

Original Documents.

GRANT IN CONFIRMATION OF TWO MESSUAGES AND LAND AT SHARESHILL, STAFFORDSHIRE, 29 EDW. III. (1355).

Communicated by Mr. WILLIAM FREDERICK VERNON.

THE document which follows has been found amongst the muniments of Henry Vernon, Esq., at Hilton Hall, Staffordshire; it relates to property in the adjoining parish of Shreshill. It may be regarded as comparatively unimportant, being only a confirmation by John de Shreshulle, Precentor of the cathedral church of Exeter, of a grant of two messuages and a virgate of land in Shreshill by Sir William de Shreshulle, knight, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, and Joan his wife. It appears, however, to present a feature of sufficient interest to those readers who investigate usages connected with Mediæval Seals to entitle it to a place in this Journal. Examples occur, not unfrequently, of the practice of appending some other seal by way of corroboration, because the seal of the party to the instrument was not known; but they usually concern persons of comparatively obscure position, the seal added for greater security being for the most part that of the town where the transaction took place, or of some official or dignitary in the locality. Some examples of such usage will be noticed hereafter.

In the instance under consideration, the person whose seal is stated to have been comparatively so unknown, that it was deemed expedient to obtain the seal of another person by way of corroboration, was not only a dignitary of the cathedral church of Exeter, but a near kinsman, doubtless, of the high legal functionary whose seal was, at his request, thus appended. John de Shreshull had exchanged the rectory of Wicardesbury, in the diocese of Lincoln, with the learned civilian and historian of his period, Adam de Muremuth, for the precentorship of Exeter.¹ John de Shreshull was admitted as his successor on 25 July, 1337, and enjoyed the dignity until his decease in 1372.² Of his kinsman, as we may conclude him to have been, the Chief Justice, a memoir is given by Mr. Foss, *Judges of England*, vol. iii. p. 504. The name of this eminent lawyer occurs first amongst the advocates in the Year Book of Edward II.; he became a King's serjeant, 5 Edward III.; Justice of the King's Bench in 1333; Chief Baron of the Exchequer, 1344; Chief Justice, 1350—57. In December, 1340, on the return of Edward III.

¹ Adam de Murimuth, Meremouth, Merimouth, or Monemuth, was a prebendary of St. Paul's. His *History of his own time*, compiled "ex libro dierum meorum," was printed by Dr. Hall, in 1722, as a continuation of Trivet's *Annals*; it embraces the period from 1303 to 1336.

See Sir C. Young's description of the Arundel MSS. in the College of Arms, p. 26.

² Bishop Grandison's Register; Le Neve's *Fasti*, ed. Hardy, vol. i. p. 410; Dr. Oliver's *Lives of the Bishops of Exeter*, p. 278.

from the siege of Tournai, he suffered disgrace, and even imprisonment, on some charge of maladministration; but he was speedily reinstated in the royal favor, and in 1342 he was appointed one of the *custodes* of the Principality of Wales during the king's absence in the French wars. Having pronounced a judgment against the Bishop of Ely for harbouring one of his people who had slain a man, Sir William was excommunicated by the Pope for not appearing when summoned. It does not appear how he made peace with the Holy See; but, having retired from the bench on which he had sat, with a slight interruption, for about 24 years, he was a liberal benefactor to the monasteries of Oseney, Bruerne, and Dudley, and took the habit of the Friars Minors in their convent at Oxford, where, as it is recorded, he died in 1370 and was there interred. He had acquired wealth, and purchased great estates, as may be seen in the account given from Huntbach's MSS., in Shaw's History of Staffordshire, vol. ii. p. 281, where some notices of the Shareshull family may be found.³ It may deserve mention that as early as 1346 his name occurs in the list of those persons from whom Edward III. required a loan on his departure for Guienne; the contribution from Sir William being no less an amount than £100.

It is not to our present purpose to trace the descent of the ancient possessors of Shareshill; we will therefore proceed to describe the two interesting seals which accompany the document under consideration, and of which representations are subjoined. Both these seals are of circular form, the dimensions, in their perfect state, having been nearly the same, and the impressions on dark green wax. That of John de Shareshull, Precentor of Exeter, presents a small escutcheon of his arms, barry nebuly with a bordure bezanty; at the dexter side is the B. V. Mary, standing and holding the infant Saviour in her arms; at the sinister, the Precentor kneeling; he holds up a branch towards the Virgin. The legend, of which portions are lost, was probably as follows:—* SIGILLVM : IOHA[NNIS : DE :] SHAR[ESHV]LLE. The seal of the Chief Justice displays an escutcheon of the same arms, a wyvern being introduced at each side; the legend is as follows: * SIGILLVM : WILLELMI : DE : SHARESHVLL'. In Huntbach's catalogue of arms of the ancient nobility and gentry of Staffordshire, of which a transcript is preserved at Hilton Hall in a MS. of Erdeswick's Survey, the arms of the Shareshull family are thus blazoned: "Ar. two barrs wavy gu. a bordure sa. bezante."

Madox, in the Dissertation concerning Ancient Charters, prefixed to his *Formulare*, p. xxviii., observes:—"If a man had not his own seal in readiness, he would sometimes cause the seal of another to be affixt; or, if his own was not well known, or for better security and confirmation, he would sometimes use both his own seal and the seal of some other that was better known than his. Sometimes one seal was sett for two persons, and sometimes the witnesses have sett their seals. The order in affixing the seals generally was, that the seal of the person named first in the charter was placed next to the beginning of the lines, and so the other seals of the parties in order, from the left to the right; though sometimes this order was not exactly observed, and if there were three seals, that of the worthiest person was sometimes placed middlemost." It may deserve notice that, in the present case, the seal of the grantor is appended on the right of that of

³ See also, in regard to Shareshill, and the descent of the estates, Erdeswick's Survey of Staffordshire, ed. Harwood, p. 134.

his eminent relative, which is placed, according to the phrase used by Madox, "next to the beginning of the lines."

