



## Hurley Priory Seals.

By Rev. F. T. Wethered.

FROM the days of Virgil (*Æneid* vii—657) hereditary devices on a shield have not been unknown. There are no recorded "Arms" of Hurley Priory. Coats of Arms were not used by the English until 1100, when they were employed by the Crusaders on their banners to distinguish one another in battle. No one can tell whether the so-called Arms of William the Conqueror were not attributed to him after having been invented in later times. They are two lions, instead of the three lions which now appear in the Royal Arms of England. Arms are attributed to Edward the Confessor, whose sister lies buried at Hurley. These, however, were certainly devised long after the Confessor's death. They are *azure, a cross patonce between five martlets or*. However, it is beyond doubt that Seals are first amongst Heraldic authorities in England. Seals have ever been regarded as of the greatest legal importance. In the East no document is considered as in any way authentic unless it is duly sealed. Amongst the most forcible and constantly used metaphors in the Bible is the metaphor of the "Seal." "Him hath God the Father sealed,"—such is the expressive description of Himself which our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ gives, in order to indicate in the most emphatic manner that language can express that He is the Father's very Own. In the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine, the hundred and forty and four thousand who represent the redeemed are spoken of as the "Sealed." In ancient times the Seal placed upon a document consisted merely of a lump of clay fastened on by strings. Whilst examining our Original Foundation Charter together with other Hurley Charters in London last December, I noticed in the case of one of them, dating from the time of Henry II., that the fragment of Seal, which remained, was made on four lengths of strong whipcord, knotted above and below the wax and lashed into the foot of the parchment crosswise. Job writes (of

earth)—“It is turned as clay to the Seal.” The signet ring was an ordinary part of a man’s equipment, as in the case of Judah, and was very likely suspended round his neck by a string. Mr. Haydn, in his Dictionary of Dates, tells us with regard to the sealing and signing of documents in this country, as follows: “Seals were not much in use with the Saxons; but they signed parchments with the cross, impressions of lead being affixed. Sealing of deeds and writs was practised in England, A.D. 1048. “Until William I.’s time, the name was written, adding the sign of the cross. Arms were then introduced in Seals. The most ancient English Seal with arms on it is that of Richard I. “Arnulphus, Earl of Flanders, used one about 940.” When the Foundation Charter of Hurley Priory was executed, it was neither signed nor dated; but Geoffrey de Mandeville, Lord of Hurley Manor, simply *sealed* it with a Seal composed of wax and earth, which is now of a dark chestnut brown in colour and is attached to the parchment. The impression upon it is that of a knight mounted, the head surmounted by a coif of steel, a banner in the right hand and a shield on the left arm. It is still in excellent preservation amongst the Hurley Deeds and Charters at Westminster, which number in all more than five hundred and fifty. The Seal is covered with a silken bag of a beautiful pattern of *terra cotta* ground-work, with peacock blue and gold upon it. The parchment on which the Charter is written is in wonderfully good repair. It is of a yellowish brown colour from age. The Seal is entire except at the edges which are a little chipped. The inscription, when I saw it last month, had still a considerable portion of G. de Mandeville’s name on it. The silk bag is sewn on to the Seal and cannot be detached from it. In the Charter, which actually dates from not later than 1086 or 1087, our founder states: “Three brief instruments recording this my gift and Foundation have been made; one I have deposited at Westminster, another at the Church at Hurley, a third for myself and my heirs who will succeed me; [and this I have done] in order to secure the everlasting integrity and permanence of the place.” All three of these instruments (*‘tria acta sunt brevia’*) were written by the scribe on one long stretch of vellum and were then separated from each other by cutting through the word CYROGRAPHUM, which (occurring twice) divided the three copies. The vellum of this our Foundation Charter, measures 13 inches across and 9½ inches in depth.

Both Charter and Seal have borne their 810 years, or so, of

existence marvellously well. They are, at the moment of writing, on loan on my behalf at the British Museum, whither they were recently conveyed by the courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, together with the rest of the Westminster Series of Hurley deeds and Charters.

