

#### XIV.—ON THE ARMORIAL DEVICES ATTRIBUTED TO THE COUNTY OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

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[Read on the 31st August, 1887.]

It seems to be admitted as a general principle by all good heralds that the counties of England, not being, as yet at any rate, bodies corporate, have no right to the use of arms. The only unquestioned exceptions to this rule are afforded by the duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall, and the counties palatine of Chester and Durham. The county of Kent, however, has seen fit to assume the white horse traditionally ascribed to the kingdom of Hengest and Horsa, and the county of Middlesex has appropriated the three *seaxes* or daggers that the heralds of the sixteenth century assigned to the kingdom of the East Saxons. A further exception has been supposed to exist in the case of Northumberland, the county authorities of which have, of recent years, made use of a castle on an azure shield.

In inquiring into the origin of this device it must be remembered in the first instance that the sheriffs of all counties formerly bore castles on their official seals, a survival possibly of times when the royal castles within their jurisdictions were entrusted to their care. Mr. John Gough Nichols was the first to direct attention to this ancient practice. In his *Herald and Genealogist*, Vol. III., p. 381, he wrote:— 'There is an interesting class of seals of which, I think, very little notice has hitherto been taken, though examples are not unfrequently occurring, and the number that once existed must have been very large. I allude to the seals of Sheriffs. . . . These seals are usually of a small circular form, and bear the representation of a castle, evidently denoting the power of imprisonment: and therefore it may be presumed that their chief employment was connected with the jurisdiction of the gaols. Accompanying this castle there is generally the coat of arms of the individual, a circumstance which gives them an important historical value.'

In the next volumes (IV. p. 213, and V. p. 193) Mr. F. J. Baigent describes the castled seals of the following sheriffs, being all, it would seem, that had come under his notice:—

Gilbert Wace, Oxford and Berkshire ... ..	1372-1387
William de Weston, Surrey and Sussex ... ..	1383
Sir Thomas Harcourt, Oxford and Berkshire ... ..	1407-1408
William Warbelton, Hampshire ... ..	1410 or 1451
John Lysle, Hampshire ... ..	1413
William Brokas, Hampshire ... ..	1416
John Uvedale, Hampshire ... ..	1420
William Ryngebourne, Hampshire ... ..	1421
John Giffard, Hampshire ... ..	1432-1433
Henry Bruyne, Hampshire ... ..	1447-1458
Sir Walter Mauntell, Oxford and Berkshire ... ..	1456-1457
Edward Trussell, Hampshire ... ..	1610
Philip Holman, Northamptonshire ... ..	1638

Of these the early Oxfordshire seals are the only ones that have on them anything that points—in their case it is an ox—to one county in particular.

Only two official seals of sheriffs of Northumberland seem to have been preserved. The earliest of these is that of Henry Percy, first Earl of Northumberland, and sheriff of the county, appended to a deed dated 30th April, 1395, by which Thomas del Strother grants all his rights in Wallington to Robert de Clifford.<sup>1</sup> The device is that of a castle nearly encircled by a crescent, the latter being the well-known badge of the Percy family.<sup>2</sup> It is a singular coincidence that crescents also appear upon the other extant 'seal of the office of sheriff,' that used in September, 1444, by John Heron of Chipchase, Sheriff of Northumberland, on the receipt he gave to Sir William Swynburn of Great

<sup>1</sup> 'Et pro majore securitate sigillum officii Henrici de Percy comitis ac vicecomitis Northumbrie presentibus apponi procuravi.'—*Proceedings of Archaeological Institute*, 1852, vol. ii. pp. 303-304.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Hartshorne gives a woodcut, *Ibid.* p. 300, of this seal from the impression in red wax attached to the Wallington deed then in the possession of Mr. Thomas Bell of Newcastle. In his 'Old Heraldry of the Percies,' *Archæologia Aeliiana*, N.S. iv. p. 179, Mr. Longstaffe has engraved the earl's shrievalty seal in 1396 from an impression in the Capheaton archives, and comparing it with Mr. Hartshorne's cut adds that 'some slight alterations in detail are rather more decided than mere degrees of preservation.' There is, however, nothing more difficult than to get a perfectly accurate engraving made of an ancient seal, and it seems highly improbable that the Earl of Northumberland would have a different shrievalty seal in 1396 from that which he used in 1395. The question is much confused in Mr. Longstaffe's paper by two misprints, one on p. 179 l. 16

