

### Original Documents.

CONFIRMATION BY THOMAS, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, OF THE CHURCH OF BEXLEY, KENT, WITH CERTAIN TITHES AND OTHER RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES, TO THE CANONS OF THE PRIORY OF THE HOLY TRINITY, LONDON.

Communicated by JOSEPH BURTT, one of the Assistant-Keepers of Public Records.

THE following charter, to which the seal of Thomas à Becket, unfortunately in imperfect condition, is appended, has been preserved amongst the Public Records, with the numerous evidences that formerly belonged to the Priory of Augustine Canons of Christ Church, or the Holy Trinity, within Aldgate, London.

The History of that grand institution is to be found in the *Monasticon*; <sup>1</sup> the *Chartularies* and numerous evidences to which references have been supplied by Tanner and other writers supply materials for a more ample account of its possessions. The charters that have been given in the last edition of Dugdale's great work, are partly from a roll in the Cottonian collection in the British Museum, with others that had been given in the *Fœdera* and by Stevens. The originals, however, of by far the greater number of documents relating to the Priory of Christ Church, London, from the time of Henry I. inclusive, if not almost the whole of the series which still remains un-calendered, exists in the great depository of our National Archives. Their history is that of many other similar collections there preserved. Seized into the King's hands by the Commissioners of Henry VIII. at the Dissolution of the Religious Houses, the muniments were deposited in the Royal Treasury. The site of the Priory being granted to Sir Thomas Audley, then Lord Chancellor, he was probably content that the muniments of the House should remain undisturbed in the royal possession. They were subsequently drafted into the Chapter House of Westminster, when that building was made the receptacle of the contents of the Royal Treasuries, and thence they were removed to the Public Record Office. The muniments of the Priory of the Holy Trinity must at one time have been exceedingly numerous; their property having been very extensive. So many documents, however, have been distributed in their present arrangement, and are to be sought for under the places referred to in them, that it would be difficult now to estimate their number, as they do not always carry with them the evidence of the original ownership.

The present charter is taken from a small number of instruments

<sup>1</sup> Dugdale, *Monast. Angl.*, vol. vi., part 1, pp. 150—165, edit. Caley.



Counterseal, set with an antique intaglio, used by Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury.

From a seal preserved amongst the Public Records.

relating to Bexley, in Kent, in the diocese of Rochester; amongst these are preserved the two charters, to which reference is made in the confirmation by Becket here printed. These are the charters of his predecessors, William Corboyl, archbishop of Canterbury, A. D. 1123-1136, and Theobald, A. D. 1138, after whose decease in 1161, the see having remained vacant upwards of a year, Becket was elected in 1162. These documents are both to the same effect as the subjoined confirmation by Becket—granting the church of St. Mary of Bexley to the monastery of the Holy Trinity. The charter by archbishop Thomas is somewhat fuller than those of his predecessors, as he grants also herbage for ten cattle in the demesne lands of the archbishop, with some other privileges. There is warrant for this grant, however, in another charter in this collection, namely, the charter of Ralph, archbishop of Canterbury, before William Corboyl (A. D. 1114—1122), granting to the church of Bexley the privilege of feeding eight animals in the demesne of the Archbishop, and ten pigs in his woods without paying pannage.

It does not appear, so far as I am aware, that the canons of Christ Church had enjoyed any privileges or concessions in the extensive parish of Bexley, previously to the grant by William Corboyl. This is, however, very probable.<sup>2</sup> The foundation of the Priory within Aldgate, it will be remembered, has been attributed to the influence of Archbishop Anselm, and of Richard Beaumeis, bishop of London; through their persuasions it was that, according to the most probable statement, Queen Maud, A. D. 1108, established there a monastery for canons regular of the Order of St. Austin, then newly brought into England. The interest thus evinced by the archbishop, in the institution of the Priory, may, doubtless, have been accompanied by some more substantial evidences of encouragement. Bexley had been given by Cenulph, king of Mercia, to Archbishop Wilfred, and it is found amongst the possessions of the see in Domesday; it is, however, within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the diocese of Rochester; hence the grant in confirmation now brought before our readers is addressed to the bishop of Rochester.<sup>3</sup> The right to the church of Bexley was long in litigation between the canons of Christ Church and the archbishop; but at length, in 29 Hen. III., on an appeal to the Pope, a definitive sentence was given in favor of the Priory, and it was confirmed by the bull of Alexander IV.