The Seals, however, which are so beautifully illustrated on the accompanying plate-sheets (Nos. I. and II.) are reproductions of nine out of twelve casts which were acquired by the British Museum in 1894 and 1895 from the originals at Westminster Abbey. Mr. A. P. Ready, the well known sigillarist attached to the British Museum, has been eminently successful in his reproductions from the original waxes. By a process of casting in sulphur peculiarly his own, which settles down into an extremely hard substance when dried, he has brought out the lines of twelve distinct impressions in a masterly manner. They are exquisite specimens of workmanship. The colour of the casts of all the Seals is a dark olive green. They are casts reproduced from casts taken from the original waxes.

I cannot, here, allow an opportunity to pass for recording my thanks to Miss Edith F. Lyon, who has greatly and most kindly aided me in the reproduction of these Priory Seals. The *chiaroscuro* of her beautiful drawings has contributed that tinge of the artistic in water-colours to which a subject of this sort lends itself so well. Miss Lyon's revivals will be valued by me, as works of art, almost as much as the kindness which she has shown in their execution.

No Seals at all are mentioned in connection with Hurley Convent in all four Volumes of Mr. W. E. de Grey Birch's celebrated book on seals. Madox in his *Formulare Anglicanum* (1702), refers to some at any rate of our Hurley Seals and describes them, but he gives no illustrations of them. I shall take the twelve, in chronological order, and give some description of each in turn. The numbers as quoted in this paper are those under which the Seals are registered at the British Museum, and the sketches on the Plates are numbered in accordance with the same order of arrangement. It will be noticed that the Nos. of the British Museum Register are not chronological. The reason why only nine out of the twelve are reproduced on the Plates is because the subjects of three of them are in duplicate.

No. civ.—36. This Seal, which is a good deal worn, was a Common Seal of the Convent at Hurley. It does not appear on

the Plates. It represents the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is composed of the two figures, S. Gabriel and the B.V.M. The shape is oval, length  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and extreme breadth 2 inches. The figures themselves are an inch and a half in height, and are both in a standing position. The left wing of the Archangel is elevated. The Divine Message is received by the Maid of Nazareth with her right hand slightly raised in well expressed surprise, whilst the Heavenly Messenger has his right hand advanced, in index attitude. The Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove, hovers overhead slightly in front of the Blessed Virgin's forehead. When Madox examined this Seal in 1702, there was the following inscription, plain, upon it, SIGILLVM ECCLIE SCE DEI GENETRICIS DE HERLEIE. — "The Seal of the Church of the Holy Mother of God of Hurley." There is only one inscription in the whole set of these Seals which is half so beautiful as this; but nearly all traces of the inscription have disappeared from the wax, in the course of the last hundred and ninety-five years, unfortunately, although there are in two places—one at the top of the proper-right side of the Seal, and the other at the bottom of the proper-right side of it—distinct traces of lettering. The history of it, which is as follows, proves unquestionably that its date is anterior to November 30th, 1200.—It was the Seal of Prior Ralph Papyllion, more commonly known as Ralph de Arundel. He was a monk at Westminster Abbey and became Almoner of that Convent. He was a high favourite of Abbot Laurence, who, Leland says, made him Prior of Hurley. This power of the Abbot of Westminster is accounted for by the fact that the Hurley Convent when founded by Geoffrey de M. was granted and given by him "to God and to S. Peter and to the Church of Westminster, as also to S. Mary of Hurley." Hurley was, in short, one of four Cells belonging to Westminster Abbey, the other three being Great Malvern, St. Bartholomew's at Sudbury, and the nunnery of Kilborne. It is not known exactly as to when Abbot Laurence died, but inasmuch as it is known that Walter, Prior of Winchester, became Abbot of Westminster in 1175 and that he was succeeded, at his death in 1191, by William Postard (Prior of the Abbey), who in turn died on May 4th, 1200, it is certain that Ralph was our Prior here for not less than twenty-five years, until at length he himself was elected Abbot of his own old Abbey at Westminster on November 30th, 1200. Having had, in Postard, one over them who had not only been a Monk at the Abbey, but Prior of it before he became Abbot (in

