

## Original Documents.

### CERTIFICATE BY THE BLACK PRINCE REGARDING THOMAS DE PRAYERS, OF BARTHOMLEY, CHESHIRE, DATED 1343.

For permission to publish the document which follows we are indebted to Mr. Thomas W. Jones, of Nantwich. It was exhibited in the Temporary Museum at Chester during the meeting of the Institute in that city. Having proceeded from the Black Prince as Earl of Chester, it was an appropriate contribution to that collection; while the nature of the instrument and the seal attached give it a more extensive interest. It is in effect a certificate by the Prince, that Thomas de Prayers of Barthomley, as the name of the place is now spelt, who had, no doubt, shown some signs of eccentricity as well as prodigality, was on examination found to be of sane mind and capable of managing his own affairs. We print it with the contractions extended.

Edward, eisnez filz au noble Roi Dengleterre et de France, Prince de Gales, Ducs de Cornewaille, et Counte de Cestre, a touz ceux qe cestes lettres verront ou orront, salut : Por ce qe done nous estoit a entendre, qe Thomas de Prayers de Bertonleghe de nostre Countee de Cestre estoit folnastre,<sup>1</sup> et en sa folie aliena graunt partie de ses terres a graunt damage de lui et de nous ; sur quoi nous lui feismes venir devant nous pur estre examine, et lui feismes examiner pur gentz de nostre conseil et auters sages de ley ; sur quele examinacion trove est, qil est homme de bone seine memoire, et tiel qi se poet mesmes et ses terres gouverner en manere assez covenable, a ce qe nous fumes enfourmez de ceux qi lont examinez. En tesmoignance de quele chose nous avoms fait faire cestes nos lettres overtes. Done souz nostre prive Seal a nostre manoir de Kenyngtone le xvj. jour de May, lan du regne nostre trescher seigneur et piere le Roi Dengleterre dis et septisme et de France quart.

(L. s.)

The Cheshire family of Prayers or Praers, de Pratis, Pratellis, Prateriis, or Praeriis, was probably of Norman extraction. The name being one that was likely to distinguish different persons, several families so designated might be expected to be found both here and in Normandy. In the latter country it took the forms of Pres, Preaux, and Presles. The words Praeria and Praria, derived from Prateria and Prataria (signifying according to Du Cange "pratorum series"), by the *t* being dropped analogously to the change of *pater* and *frater* into *pere* and *frere*, were the Latin forms of Prairie; which, though now considered peculiarly American, was and still is a French term, and was occasionally used in this country. An instance of it we remember to have seen in an English deed of the XVIIIth century, relating to lands in Cheshire. This family appears to have been settled

<sup>1</sup> For *folastre*: Guill. Guiart uses the word *folnatre*, of which Roquefort gives the following explanation:—"On croit que ce mot a pu signifier archi-fou."

in that county since the beginning of the XIIth century.<sup>2</sup> It seems not improbable that one of them, not mentioned by Ormerod, was in the service of the last Ranulph, Earl of Chester, in Normandy; for in 1180 we find a Ranulph de Praeris, as the deputy to the Earl of Chester, rendered an account for the *preposituræ* of S. Jacques de Beuvron and of Avranches;<sup>3</sup> and the same person was apparently a witness to a confirmation by that Earl of some donations to the Priory of Plessis-Grimould;<sup>4</sup> and he may have been the Renaud de Prairie, who, with his son Hasculf, granted to the Abbey of S. André en Gouffern two acres of land at Prairie; for D'Anisy has sometimes rendered de Praeris by de Preaux, and sometimes by de Prairie.<sup>5</sup> The Thomas de Prayers named in the above instrument was the son of Richard de Prayers by Joan his wife, the eldest of the three co-heiresses of Crewe, and succeeded to Barthomley and other estates in the county, in 6 Edward III. after the death of the widow of his elder brother Ranulph, as his heir. Those estates were held of the Earl of Chester by knight service. This Thomas died in 23 Edward III., about six years after the date of the document, leaving a daughter Elizabeth his sole heiress; who married Sir Robert Fulleshurst, one of the Esquires of James Lord Audley at the battle of Poitiers. The passage, mentioning that the alienations by Thomas de Prayers "*en sa folie*" had been prejudicial to the Prince as well as to himself, may have had reference to the tenure of the estates. It was not, however, we conceive, as the lord of whom they were held that the Prince had him examined in regard to his sanity, but as being invested with the royal authority in this County Palatine. One branch of the prerogative of the Crown was, to have the custody of lunatics and their estates, providing for the maintenance of them and their families out of the profits, and reserving the surplus for their use in the event of recovery; a right which was confirmed, if it were not conferred on the crown, by the statute of 17 Edw. II. *Prærogativa Regis*. To carry this into effect, an examination and inquiry into the state of the supposed lunatic took place; and if he were found *non compos mentis*, the King took charge of his person and estates, and committed them to the custody of some nominee of his own, who, though liable to account, often derived no small advantage from the appointment. Any grants previously made by the lunatic while in that state were void, and the lands granted were resumed for his benefit. In the present case, had Thomas de Prayers been found to be *non compos*, and to have been so when he alienated some of his estates, the Prince, in exercise of this branch of his *regalia*, would, no doubt, have set aside those alienations, and taken possession of the estates, that he might commit them, together with those that remained unalienated, and also the person of his lunatic tenant and subject, to some one on his behalf. It will be remarked that in this point of view such alienations were to the prejudice of the Prince, as well as of Thomas de Prayers himself. It should seem to have been part of the duty of the escheator to look after matters of this kind; and to him or the sheriff was the writ of inquiry usually directed. If any certificate similar to this has been previously published, it has escaped our notice.

