to tamper with the wax at the back and liberate the cords or tags.

The Appleby matrices are of latten and measure $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter.

Each



SEAL AND COUNTERSEAL OF THE BOROUGH OF APPLEBY.
(FULL SIZE.)

Each has been furnished with four loops round the circumference to ensure the two halves of the seal fitting accurately one over the other, but two of those on the upper matrix have been broken off.

The seal or obverse bears for device a heater-shaped shield of the royal arms of England, *gules three "leopards" (or lions passant gardant) in pale or*, suspended from a seven-branched *apple* tree.

The marginal legend is

✠ SIGILLVM : COMMVNITATIS : BVRGII
DE : APPILLBI

and terminates with an apple, in allusion to the name of town.

The counterseal or reverse has a representation of the martyrdom of St. Lawrence, the patron saint of Appleyby, who is shewn stripped to the waist and bound on a long gridiron with fire under. Two tormentors in loose tunics, one wearing a conical hat, stand at either end, and are armed with short forks. Above the saint's feet is an angel issuing from the clouds and apparently holding a censer, receiving the soul in a napkin. In the background is also a large banner with the lions of England, beside which hangs an apple. Under the banner are three stars in a row. The legend is :

✠ HIC JACET LAVRENCIVS IN CRATICVLA POSITVS.

i.e. Here lies Laurence placed upon the gridiron.

It will be noticed that the engraver has taken care to fill up all the unavoidable blank spaces on both halves of the seal, and for this reason the apple and stars are introduced upon the obverse.

It is popularly supposed that both the shield and the banner bear the town's arms, *gules, three lions passant gardant*

gardant crowned or, but on the seal the lions are *not* crowned and are unquestionably those of the royal arms as borne from about 1197 to 1340.

This very fine and interesting seal is of the early part of the 13th century, and is probably contemporary with the charter of John or Henry III.

It is to be hoped now that the seal is no longer used that it will nevertheless continue to be carefully preserved.