1191), the Westminster Monks went to King John at Northampton and begged him to ratify their choice of our Prior at Hurley; and so Ralph de Arundel left this Parish and became Abbot of Westminster. When he had been there thirteen years, he was, however, deprived of his Abbacy after investigation of circumstances into which we need not enter, and he retired into private life on the Manors of Sunbury and Toddington, which were allotted to him for his support. He died in 1223, and was buried somewhere in the nave of the Abbey at Westminster, and is the first Abbot we read of so buried. Such is a brief sketch of this man's history, which I have related here to add interest to the following little episode in his time at Hurley identified in the closest possible manner with Seal No. civ.—36.—In the Westminster Series of Hurley Charters, there is one to which I shall refer later on as the "Tapers" Charter—in which "Ralph de Arundel Prior of the Church of Hurley sends greeting to all sons alike present as future of Holy Mother Church,"—and then proceeds to acquaint them that "by the common assent and good will of the Convent of Hurley, &c.," he had granted and by his present Charter had confirmed a pension from the Church at Easthampstead, that is to say four shillings (*solidos*) to our Secretary, and expressly for this purpose, that alike present as future, Sacristans might have sufficient means wherewith honourably and fully to supply wax tapers (*cereos*) at the Mass of St. Mary of Hurley which he had appointed to be sung:—and he concludes his grant by invoking all Priors, his successors, "by the tremendous judgment of God and by His Almighty power in Heaven and in earth, that they do not infringe nor allow any one to infringe upon this my gift," giving as his reason for so urging them,—“in order that God may increase and establish their days and their life in everlasting happiness and that they may have a share with Christ in the Heavenly Rest.” Seals civ.—36, civ.—37, civ.—38, which are all of a yellowish brown colour, have always been and still are appended to the original parchment of this Hurley Charter.

No. civ.—39 is another and a more perfect specimen of civ.—36. The reason why this specimen is chosen for illustration (on Plate I.) is because the wax has melted much less upon its surface than on the other impression. Both specimens are on deeds of Ralph de Arundel, the deed to which Seal civ.—39 is affixed being a grant of land at Little Waltham, a portion of Waltham St. Laurence Parish to the south of Knowl Hill (Hurley), &c., by

Ralph, Prior, and the Convent of Hurley to "Osbert, son of Robert." It will be noticed that a portion of the word SIGILLUM is clear enough upon it, and on close scrutiny of the cast of this Seal I can plainly decipher the EC and the bottom half of the second C in ECCLE, but all the rest of the lettering has melted except an unreadable letter or two at the end of the inscription. The Seal, which is of dark green wax, is otherwise in excellent preservation. Date, before Nov. 30, 1200.

No. civ.—40. This is a counterseal of No. civ.—39. It is evidently a very beautiful adaptation from an ancient Eastern gem—possibly a ring. A deity seated,—opposite to whom is a votary;—the right hands of both are extended upwards and are together holding a rather large cup. The Prior adopted this heathenish votive offering, consecrated the cup into the Christian Chalice and made it to symbolize the Communion of the Faithful.—"Do this (i.e. 'Offer this') in Remembrance of Me." The intention is quite clear from the (greater) part of the original inscription which remains still perfect on the wax. The Septuagint Translation of David's Psalm cxv. 13 from the Original Hebrew is rendered in the Vulgate (Ps. cxv., Sarum Use), "*Calicem salutaris accipiam*" (See Ps. cxvi. 12, in Book of Common Prayer), and this formed the legend round our Seal. CALICEM SALVTAR remains still clearly upon it. Our Prior must surely have had in his mind, at the time when he converted this heathen device into an Hallowed Christian symbol, those caustic words of St. Paul to the frail Corinthians, "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." (1 Cor. x., 20). Date—before Nov. 30, 1200.

No. civ.—37. This charming little Seal is quite the most interesting of the series. The veil on the head of the bust of the Blessed Virgin is peculiarly beautiful and the shoulders, &c., are most exactly stamped on the lower part of it. VE MARIA GRA PLEN is all that remains of the inner circle of the inscription, but at the time Madox saw it the beautiful legend was then complete—AVE MARIA GRA PLENA. In the outer circle of the inscription the letters ARVN as well as an A a little before it is plain. When Madox examined it in 1702, there was SIGILL RAD DE ARVNDEL PRIORIS HERL on it. It is on the "Tapers" Charter already described. Date—before Nov. 30, 1200.



