

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

SEALS OF THE SUSSEX CINQUE-PORTS.

READ AT BRIGHTON, SEPTEMBER 25, 1846,

BY MARK ANTONY LOWER.

EVERYTHING connected with the municipal towns known as the Cinque-Ports should possess interest not merely for the archæologist, but also for the student of English history, and, indeed, for every one who prides himself on the 'Wooden Walls' of Old England. Originating at a period beyond the date of any existing records relating to them, these towns enjoyed the distinguished honour of guarding the most exposed portion of our maritime frontier, and for the services thus rendered our early monarchs invested them with many eminent privileges. That these places—supporting as they did a large proportion of the ancient navy of England, and becoming in consequence the nurseries of nautical talent—laid the foundation of the present naval glory of our empire is a position which cannot be controverted; and although from the geological changes to which the south-east coast of this country has ever been peculiarly exposed, these venerable towns for the most part now possess no available ports, yet it would be ungrateful for Englishmen to treat with neglect or contempt places once so necessary to the well-being of the kingdom, merely because the hand of Nature and of Time seems to have gone out against them.

On the decline of their empire in Britain, the Romans found it necessary to protect their coasts opposite the continent from the invasions of the marauding tribes of the north; and for this purpose, garrisons of regular troops were established at nine favourable posts on the south-eastern shores, under the command of an officer, who was styled *Comes Littoris Saxonici*, 'the Lieutenant of the Saxon Shore.' The stations,

which were designated respectively Othona, Dubris, Lemanis, Branodunum, Gariononum, Regulbium, Rutupium, Anderida, and Portus Adurni, have mostly been satisfactorily identified with places on the southern and eastern coast, and many of them to this day present ruins of Roman fortresses, which anciently commanded convenient harbours. That the Cinque-Ports of later times were the representatives of those ancient stations scarcely admits of any doubt.

In the charters of *Inspeximus* granted to the Ports by King John, that monarch refers to charters of all his predecessors up to the time of Edward the Confessor, who is generally regarded as the first who bestowed the privileges and immunities still enjoyed by them. The Ports, it is true, are not collectively mentioned in Domesday Book: only Dover, Sandwich, and Romney occur there as privileged ports; but that the league existed at an earlier period is tolerably clear, from the fact that Hastings has always been considered the chief of the Ports, an honour which certainly would not have been conferred upon it, had its privileges been of more recent donation than those of the three alluded to.

The five head Ports, from which the appellation *Cinque-Ports* is derived, are Hastings, Dover, Sandwich, Hythe, and Romney. In course of time various intermediate towns and places were added, as members, or 'limbs,' of these five; particularly Winchelsea and Rye, which, from their importance, were styled, as early as the year 1247, *nobiliora membra Quinque Portuum*, and which at the present day are often designated by the additional style of 'Ancient Towns.'

In the year 1229 the members of Hastings are thus described:

"HASTYNG. Ad quem pertinent tanquam membra unus vicus litus (*sic*) maris in Seford, Peivinsæ, Bulwareth, Hydonye, Iham, Bekysborn, Grenetha et Northye. Servicia inde debita domino regi xxi naves, et in qualibet nave xxi homines, cum uno garcione qui dicitur *gromet*.

"Wynchelsey et Rye, tanquam membra; viz. Wynchelsey x naves, Rye quinque naves, cum hominibus et garcionibus ut supra."—*Jeake's Charters of the Cinque-Ports*.

'Hastings, to which belong, as members, one town on the sea-shore in Seaford, Pevensey, Bulverhythe, Hidney, Iham,

Beaksbourne, Grenhithe, and Northye. The services due from them to our lord the king are 21 ships, and in each ship 21 men, with a boy called a *gromet*. Winchelsea and Rye as members, to wit, Winchelsea, 10 ships, and Rye, 5 ships, with men and boys as above.' 'Gromet' seems to be a diminutive of 'grome,' a serving-man, whence the modern groom. The provincialism *grummet*, much used in Sussex to designate a clumsy, awkward youth, has doubtless some relation to this cabin-boy of the Ports' navy.