W. S. W.

<sup>2</sup> Ormerod's Cheshire, iii. p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Rot. Scac. Norm. i. 40, and Pref. xci et seq.

<sup>4</sup> D'Anisy's Archives du Calvados, ii. pp. 88, 143.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. and p. 142, and ii. p. 452.

The privy seal of Edward the Black Prince, an impression of which, on bright red wax, is appended to the foregoing document, had not previously fallen under our observation. It is not included in the series of seals described by the late Sir N. Harris Nicolas in his *Memoir "On the Badge and Mottoes of the Prince of Wales,"* *Archæologia*, Vol. xxxi., p. 361; and we have sought in vain for any notice of it elsewhere. The impression, as will be seen by the woodcut, has suffered some injury, and the legend is unfortunately imperfect. The seal, in its perfect state, measured about 1 inch and  $\frac{3}{8}$  in diameter. It bears an escutcheon of the arms of England, differenced by a label of three points: the escutcheon is placed within an eight-cusped panel of very elegant design, the cusplings being pierced with tracery, and the small intervening spaces in the field of the seal are filled up with foliated ornaments at the sides, and a diminutive demi-lioncel rampant introduced in the centre at the top of the escutcheon. The following portion only of the legend can be deciphered:—  
 . . . . EDWARDI PRIMO . . . . I REGI . . . . The whole in all probability read as follows:—s' EDWARDI PRIMOGENITI REGIS ANGLIE, as these words occur on another seal (engraved by Sandford, p. 125). In that example the continuation of the legend runs thus:—& : franc' : principis : Wall' : Ducis : cornub' : & : comit' : cestr'. All these titles could, however, scarcely have been introduced within the space afforded on the seal here figured, even with the aid of contractions.



Privy Seal of Edward the Black Prince, 17 Edw. III. 1348. Original size.

The label borne as a mark of cadency by Edward the Black Prince appears to have been either of five, or of three points, indiscriminately. In many instances, such as the escutcheon on the tomb of Bishop Burghersh in Lincoln Minster, figured in this Journal (Vol. VII., p. 162, in the *Memoir "On some Marks of Cadency borne by the sons of King Edward III."*) the label has five points. On a large seal of the Black Prince, on which he appears mounted on horseback (turned to the left) the shield on his arm, his surcoat, the trappings of the horse, and a large escutcheon on the reverse of the seal, all display the arms of England, differenced with a label of five points. In this example the Prince wears ailettes. On a seal, in the Augmentation Office, closely resembling in general design that above figured, but of somewhat larger dimensions, and probably the Prince's seal for the Earldom of Chester, being inscribed:—\*Sigill' Edwardi Fil' Regis Angl' Comit' Cestr', the escutcheon bears the arms of England with a label of five points. On another large seal with a mounted figure (turned to the right, no

ailettes) the shield on the Prince's arm and the trappings of the horse display England with a label of three points only, whilst the escutcheon on the reverse has one of five points.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the jupon of the Prince's effigy on his tomb in Canterbury Cathedral, the enamelled escutcheons affixed to the sides of the tomb, the seal for the Duchy of Aquitaine, and another seal figured by Sandford, as also five other seals of smaller dimensions, all of them bearing France and England quarterly, supply examples of the use of the label with three points only.

Amongst the charters entrusted to us by the Corporation of Chester for exhibition in the Temporary Museum, there was one to which is appended the seal of the Black Prince, already noticed as preserved in the Augmentation Office (described by Sir N. Harris Nicolas, *Archæologia*, vol. xxxi. p. 361), and attached to a document dated July 16, 28 Ed. III. 1354. The impression produced at Chester is perfect, but not in equally good condition as that moulded by the late Mr. Doubleday in the Augmentation Office. It is appended to a charter of Edward, Prince of Wales, dated at Chester March 9, "anno regni patris nostri Anglie xxviii., et Francie xv." (1354). This seal has been imperfectly figured in the "Remarks on the History of Seals," by the late Rev. W. H. Massie (*Journal of the Chester Archæological and Historic Society*, vol. i. p. 176).<sup>7</sup> Mr. Massie gives it as "the Exchequer Seal of the Palatinate, in 1371;" the document to which it is appended being dated at Chester, May 6, 44 Edw. III., and stated to be sealed "*sigillo scaccarii nostri*." It is preserved amongst the documents belonging to the Cordwainers of Chester.

The various seals used by the Black Prince are well deserving of more minute attention than they have hitherto received, and we hope, on some future occasion, to place before our readers a more detailed enumeration of them than can conveniently be comprised within the limits of our present subject.

A. W.

<sup>6</sup> This is the seal, No. 1, noticed by Sir Harris Nicolas, *Archæologia*, vol. xxxi. p. 361, and obtained by Mr. Doubleday from the Archives at the Hotel Soubise, Paris. The description there given is not strictly accurate, and the statement that the label has five points on

the obverse as well as the reverse, appears on close examination questionable.

<sup>7</sup> The seal is figured on the page of seals facing p. 164; fig. 4. Facsimiles of the various seals of the Black Prince may be obtained from Mr. R. Ready, High Street, Lowestoft.