The interest of the following document, although relating to the ancient possessions of one of the most important of the monastic establishments of the metropolis, doubtless consists chiefly in the remarkable seal attached to it. No impression of this *Secretum*, or privy seal, used by Archbishop Thomas has hitherto, so far as we are aware, been noticed. Unfortunately, the obverse of the impression in the present instance has entirely scaled off and perished. The Archbishop's counter-seal, however, here figured, is of considerable interest and in perfect preservation. It is of oval form, the dimensions are  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch by somewhat less than an inch; the device is a nude figure standing, with one hand resting on a short column; the setting was, doubtless, an antique intaglio that may have

<sup>2</sup> See the *Litteræ diffinitivæ super questione de Ecclesia de Bixle, &c.*, between the Archbishop and the Prior and convent of the Holy Trinity. Dugdale, *Mon. Angl.*, vol. vi. p. 163, edit. Caley.

<sup>3</sup> Walter, Archdeacon of Canterbury, brother of Archbishop Theobald, consecrated bishop of Rochester A.D. 1147-48, died 1182.

represented Mercury, but the usual attributes are not distinctly seen. It has been imagined that some indication of the winged *petasus* may be traced on the head. The broad flat rim in which this gem was set bears the following legend in bold letters :—† SIGILLVM TOME LVND.—The seal was protected by a kind of wrapper, or open case, not uncommonly used at the period, and consisting of two oval pieces of silk or other soft tissue, that were attached together at the upper end only, through which the parchment label at the foot of the document passed. The material in the present instance is of pinkish brown tissue, diapered with a richly floriated pattern of green color; the lining is of fine red cloth, like thin canvas, and the edges are carefully stitched with green. By this simple contrivance the fragile wax was more effectually protected than by enclosing it in a small bag, as sometimes was the practice, and by folding back the wrapper the seal was more conveniently exposed to view. To the lower extremity of each of the oval pads is attached a small tassel of green silk. In the woodcut, the moiety of the wrapper that covered the reverse of the impression is represented as turned back.

It is scarcely necessary to remark how frequently antique gems were used by dignitaries of the church and ecclesiastics, and likewise by other persons, as personal or privy seals. Several remarkable examples might be cited in the series of archiepiscopal seals at Canterbury. It is probable that the selection of a device amongst antique intagli was, in many instances, influenced either by the notion of certain physical and phylacteric virtue attributed to it, or by a supposed allusion in its design to some incident or person in sacred story. The suggestion, that in the seal under consideration, any such notion may have guided the distinguished prelate by whom it was used, in the choice of a device, may, doubtless, appear too conjectural to claim attention. If, however, we accept the supposition that the intaglio used as a seal by Thomas a Becket is actually a representation of the messenger of the Gods, the device might doubtless have been very suitably chosen by the archbishop, since the virtues attributed to such a gem in mediæval *lapidaria* were as follows:—"Est et alius lapis in quo habetur Mercurius; qui hunc habuerit tantum abundabit sapientia atque gratia ut nemo sibi resistere possit. Gratus erit Deo et omni populo, et perpetua gaudebit sanitate."<sup>4</sup>

The use of intagli, for the most part antique gems, as privy seals, is an interesting fact in mediæval sphragistics; Mr. Roach Smith has figured a large number of examples in his *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. iv., plates 18 to 20. An unusual mode of impressing the *Secretum* occurs on the fine seal of one of the Archbishops of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, A. D. 1206—1228. A small oval intaglio here appears immediately below the figure; the impression, probably, of a ring, being so made that it effaces part of the base on which the Archbishop stands, and also three letters of the legend. The intaglio in this instance is not, as commonly the case, a gem of classical antiquity; the subject is the Temptation in Paradise. This singular mode of introducing the personal or privy seal occurs likewise on some of the magnificent great seals of the Imperial series.

<sup>4</sup> Treatise "de sculpturis lapidum," *Archæologia*, vol. xxx., p. 449. One of the most singular instances of the use of antique intagli by mediæval prelates is

the gnostic gem found in Chichester Cathedral, with the remains, as supposed, of Bishop Seffrid, who died 1151. It is figured *Arch. Journ.*, vol. xx. p. 235.

The fine seal of Boniface of Savoy, Archbishop of Canterbury, A. D. 1244—1270, had four small oval intagli, apparently antiques, inserted in the field, two on either side of the figure.