Some of these members were never of much importance, and can now scarcely be identified. Hidney, between East-Bourne and Pevensey, has not a single house; Northeye, in the parish of Bexhill, is in the same desolate condition; Bulverhythe contains but three or four houses; and Iham, which stood near the site of the modern Winchelsea, has lost its very name. Bekesbourne and Grenhithe, otherwise called Grench, Grange, or Grenocle, are obscure places in Kent.

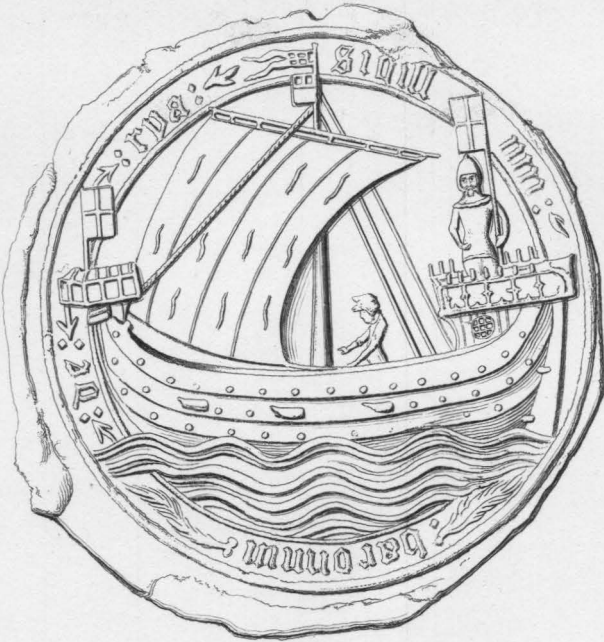
The design of the present paper, is to illustrate the Seals of those of the Cinque-Ports which are situated within the county of Sussex, namely, Hastings, Rye, Seaford, Pevensey, and Winchelsea.

The common seal of the port of HASTINGS (Plate No. 1) bears on its obverse a representation of an ancient one-masted vessel with a square sail set, 'running down' an enemy's vessel of similar form, which it has completely divided, separating stem from stern. Protruding from the billows is seen a mail-clad head which—*pars pro toto*—stands as the representative of the discomfited crew. On board the victorious ship, on the embattled poop, or stern-castle, beneath which sits the steersman, is a quadrangular banner of the royal arms of England, three lions passant, which shows the seal to have been executed prior to the year 1339, when Edward III set up his claim to the throne of France, and quartered the arms of that kingdom. Before the mast is another man with his hands elevated in the attitude of exultation or thanksgiving. At the head of the vessel is a banner charged with the armorial ensign of the Ports, viz. "Per pale, *dexter*, Gules, three demi-lions passant Or; *sinister*, Azure, three semi-ships Argent."



Nº 1





N° 2





N° 3





№ 4





N^o 5



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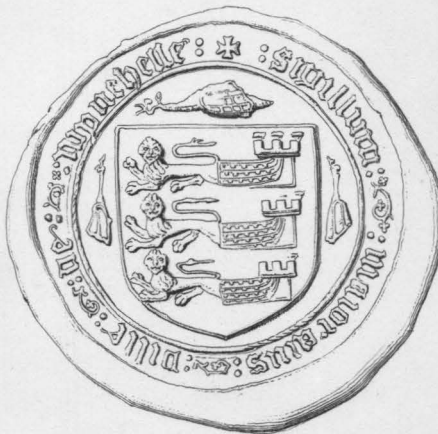
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9