No. civ.—38. This is a counterseal of No. civ.—37, and is on the "Tapers" Charter. It is greatly worn and the wax is very lumpy. The Lion which forms its subject is quite visible in the cast, the tail curled over his back. Madox found the whole inscription in its entirety on the wax in 1702—ECCE VICIT LEO DE TRIBV JUDA (Rev. v. 5), but the lettering is now very difficult to catch. With a strong glass I have detected the whole of ECCE and the whole of VICIT, of these words there is no doubt, on the Seal still. There are several other indications of letters round the Lion, but none are distinct besides those which I have mentioned. Date—before Nov. 30, 1200.

No. cx.—30. The sharpness and extreme clearness of this Seal is very remarkable. The expression on the face of the tonsured figure holding the two keys is remarkably distinct: and the tonsure is wonderfully exact. It is attached to a Hurley Charter. The whole inscription was CONTRA SIGILLVM HVRLEYE. Most of the CONTRA has disappeared, but all the rest remains, except the H and part of the V in HVRLEYE. The Charter to which this Seal is attached is an Inspeximus and Confirmation, by the Abbot and Convent of Westminster, of certain grants made by the Prior and Convent of Hurley to clothe and support fifteen monks in Hurley Priory, &c. Date—Feb. 3, 1300.

No. cx.—13.—This is a Common Seal of the Hurley Convent. It was used by Prior Adam. The subject is The Annunciation of the B.V.M. The Charter to which this Seal is attached is a grant by Prior Adam, of Hurley, to John Le Coupere (the Cooper) of a messuage, late John Gynot's, in Hurley, and of another messuage in La Westrethe. It is not represented on the Plates, as the following specimen is so much the best of the three impressions of this Seal in my possession.—The Seal is broken. Date—Edw. I. (1286—1299).

No. civ.—41. Another impression of cx.—13, and being in splendid preservation I have selected this specimen for illustration in the Plates. The mis-spelling of COMMUNE is quaint in the inscription. The legend runs in its completeness, S CONMUNE CAPITULI PRIORAT' HVRLEY. This specimen is attached to a Hurley Charter of 31 Edw. I. It is singularly handsome, and of a beautiful oval shape. Miss Lyon's drawing does it ample justice. The lily-pot between the Archangel and the Blessed Virgin is a pretty feature in this impression. The Prior of Hurley, in a kneeling position, is seen in the lower part of the Seal. His

pastoral staff is grasped in both hands, his right hand is held slightly forward with a drooping sleeve below it,—his left steadying the staff lower down, his Benedictine hood falling back from his shoulders,—his eyes uplifted in Adoration of Our Lady his Patron Saint. On the dexter side of the Prior is an *estoile* of six points, and on the other a sexfoiled flower known as the *angemma* of French heralds. It is worth noticing that when the brother of the present owner of Harefield, Middlesex, who died some years ago—Mr. W. F. Vernon—was hunting up the title deeds of his estate he came across an impression of this Hurley Seal. The greater part of the word CAPITULI had melted off the wax but otherwise the impression was perfect. There was no date to the deed but it was by Prior Alexander de Neuport and the Convent of Hurley granting the Manor of Harefield to Richard Weltekart of Louth (de Luda), Thomas his son, and Florence the wife of the said Thomas to hold to them and the heirs of Thomas of the chief lands of the fee by the accustomed services for ever. The beautiful impression on Plate II. is attached to a Grant by Frater Ricardus de Waledene, Prior of Hurley, and the Convent of Hurley to Reginald de la Hurley and John his son—of an enclosure (*purprestura*) of land lying between La Cnolle (Knowl Hill) and Denesfeld (a portion of Bartlett's Farm, on the S. side of the London and Bath Road). This Deed, which is made of yellow wax, is dated Hurley, Friday before F. of Nativity of the B.V. Mary [8 Sep.] 31 Edw. (1303).

No. cx.—14. Another example of the same Seal, imperfect. This Priory Common Seal, which is broken, is on a Bond by William de Bromle, Prior, and the Convent of Hurley to Mag. Richard de Warmyngton and William Niesman for payment of £120 to the said Richard and William, by instalments of £40 a year in St. Paul's, London. Date—13 Feb., 43 Edw. III (1369).