It has been truly remarked by the learned biographer of the Archbishops of Canterbury, that "the controversies, with respect to Becket, commence with his very name. His father was certainly called Gilbert Becket, and admitting that surnames in the twelfth century were not hereditary, yet we find Thomas addressed as Becket by his murderers; the name was, doubtless, uttered by them as an expression of contempt."<sup>5</sup> It would exceed the limits of our present purpose to examine the conflicting opinions of many authorities by whom the subject has been discussed, but we cannot omit to invite attention to the indisputable evidence here presented on the privy seal of the Archbishop, that even in his highest distinction he had not wholly abandoned the name by which in the days of his earlier career he had been known—"Tomas Lundeniensiis," or "Thomas de Londoniis." It has been suggested, as Dr. Hook remarks, that he was "known to his contemporaries as Thomas of London, perhaps rather as Thomas of Cheapside, as we say John of Oxford, and Herbert of Bosham; and such, we can have little doubt, was the case until he became Thomas the Archdeacon, Thomas the Chancellor, and Thomas the Archbishop."<sup>6</sup> It is needless now to seek the precise time when the son of the Norman settler in our metropolis—"Gilbertus quidam cognomento *Becchet*, patria Rotomagensis,"—may have changed his proper patronymic, that doubtless had originated in a nickname suggested by some slight personal deformity,<sup>7</sup> for the name derived from the place of his birth. The appellation Becket is not unfamiliar to visitors of Rouen at the present time. The usages connected with changes of surname amongst ecclesiastics and religious men present a subject of curious investigation, to which attention was formerly invited in this Journal<sup>8</sup> as illustrated by a remarkable bond by the Abbot and Convent of Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. It may here suffice to advert to the statement there cited from Mr. Markland's valuable Remarks on Surnames, published in the *Archæologia*, that it was a fashion, as we are informed by an old writer of authority, "from a learned spirituall man to take awaie the father's surname (were it never so worshipful or ancient) and give him for it the name of the town he was born in."<sup>9</sup>

In regard to the birth-place of the Archbishop—"Londoniensis urbis indigena"—as he is called by Brompton, there appears to be no controversy. The dwelling of Gilbert Becket and his wife Roesa was on the North side of Cheapside, near the East end. There, as the Dean of Chichester and other historians inform us, Thomas was born in 1118. It would probably now be in vain to inquire at what precise period he assumed, in accordance with an usage to which allusion has been made, the surname by which we find him designated on his privy-seal. The

<sup>5</sup> Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, by the Dean of Chichester, vol. ii. p. 356. "Ubi est Thomas Beketh?" was the shout of the murderers, as related by Edward Grim.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>7</sup> *Becchet* or *Bequet*, in old French, signifies "a pike, also the name of a

sourish apple, good to be eaten raw.—Bequet de mer, a dainty, little, and long-nosed rock-fish, not very common." Cotgrave. See also Ducange v. *Becchetus*.

<sup>8</sup> Arch. Journ., vol. ix. p. 181. See also Ducange, ed. Henschel, v. *Nomina Mutari*.

<sup>9</sup> *Archæologia*, vol. xviii. p. 108.

chroniclers mention him familiarly as—"Thomas Londoniensis,"—or "de Londoniis."<sup>1</sup>

It is to be regretted that the obverse of the seal appended to the subjoined document should have perished, the moiety of the impression having unfortunately scaled off, probably through the insertion of the parchment label in the mass of wax. It is moreover singular that, so far as we are aware, impressions of the seal of Archbishop Thomas, if indeed any unquestionable example can be cited, are of extreme rarity. We are not aware that any impression has been found in the Golden Treasury at Canterbury, so rich in sphragistic treasures, especially in the series of the early Archiepiscopal Seals, of which we believe that the late Mr. Doubleday was permitted to take casts in plaster. A seal described as that of Thomas à Becket has been engraved for the Gentleman's Magazine. The seal placed before us by Mr. Urban is commended as the only portraiture extant of Thomas à Becket executed in his lifetime; it is observed that it "would be engraved on his first elevation to the archbishoprick in 1162."<sup>2</sup> It represents him standing, vested in the customary pontificals; the right hand is raised in the gesture of benediction, the left grasps a crosier formed, as in other early archiepiscopal seals, with a simple crook turned inwards towards the figure. The mitre is of the ancient fashion, as seen likewise on the seal of Becket's predecessor Theobald; the horns or *apices* are on the sides, not, as in the later form, at the front and back. The upper part of the mitre thus assumes a crescent shape in its outline. The legend is as follows:—  
✠ SIGILLVM THOME DEI GRATIA ARCHIEPISCOPI CANTVARIENSIS. It is not stated where the impression is preserved.