10



This is probably one of the greatest heraldic curiosities extant. The original device was doubtless three ancient ships, white, in a field of azure, and these—upon some occasion of importance now forgotten—were united to the royal ensign of the lions passant by what is called in the language of heraldry *dimidiation*, that is, the suppression of one half of each coat, and the combination of the remaining halves, producing most absurd *hybrids*, namely, lions with ships' sterns!* There is reason to believe that this singular bearing was originally the peculiar property of Hastings, though it afterwards became the common ensign of the whole league. It must have been such before the 34th Henry VI, when it was granted "that Robert Cooke of Romene, shall were and beare the whole armes of the Portes." (Boys's Sandwich, p. 777.) This is perhaps one of the earliest instances of a corporate body empowering a family to bear its armorial distinctions. In 5th Henry VIII it was ordained that "everie person who goeth into the naby of the Portis shall have a cote of white cotyn, with a red crosse and the arms of the Portis underneath; that is to say, the halfe Lyon and the halfe shippe." The legend in the circumference of the seal is in Gothic characters of the thirteenth century, and reads—

SIGILLVM : COMMVNE BARONVM : DE HASTINGGIS.

'The Common Seal of the Barons of Hastings.' The freemen of the Cinque Ports have ever been styled Barons, and it is supposed on good authority that they anciently ranked among the actual nobility. It must not be forgotten that by a celebrated law of Athelstan it was enacted that every merchant who should have made three voyages over the seas with a ship and cargo of his own should have the rank of a nobleman or thane. The ancient right, still enjoyed by the barons of the Ports, of supporting the canopy over our monarchs at their coronation, and of walking in certain processions, into which none below the rank of barons of the realm, except the king's

* By a similar dimidiation, the seal of Great Yarmouth exhibits the royal lions with the tails of *herrings*, which forcibly reminds one of Horace's monster—

"turpiter atrum

Desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne."

A burges of Yarmouth would have written *rubrum* for *atrum*!

more immediate domestics, are admitted, also supports this idea.

The reverse or counter-seal contains a bold and spirited representation of the familiar religious myth of St. Michael and the dragon. The archangel stands erect, with his wings expanded and a nimbus around his head. In his left hand he holds a circular shield such as was sometimes used during the reign of Henry III, charged with a cross, and having in the centre a large hemispherical boss, while the right hand grasps a long and slender cross, the foot of which is thrust into the mouth of the wyvern he tramples beneath his feet. The costume of the figure is very simple and well designed. Around the device is the Leonine hexameter verse—

DRACO CRVDELIS : TE VINCET VIS MICAELIS.

“The power of Michael shall overcome thee, oh cruel Dragon.”

Hence we may infer that St. Michael was regarded as the patron of the Port of Hastings. There were anciently at Hastings a church and parish of St. Michael; and it may be remarked that the saints invoked in the legends of the Cinque-Port seals are generally those to whom the churches of the respective places are dedicated.

The seal of the Mayor of Hastings (No. 6) exhibits a shield containing the arms of the Ports, incorrectly giving the middle lion his entire form, without the ship's stern. The inscription is, ✕ SIGILLVM · OFFICII · MAIORIS · DE · HASTING., in characters not older than the time of Queen Elizabeth, who elevated the style of the chief officer of this port from bailiff to mayor, and the seal was most probably devised on that occasion.

The common seal of RYE (No. 2) has on its obverse a very boldly-designed ship of one mast with a square sail. There are two men on board, one of whom, standing on the poop, and holding a banner charged with a cross in his left hand, is clad in the jupon, camail, and pointed basinet of the time of Henry V. On the prow is the plain cross banner of St. George. The inscription is in old English characters—

sigillum : baronum : de : rya :

The counter-seal exhibits a splendid church, probably intended for that of St. Mary of Rye. In the centre is a large tower supporting a spire and crocketed pinnacles. The eastern and western gables are decorated with crosses, and have pinnacles at the angles. There are six windows with ornamented hood-mouldings, and over them in the clere-story are six others. The upper portion of the tower is made to form a kind of canopy under which are figures of the Virgin and Child, the former holding in her right hand the usual emblem of a cruciform branch of lilies. Above the roof of the building, for the purpose of filling up a vacant space in the field of the design, are the sun, moon, and fourteen stars, and the lower part of the building is encompassed with a strong wall. In the circumference are the words of the Salutation—**ave : maria : gracia : plena : d(omi)n(us) : tecum : benedicta : tu : in : mulieribus :** This interesting seal was probably executed in the reign of Henry V, and the ship upon it may be regarded as a good specimen of the vessels which conveyed the armies of that king to the triumphs of Agincourt.