The *Formulare* supplies several examples of seals added, as in the instance before us, by way of corroboration. Thus, in No. 348, Johanna, widow of Walter Glede, at Taunton, uses her own seal, and that of a neighbour:—"Et quia sigillum mei supradicte Johanne pluribus est incognitum, et ut presens scriptum meum temporibus futuris in suo robore magis optineat et virtute, sigillum Roberti Warre de Hestcombe armigeri hiis apponi procuravi; et ego vero Robertus Warre, ad specialem rogatum predictæ Johanne Glede, huic presenti scripto sigillum armorum meorum apponi feci." Again, to a bond for payment of money by Thomas Madre and Jankyn Cok, merchants of Boston, to Sir John Deincourt, the first named of the obligors attached his seal,—“et pur ce que le seel du dit Jankyn Coke est a plusurs desconu, Adam Mistreton demorant a Burdeux ad mys a cestes presentes son seel, pur noum de Jankyn Cok suisdit.” (No. 645.) So likewise the seal of the Prepositure of the town of Southampton (Nos. 695, 733); the seal of the Dean of the Isle of Wight (No. 700); the common seal of Newcastle (No. 677); that of Chichester (No. 701); the seal of the Bishop of Hereford (No. 445); and that of the official of the Bishop of Lichfield (No. 443), are stated to have been added, respectively, by way of corroboration, or “ad maiorem securitatem.” In one instance (No. 679), in which Warin de Waletona released to the Abbey of Seez and the Priory of Lancaster the right of patronage of a church, having found by ancient charters that the same did rightfully belong to the said abbey and priory, the seal of the releasor and those of four others, persons of note in the locality, but not parties to the deed, were attached. Other examples have been brought under our notice, especially amongst documents exhibited at the meetings of this society at Bristol, and in other places; to a document, likewise, in possession of the Institute, the common seal of Marlborough is found in like manner added. We may also refer to a document in possession of the Rev. H. T. Ellacombe, F.S.A., described in a subsequent page, which has the town-seal of Bristol added by way of corroboration. Lewis, in his *Dissertation on the Antiquity and Use of Seals in England*, p. 27, alludes to this usage, and cites an example given in Bishop Kennett's *Parochial Antiquities*, where a document occurs to which the mayoralty seal of Oxford was attached by way of corroboration.

The document to which we would now invite the attention of our readers, more especially of those who take interest in sphragistic inquiries, may, we hope, prove acceptable as an illustration of this practice. The influential position of the witnesses, residents in the immediate locality in which the transaction occurred, is scarcely less deserving of consideration, than that of the grantor, and of the high public functionary thus prevailed upon to render assurance more sure in a matter of comparatively small importance. Amongst the witnesses are found Sir William de Sharesnull the elder, whose grant to Robert, son of Robert Costey, it was the purpose of this instrument to confirm; Sir John de Swynnerton, of Hilton, possessor of considerable estates adjacent to Sharesnull, and seneschal of the forest of Cannock; and William de Perton, of an ancient family and good possessions in Staffordshire. John de Covene, the witness last named in the deed, may have been of the family whose name is more commonly written Coyney, established, as it is asserted, at Weston Coyney in the same county from the days of the Conqueror.

The following is a copy of the document, with the contractions, a few excepted, extended :—

Omnibus ad quos presens scriptum pervenerit Johannes de Shareshulle precentor ecclesie beati Petri Exon salutem in domino sempiternam. Cum dominus Willelmus de Shareshulle miles et primogenitus domini Willelmi de Shareshulle, et Johanna uxor ejus dedissent, et per finem in Curia domini Regis Anglie coram Justiciariis suis de Banco levatum reddidissent Roberto filio Roberti Costey de Shareshulle duo mesuagia et medietatem unius virgate terre cum pertinenciis in Shareshulle, tenenda et habenda eidem Roberto et heredibus de corpore suo legitime procreatis, prout in predicto fine plenius continetur; Ego vero dictus Johannes, concessionem et reddicionem predictas gratas habens et ratas, pro me et heredibus meis confirmavi et per presens scriptum relaxavi et quietum clamavi prefato Roberto filio Roberti omnia tenementa predicta cum pertinentiis sibi et heredibus suis predictis tenenda imperpetuum. Et preterea ego dictus Johannes, prefato Roberto filio Roberti de tenementis predictis volens titulum facere forciozem, concessi pro me et heredibus meis quod nos tenementa predicta cum pertinentiis prefato Roberto filio Roberti et heredibus suis supradictis contra omnes gentes warantizabimus imperpetuum. In cujus rei testimonium huic presenti scripto sigillum meum apposui; et, quia sigillum meum pluribus est ignotum, sigillum dicti domini Willelmi de Shareshulle illustris Regis Anglie Justiciarii capitalis ad rogatum meum presenti scripto pariter est appensum. Iliis testibus, prefato domino Willelmo de Shareshulle milite seniore, Johanne de Swynenortone de Ilultone, Willelmo de Pertone, Willelmo Le Champioun de parva Saredone, Johanne de Couene et aliis. Datum London die dominica proxima post festum sancte Trinitatis anno regni Regis Edwardi tercii post conquestum Anglie vicesimo nono, et regni ejusdem Regis Francie sextodecimo (June 7, 1355).

[L. S.]

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Seal of Sir William de Shareshulle,
Chief Justice of the King's Bench.
(Orig. size.)



Seal of John de Shareshulle,
Precentor of Exeter.
(Orig. size.)