No. civ.—42. Seal of Prior William de Bromle. The Prior is adoring a Saint in a niche. The legend runs SIGILL' FRIS [W]ILLI' BROML' PORIS. This is the special Seal of Prior Bromle and is attached to an assignment by himself, with the consent of the Convent, towards the clothing and support of the Monks at Hurley of the annual rent of twenty *solidi* issuing from rent at Easthampstead, to be received by the Cellarer, or by the out-door man of the Priory, and paid out yearly to the Chamberlain. Date—before Nov. 29, 1386.

No. civ.—43. This is the Seal of William Zepuswych, or of



Ipswich, Prior. The Blessed Virgin and the Holy Child are in a niche. The legend runs SIGIL' FRIS WILLI ZEPU...WIK PRIORIS. The Seal is attached to a Lease by Frater William Zepuswych, Prior of Hurley, to Isabel, relict of Thomas Chapman, of Ergaston (East Garston), co. Berks,—which was formerly a ton or town of Esgar Master, of the Horse to Edward the Confessor) of all tithes, great and small, belonging to the said Prior in Ergaston, for seven years at a yearly rent of 20 shillings. Date—Hurley Vig. of S.S. Philip and James (30 April) 1 Hen. IV. (1400).

No. cx.—15. The most modern of this set of twelve has the misfortune (like No. civ.—42) to be broken. It is a beautiful niche-like specimen of late perpendicular architecture. It is the Common Seal of the Priory in 1497 (13 Henry VII.). Besides its general beauty, we cannot fail to notice that at its proper dexter side there is arranged vertically a specimen of the Norman zig-zag work of Hurley Church, imitative of the beautiful eleventh century work over the large western door still existing at S. Mary's Church; and, on the sinister side of the Seal there is an evident introduction of our beautiful chancel window, made wholly of indigenous chalk of the Decorated Period (1350). The Convent was evidently as proud of the beautiful old work of the Church as we are at the present date. The Seal is attached to a Grant by John Noreys, gent. of Wynkefeld (Winkfield) to John Hilston, Prior, and the Convent of Hurley, of an acre of land in "Le Hechyn ad finem ville de Hurle," in exchange for a little garden in Hurley and an acre of arable land in Le Estfeld (now enclosed in Temple Park, Hurley). Dat.—16 Sept., 13 Hen. VII. (1497).

[The Editor desires to express his thanks to the Author of this interesting article, for the presentation of the accompanying Plates, and also to Miss Edith F. Lyon for her artistic drawings of the Seals.]

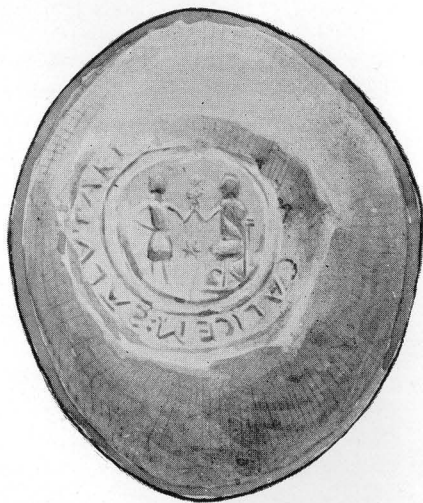
BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.—On September 29th, this Society, in conjunction with the Reading Literary and Scientific Society, visited Silchester, under the guidance of Mr. Theodore H. White. The members of the party were met by one of the gentlemen in charge of the excavations, who gave a brief account of the history of the Roman City, and of the excavations made during the past season. On November 24th, a very interesting Lecture was given by Mr. Llewelyn Treacher, F.G.S., on "Pre-historical Remains in the Thames Valley," who also exhibited part of his valuable collection of flint and bronze implements. Want of space prevents us from publishing the lecture, but we hope to do so in a later number. A large number assembled to hear the lecturer, and the meeting was very successful.

# Hurley Priory Seals.

PLATE I.



CIV-39.



CIV-40.



CIV-37.



CIV-38.



CX-30.

(The Nos. are those entered in the British Museum.)

# Hurley Priory Seals.

PLATE II.



CIV-41.



CIV-42.



CIV-43.



CX-15.

(The Nos. are those entered in the British Museum.)