The mayoralty seal of Rye (No. 7) has the Cinque Ports' arms and the legend, SIGILLVM · OFFICII · MAIORIS · VILLE · DE · RIA · In the spaces between the shield and the inscription are three rude wyverns. This seal, which was engraved in the year 1574 at the expense of 'Master Gaymer formerly mayor' (as appears by an inscription upon it), was copied from a more ancient one with the same inscription and device, a representation of which is given in Boys's Sandwich.

X The seal of SEAFORD (No. 3) is of less dimensions than the preceding. Its device is an eagle in the attitude of rising to fly, with its head *reguardant* or turned back. The legend is in Gothic letters intermixed with Roman—

✠ SIGILLVM · BVRGENSIVM : DE SAFFORDIA.

The occurrence of *Burgensium* in the place of *Baronum* is peculiar to this seal, and it must be observed, to account for this difference, that although Seaford enjoyed the privileges of a Cinque Port as member of Hastings, and even sent members to parliament from the 26th year of Edward I, it did not become an independent port and a corporation until a much

later period. The matrix of the reverse or counter-seal is not of the same kind of brass as that of the obverse, and is of much more recent date. It exhibits a ship of three masts and the legend in Roman characters—

WITH SUTTONII · · ET · CHYNGTON.

This odd mixture of Latin and English is doubtless meant to read in continuation of the inscription on the obverse, thus making altogether, 'The Seal of the Burgesses of Seaford with Sutton and Chinting.' Sutton and Chinting, now single houses, were anciently vills or townships within the jurisdiction of the Port, and are still dependent upon it. The manor of Chinting and other possessions in Seaford belonged in the time of Henry III to Gilbert *de Aquila*, lord of Pevensey and founder of the priory of Michelham; and the *eagle* on the obverse may be his rebus or badge. The disparity in age of the counter-seal may be accounted for on the supposition that, when Henry VIII in 1544 gave Seaford a charter of incorporation making it independent of Hastings, the burgesses adopted a new counter-seal, with the ship, emblematical of their newly acquired privilege. I think the obverse may be safely assigned to the 13th century, and the reverse to the time of Henry VIII.

The official seal of the Bailiff of Seaford is very small (No. 8), and has the device 'an eagle displayed with his head to the sinister,' with the inscription *Sigillum · ballivi · de Seforde*. It is very rudely executed. X

The most antique seal of our series is that of PEVENSEY (No. 4), which was probably engraved in the early part of the 13th century. The obverse exhibits an ancient ship with a poop and an embattled forecastle, both very lofty. On the latter is a banner and abaft the staff of it a fleur-de-lis. The crew consists of eight men, one of whom is steering; over his head upon the poop are two others with immense speaking-trumpets, like those observable in many seals of this period; four others are engaged in drawing in a cable and squaring a yard, and the remaining man is ascending the backstay. Above the yard are a crescent and a star, and beneath it the royal arms of three lions passant. The legend is

SIG(I)LLV(M) : BARONVM DOMINI · REGIS · ANGLIE DE PEVENES.

‘The Seal of the Barons of our Lord the King of England of Pevensey.’ The reverse has two ships most rudely designed, with their sails torn into shreds. In the hindmost vessel stands a mitred figure holding a crosier in his right hand, while his left is raised in the attitude of benediction. This is probably intended for St. Nicholas, the patron at once of mariners and of the parish church of Pevensey. The inscription stands—

☒ SCE · NICOLAE · DVC · NOS · SPONTE · TRAHE : PEV.

The ‘PEV.’ seems to have been inserted to fill up space. The sense of this Leonine verse seems to be

O Saint Nicholas, willingly guide and convey us!

The port-reeve’s seal of Pevensey (No. 9) is in the possession of Inigo Thomas, Esquire. It bears upon a diapered ground *two ostrich-feathers erect*, surmounted by a ducal coronet, the badge of the duchy of Lancaster, surrounded by the legend—

☒ : the · custum · selle · of · the · porte · of · pemse.