Heaton for 28s. of green wax due from him to the king in the previous year.<sup>3</sup> This time three crescents are charged upon the castle itself. Mr. Longstaffe in his masterly essay on the 'Old Heraldry of the Percies,' has pointed out that this seal is wholly unconnected with that family, but he is inclined 'to take up the position that the crescent in Northumberland had an official or territorial origin, arising in some remembrance of the Saxon kingdom and earldom of Northumbria.'<sup>4</sup> Now certainly it may be conceded that the three crescents on the shrievalty seal of 1444 have no connection with either the Percies or the Herons, but the impersonal way in which the receipt speaks of 'the seal of the office of sheriff' justifies the belief that this had been originally made for Sir Robert Ogle, who was sheriff five years before, the arms of Ogle being *argent a fess between three crescents gules*. A similar instance of economy in the matter of shrievalty seals is afforded by the fact that the seal used by William Ryngebourne, sheriff of Hampshire in 1421, appears to have belonged to Robert Dyneley, who was sheriff so far back as 1392.

There is then nothing unusual in these two seals of Northumberland sheriffs when we compare them with the seals of the same class in the southern counties of England as described by Mr. Baigent. Each bears a conventional castle—the badge of a sheriff just as much as a mitre is the badge of a bishop—while in the one case the castle is embraced by the Percy crescent, and in the other charged with the Ogle crescents. There is apparently nothing about these seals that would identify them with the county of Northumberland. If a Percy or an Ogle had been Sheriff of Oxford and Berkshire, of Surrey and Sussex, or of Hampshire, at that period, they might, it would seem, have used these self-same seals there respectively without the least incongruity.

where for '1375' read '1395,' and the other on p. 182 l. 7 where the date should be '1396' instead of '1386.' The triangle of pellets Mr. Longstaffe sees on his Capheaton seal may be the traces of a figure on the flanking tower of the gateway.

<sup>3</sup> For the woodcut of this seal given by Mr. Longstaffe, see *Arch. Ael.* N.S. iv. p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 181. The fact that the Danish moneyers at York in the tenth century inserted here and there a crescent in the legend or in the field of their coins, like a private mark (*Proc. Arch. Inst.*, 1846), seems a very slender ground-work for this theory, and it is nearly all that Mr. Longstaffe adduces in support of it.

It is, however, remarkable that we meet with similar castles on the insignificant seal of John de Coupland, Escheator of Northumberland in 1355 (Brit. Mus. Seals, 48 I 20), and on the fine seal of William de Beverley, Archdeacon of Northumberland in 1369, of which impressions are preserved in the Treasury of Durham, one of them having been engraved by Surtees in his history, Seals, Plate XII., 9. But in the case of Beverley's seal we at once perceive that the castle is a Northumbrian one, by the fact that St. Oswald with crown and sceptre is represented looking out of the circular flanking turret on the dexter side of the high gateway, while St. Cuthbert with mitre and pastoral staff appears in that on the sinister side, and lest there should be any mistake as to who were intended they are respectively docketted with the initials O and C. In all probability this castle, which is further drawn as standing on water, is intended for that of Bamburgh, for long the official residence not only of the sheriffs, but it would seem of the archdeacons of Northumberland.<sup>5</sup>

Coming now to modern times we find that in 1823 Mr. Robert Thorp, then Clerk of the Peace for Northumberland, devised a County Seal with a castle, which still kept to the main outlines of the Great Gate of Bamburgh, set on a shield of the most preposterously degenerate character conceivable: Round the shield was the motto 'Libertas et Natale Solum.' Where Mr. Thorp got his castle from cannot now be discovered, but there can be little doubt that it was imitated from some old shrievalty seal under the mistaken notion that the castle was the peculiar badge of the county of Northumberland.<sup>6</sup> By the apparently accidental use of horizontal lines by Mr. Thorp's engraver for shading the shield, the field came to be regarded as blue, while the use of vertical lines for the same purpose on the flags waving on each flanking turret has caused them to be painted red.

In 1843 Mr. Thorp was succeeded in his office by Mr. William Dickson, who enjoyed a certain reputation as an antiquary. Unfortu-

<sup>5</sup> William Heron, Sheriff of Northumberland, accounts on the Pipe Roll of 1248, 32 Hen. III., for 'ij marcas de firma cujusdam molendini in Bamburc quod archidiaconus Northumbrie aliquando tenuit.'—Hodgson, *Northumberland*, II. iii. p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> There exist several spurious arms of counties formed from those of their chief towns. I have seen ascribed to Northumberland a shield *argent on an inescutcheon azure a castle of the field, in chief three martlets sable*. This is, of course, a worthless imitation of the arms of Morpeth.

nately Mr. Dickson, perceiving no doubt that Mr. Thorp's castle possessed no definite local character, invented as the arms of the county of Northumberland a pictorial representation of the keep of Newcastle, which had then ceased to be even situated in Northumberland; the keep moreover was drawn not only in violation of all heraldic precedents, but so far out of ordinary perspective as to give the idea that it was pirouetting round on the foundation of its south-west corner, a prank which it is devoutly to be trusted it will not indulge in when the Society of Antiquaries is assembled within its walls.