Two seals here claim notice that are familiar to the Kentish collector as so-called seals of Archbishop Thomas. Of these one is unquestionably a reproduction, slightly altered, of that of Archbishop Theobald. On careful comparison of impressions from his seal it is evident that the legend only has been changed, the letters being placed at wider intervals, and thus SIGILLV: TEOBALDI: has been converted into SIGILLVM ·TOME. The letters thus supplied, as might be done with perfect facility in a plaster mould, are of larger size and unskilful execution as compared with the legend on the genuine seal of Theobald. In this supposed seal of

<sup>1</sup> Brompton writes of "*Thomas de Londoniis*, Archidiaconus Cantuariensis," X. Script. col. 1052. Gervas relates that on the accession of Henry II. at the instance of Archbishop Theobald, Becket, who held an office in his household, was appointed Chancellor. "Egit igitur apud regem ut statim in initio regni cancellariam concederet clerico suo *Thoma Londoniensi*." Ibid. col. 1377. The reader who may desire to investigate more minutely these and other like details cannot fail to derive full satisfaction from the valuable Life of Dr. Hook, and the authorities there cited, p. 354, *ut supra*. See also the correspondence on the names of Archbishop Thomas, and various recent writers who have entered upon the subject, Gent. Mag., vol. ix.

N.S., pp. 163, 300, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Gent. Mag., Nov. 1848, vol. xxx., N.S., p. 494. This seal is said to be there engraved for the first time, and also a very interesting seal of the Chapel of St. Thomas on London Bridge, commenced shortly after his death, namely, in 1176. The chapel stood in the centre of the bridge. On the seal, which may be assigned to the early part of the twelfth century, a seated figure of the archbishop is introduced, placed between two tall candlesticks upon an arch. A river flows beneath, and one end of a boat appears as if shooting the arch. The legend is as follows: +SIGILL' BEATI: THOME: MARTIRIS: D' PONTE: LOND'.

Becket, the crosier has its head turned outwards, as on the prototype used by his predecessor. The length of this seal is about 3½ in.

The second is a seal of rather larger dimensions than that last described, the length being about 3½ in. The figure is well executed, the mitre is bifid, as on the example above described, the crosier has the crook turned inwards. The legend, with letters clumsily formed and irregular in size, reads thus:—✠ SIG · TOME · DEI · GRATIA · CANTVARIÆ · ARCHIEPISCOPIVS. There can be little doubt that this, and also that first described, are fictitious reproductions of other archiepiscopal seals. We believe that they are so regarded by Mr. Ready, in whose long tried experience we have the highest reliance, and who has devoted special attention to the Kentish series.

A. W.

*Confirmation of the grant of the Church of Bexley, Kent, with other privileges, to the Priory of Christ Church, London. (Public Records, Rolls House, 21, A. Box 47).*

Tomas, Dei gratia Cantuariensis æcclesiæ minister humilis, venerabilis fratri Waltero Rofensi Episcopo, et universis sanctæ matris æcclesiæ filii salutem. Quod ad multorum noticiam pervenire congruum duximus, litterarum monimentis commendare decrevimus. Noscat igitur præsens ætas et secutura posteritas, nos concessisse et præsentī carta confirmasse dilectis filiis nostris Canonicis Sanctæ Trinitatis, London', tam præsentibus quam futuris, æcclesiam Sanctæ Mariæ de Bixle, quiete habendam et perpetuo possidendam, quam bonæ memoriæ Willielmus prædecessor noster illis in elemosinam perpetuam contulit, et piæ recordationis Teobaldus successor illius, noster vero prædecessor, eisdem perpetuo concessit et confirmavit. Unde et nos quoque, memoratorum patrum sequentes vestigia, caritatis intuitu hanc eandem æcclesiam prædictis fratribus, sicut nostram propriam elemosinam, perpetuo confirmamus, et auctoritate qua fungimur corroboramus, cum terris ad eam pertinentibus, et decimis omnium rerum quæ decimari debent, et nominatim de pannagio, de porcis, et de denariis; et concedimus eis habere x. animalia in dominico herbagio nostro, et x. porcos in bosco nostro sine pannagio. Volumus itaque et præcipimus ut prædicti fratres hanc elemosinam nostram bene et in pace, libere, et quiete et honorifice teneant, sicut melius et quietius tenuerunt aliquo tempore; prohibentes ne ulli omnino hominum temere inde eos liceat perturbare, aut aliquibus vexationibus fatigare.

[L. s.]

Endorsed,—Bixle.

Sanctus Thomas Archiepiscopus de æcclesia de Bixle, et de x. animalibus in dominico herbagio, et de x. porcis, sine pannagio, et de decima pannagii.