It was probably executed during the period that Pevensey was the fee of the Dukes of Lancaster—John of Gaunt, and his son, afterwards Henry IV,—namely, between the 44th year of Edward the Third when that monarch granted it to the former, and the accession of Henry when his title of Duke of Lancaster merged in that of king of England.

The obverse of the WINCHELSEA seal (No. 5) is a copy of that of Pevensey, but of rather later date and superior workmanship. The legend is

SIGILLVM : BARONVM : DOMINI : REGIS : ANGLIE : DE :
WINCHELLESE.

‘The Seal of the Barons of our Lord the King of England of Winchelsea.’

The counter-seal is a modern imitation of the original, which is said to have been stolen during an electioneering squabble in the last century, and to be still in the possession of an in-

habitant of Winchelsea, though I have been unable to trace it. We have, fortunately, the testimony of Mr. Boys, in 1792 (Hist. Sandwich, p. 815), to the accuracy of the copy. This applies to the device only—not to the legend, which the artist, in the absurd taste of his day, thought would look much better in Roman than in Gothic letters, and cut them in Roman letters accordingly.* Had he at the same time translated the inscription, he would have spared the antiquaries of a more recent date much trouble, and prevented a multitude of erroneous conjectures. But before citing and discussing it, let us describe the device, which is of a very elaborate kind. It principally consists of a rich Gothic church with an embattled tower, two spires, and an infinity of crocketed gables and pinnacles. On the central tower stands a figure, in a habit somewhat resembling that of a cardinal, holding out a lantern, as if to guide benighted mariners into port. In front of this personage, on a shield, are the three lions-passant of England, and behind his back is a banner charged with *three cheverons*. This coincides with the arms of the old Sussex family of Lewknor, and I have searched in vain for any other family in this district, bearing similar arms, more likely to have been connected with the Port, though I am not aware of any evidence that they had local influence here. More to the left, perched upon a pinnacle, is a bird, which appears to have been introduced merely for the purpose of filling up a blank space in the design. At the base of the church are three or four buildings, and below them, waves of the sea. The church itself has six divisions, or niches; one in the tower, two to the left, and three to the right. In the central or tower compartment is a doorway, approached by several steps; in the opening are three human figures, which I cannot appropriate; and in a small niche above there is a crowned or nimbed figure, which may be intended for the Virgin. In the left hand niche is a representation of St. Giles caressing that faithful hind by whose milk his life is reputed to have been sustained; and the second niche has a repetition of the same design.† The three niches

* Since the above was written, the engraver has discovered an impression of the original seal, from which he has made the accompanying representation.

† The legend of the abbot St. Giles states that while living the life of a hermit, in a cavern, in the kingdom of Naples, he was nourished by wild herbs and by the

to the right of the tower exhibit the martyrdom of St. Thomas à Becket. In the central compartment the archbishop in his pontificals is seen kneeling before an altar, while an attendant priest elevates a crucifix above his head, as if to ward off the sword of one of the assassin knights, who from behind is aiming the fatal blow. On the left another is seen armed with his shield and a drawn sword; and to the right a third is in the act of unsheathing his weapon. These representations of SS. Giles and Thomas refer to the dedications of the two principal churches of Winchelsea, and the surrounding legend contains an invocation of these joint patrons of the Port, viz.

✠ EGIDIO : THOME : LAUDVM : PLEBS : CANTICA : P(RO)ME :
NE : SIT : IN : ANGARIA GREX : SVVS : AMNE : VIA.

The precise meaning of the second verse has long been a matter of enquiry and discussion. Mr. J. D. Parry, in his 'History of the Sussex Coast,' tells us that he vainly endeavoured to get a translation, and as nobody could or would give it him, he himself attempted one, which, before printing, he submitted to the Rev. Edmund Cartwright, who says,—“The inscription on the seal of Winchelsea is very obscure, and I question whether it was understood by him who cut it or by those who used it. (!) Your interpretation seems to express the meaning as nearly as it can be made out.” The translation which has this *imprimatur* of the historian of the Rape of Bramber is as follows :

“To Giles' and Thomas' praise, ye people chaunting pray;
Lest in the Angarian road their flock be washed away.”