Mr. Stephen Sanderson, the present Clerk of the Peace, has continued to use the invention of his predecessor. There can be little divergence of opinion as to the desirability of discarding so very modern and extraneous a badge; the difficulty is to know what can be legitimately put in its place. If a county badge only is required the castle on the seal of William de Beverley, *differenced* as it is with the figures of Oswald and Cuthbert, may have sufficient *couleur locale* for the purpose; if anything further is desired the only course open seems to be to follow the example of Kent and Middlesex, and revive the traditional arms of the Northumbrian kingdom that had its seat at Bamburgh.

It so happens that two traditional coats are ascribed by the heralds to King Oswald, and it is one of the curiosities of heraldry that the Bishop of Durham should bear one of these, viz., *azure a plain cross between four lions rampant or*, instead of the similar coat, *azure a cross patonce or between four lions rampant argent*, that is associated with the name of St. Cuthbert.<sup>7</sup> The other arms of King Oswald blazoned as *paly of eight or and gules* have their foundation on the passage in Bede where he mentions that after the king was slain at Maserfield his body was conveyed to Bardney Abbey, in Lincolnshire, and his banner of gold and purple hung up over his tomb.<sup>8</sup> The monks of Bardney

<sup>7</sup> Tonge's *Visitation*, edited by Mr. Longstaffe in *Surtees Society's Publications*, 41, p. 31. The distinction between the two coats is forcibly illustrated on the obverse and reverse of the palatinate seal of Bishop Tunstall.—*Surtees's Hist. of Durham*, I, seals, plate VI. 3, 4. The use by the Bishops of Durham of the secular instead of the ecclesiastical coat is, after the transference of their palatine jurisdiction to the Crown, as difficult of justification as their continuing to place a coronet round their mitre.

<sup>8</sup> Bede *Historia Ecclesiastica* lib. III. cap. xi. The same coat as this attributed to Oswald, was borne, for no apparent reason, by the Cistercian abbey of Bindon in Dorsetshire, which supplanted an ancient nunnery of unknown origin.

would naturally, up to the Dissolution, show a banner to the people as that of St. Oswald ; but it says something for the genuineness of their relic that they do not appear to have decided how the fragment had been attached to the staff, since Camden describes it as 'a banneroll of gold and purple, interwoven *paly* or *bendie*.'<sup>9</sup> Camden's followers settled this coat to have been *paly*, and assigned it in their fashion to Bernicia, giving the very much more suspicious cross and lions to Deira, and the two are often drawn among the 'arms of dominion' of the King of England in the heraldic collections of the early sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The County of Northumberland represents to-day, after the waxings and wanings of thirteen centuries, the old Bernician state that rose round the basalt rock of Bamburgh ;<sup>11</sup> and whatever doubts may be cast on the origin of the banner of eight red and gold stripes ascribed to the king who made Northumberland a name to be ever honoured in Christendom, it forms a coat as illustrious as it is simple,<sup>12</sup> and one that can have no rival among a people really proud of the history of their county.

Oswald's wife was a West Saxon princess ; can she have sought refuge in her own country after his death, as Ethelburh did in Kent after the death of her husband Edwin, and founded this religious house ?

<sup>9</sup> Camden *Remaines concerning Britaine*, ed. Philipot, 1637, p. 206.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. *Harl. MS.* 6823. The town of Tynemouth, it will be remembered, bears the arms ascribed to St. Oswin, *gules, three crowns or*.

<sup>11</sup> Neither a diminution of area nor a loss of independence affects the right of a country to its armorial ensigns ; the *Kongresowka* or mock kingdom of Poland, manufactured by the Congress of Vienna, retains the white eagle of the ancient Republic, and the Prussian province of Hanover the white horse of its former sovereigns.

<sup>12</sup> The advantages of a simple combination of colours easily produced for purposes of decoration are sufficiently obvious, 'The colours of a province, dukedom, or freetown,' Dr. Woodham remarks in his valuable account of the *Heraldry of the University of Cambridge*, 'so far from excluding ordinaries, are almost confined to them. Compare for instance, Hungary, Austria, Bavaria, Angoulême, Brabant, the French and Belgian tricolors, &c. The canton of Friburg bears *sable* and *argent*, that of Zurich *argent* and *azur*, the former *per fesse*, the latter *per bend sinister* ; and a better example of the intrinsic property of ordinaries could scarcely be found : the colours would be perfectly distinct in the field, and answer all the purposes of rallying points.'—*Publications of Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, No. IV. p. 21.