Though this rendering is obviously absurd, it is not very easy to arrive at the true sense; and the subjoined attempt to do so is submitted with great deference to the Society.

Angaria, in which lay Mr. Parry's chief difficulty, is a word of very common use in medieval Latin; it means in law “any vexatious duty or service paid by the tenant to the Lord” (see

milk of a hind, which providentially resorted to him every day for that purpose. It happened that this hind was scented by the royal hounds, and having been wounded, retired into the cave. This circumstance brought the king to an acquaintance with the holy man, who thenceforward enjoyed his protection. He lived in the first half of the eighth century. His festival is Sept. 1st.

Cowel's Law Dict.), such as a pressing of horses, teams, men, ships, &c. for the public use. The system of the Persian couriers, who had authority to command relays of horses for the king's use, is described by Herodotus (viii, 98) as *αγγαρηιον*, from which the word originates. Æschylus speaks of the transmission of news by fire-beacons, *αγγαρον πυρ*. (Agam. 273.) It was afterwards applied to any pressed or compulsory service, and from thence came to mean anxiety or distress of any kind.* 'IN ANGARIA' then simply means, 'in a strait,' or 'in distress.' AMNE again is 'sea,' not 'river.' These terms accepted, the whole will read thus :

*Give forth, O people, songs of praises to Giles and Thomas ;
Lest their flock be in distress by sea or land.*

Or, more paraphrastically :

“ Pour forth your songs ye people all
To Giles' and Thomas' praise ;
Lest evil should their flock befall,
By land, or ocean's ways.”

I have some doubt about AMNE VIA. If this phrase be, as I rather conjecture, an ablative absolute, the “ sea being their way” would be the correct reading. If, on the contrary, it be a simple ablative, *vel* or *aut* may be understood between ‘amne’ and ‘via,’ and the phrase will read, ‘by sea or by land.’ Mr. Boys (Hist. Sandwich, p. 815) is of this opinion. His translation is this : “ Address, ye people, songs of the praises of Thomas to Giles, lest his flock be in danger by water or land.” The address to the Patron Saints is by no means inappropriate in relation to the far-wandering mariners of Winchelsea, whose trade was in a great degree a foreign, and consequently (at the period when the seal was engraved) a dangerous one.

The Winchelsea mayoralty seal (No. 10) has the Cinque Ports' arms very incorrectly designed, and bears the inscription—

✻ *sigillum : maioratus : ville : de : wynchelse,*

in Old English characters of the 15th century. In the inter-

* “Naves eorum angariari possere scriptum est.”—Ulpian. “Legentibus innotescit quot angariis et injuriis nos miseros Anglos exagitat Curia Romana.”—Mat. Paris.

vals between the shield and the legend are three figures, which are not very intelligible, but which on a comparison with the corresponding seal of Rye may be intended for wyverns.

The foregoing Paper was read at the Society's meeting at Brighton in September, 1846, when the impressions of the seals from which the accompanying plates have been engraved were exhibited. I have to add my thanks to those gentlemen by whose kindness I was furnished with the impressions for my use—viz. to

John Phillipps, Esq. town-clerk of Hastings;
G. S. Butler, Esq. clerk of the peace of Rye;
Messrs. Terewest and Whiteman, town-clerks of Pevensey;
The Rev. I. Carnegie, vicar of Seaford and bailiff of that port;
and to
Mr. Thos. Ross of Hastings.

In concluding these Notes, I would beg to direct the attention of members of the Sussex Archæological Society to the little-explored antiquities connected with the municipal rights and customs of the Cinque Ports, more especially, of course, to those of Sussex, as a legitimate and useful subject of enquiry; and I would add that although several of these towns have met with very able historians, a general history of the Cinque Ports, in their *associated capacity*, is a great desideratum in our topographical literature.
