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MEDIAEVAL SHIPS

H. H. Brindley

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The MARINER'S MIRROR

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MEDIÆVAL SHIPS.

No. V., PART I.

By H. H. BRINDLEY.

IN THE MARINER'S MIRROR, Vol. I., No. 2, pp. 45-46, I described certain XIVth and XVth Century representations of craft having two or more turns of rope passed round the stem. These were from two different seals of Edward, Earl of Rutland, Admiral of England, 1391; seal of Richard Cletherowe, Admiral of the West, 1406; two different seals of Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter, Admiral of England, Aquitaine and Ireland, 1416-26;

east window of Malvern Priory Church (glass of 1440-60) in which the stem ropes are seen in the ship borne by St. Jude ; seal of Sub-Admiralty of England, XVth century (probably of reign of King Edward IV.) ; seal of Tenterden, Kent, XVth century ; and an unidentified seal, almost certainly of the XVth century, in the R.N. College Museum, Greenwich. Since the account of these curious stem ropes appeared several suggestions have been made (Vol. I., pp. 92, 93, 120 and 121) as to their meaning, and therefore it may be of interest to readers of *THE MARINER'S MIRROR* to mention some examples of this unexplained fitting which have been noticed since my article appeared, and also to attempt a summary of the speculations which have been made as to their meaning. It may be said that there is no reasonable doubt that the stem ropes were a real fitting, their representation is too widespread for them to have been merely a fancy of artists and seal engravers. Moreover they are depicted in a manner so uniform that they give the impression of a fitting represented accurately in all main respects, though more or less conventionally.

The examples of stem ropes quoted above occur between 1391 and 1500. An examination of the other English seals bearing ships in the British Museum to the close of the XVIth century has not furnished any others. With the kind assistance of M. Auguste Coulon, Keeper of the Seals, I have recently examined all that bear ships at Les Archives Nationales, Paris. Of seals with ships engraved up to 1600 the collection has 28 French and 11 of other countries besides Great Britain. None of the ships on these have stem ropes. There are at least 60 British seals bearing ships up to the close of the XVIth century (the total number is probably much greater, but I have found no more at present), and only 7 have the stern ropes. The great majority of the seals up to 1600 belong to the XIVth and XVth centuries, in which were engraved all the examples with stem ropes, so their representation on seals is not common.

I am indebted to the Editor of *THE MARINER'S MIRROR* for his note (Vol. I., p. 120) that stem ropes are represented on the ship of the gold noble of King Edward III., for I had overlooked their presence on this well-known coin. Since his note appeared I have examined the nobles and other mediæval coins bearing ships in the British Museum and in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, with the results tabulated below. I have to thank Mr. G. C. Brooke, of the Coins and Medals Department of the British Museum, for much kind assistance in this enquiry.

1

EDW.III.NOBLE 1346-51

2

EDW.III.NOBLE. c.1360

3

EDW.III.NOBLE. c.1360

4

EDW.III.NOBLE. 1369-77

5

EDW.III. HALF NOBLE

6

RICH.II.NOBLE

7

HEN.IV. NOBLE. c.1413

8

HEN.V. NOBLE

9

HEN.VI. NOBLE

10

HEN.VI.NOBLE. ANGEL.

11

12

EDW.IV. NOBLE.

13

RICH.III.HEN.VII.ANGEL.

14

Reign.	Coin.	When issued.	Number of turns of rope round stem.
Edward III.	Noble	1344	3 (probably)
"	"	1346-1351	3
"	Half noble	1346-1351	2, or 3
"	Noble	1351-1360	3, or 2 (occasionally), or 0 (rarely)
"	"	1360-1363 (approximately)	4, 5, 6, or 7
"	"	1363-1369	2, or 3
"	"	1369-1377	3
Richard II.	"	1377-1399	3
"	Half noble	1377-1399	2
Henry IV.	Noble	1399-1413	3
"	"	c. 1413	4
Henry V.	"	1413-1422	
		1st issue	4
		2nd "	4
		3rd "	3, or 4
		4th "	3
"	Half noble	1413-1422	2, or 3
Henry VI.	Noble	1422-1461	3
"	"	c. 1460	4
"	Half noble	1422-1461	2, or 3
"	Angel	1470-1471	2
Edward IV.	Noble	1461-1483	2, 1, or 0, or (rarely) 3
"	Half noble	1461-1483	2, or 3
"	Angel	1461-1483	2, or 0, or (rarely) 1
"	Half angel	1461-1483	1, or 0
Edward V.	Angel	1483	2
"	Half angel	1483	0
Richard III.	Angel	1483-1485	2
"	Half angel	1483-1485	0
Henry VII.	Angel	1485-1509	
		Early issues	2, or 0
		Later "	0
"	Ryal	1485-1509	0
Henry VIII.	"	1509-1547	1 (?)
"	Angel	1509-1547	0
Mary Elizabeth	} Angel and Ryal }	1553-1603	0

18

19

From this table it will be seen that the stem ropes on the gold coinage cover a longer period (1344 to c. 1490) than the recorded examples from seals and painted glass (1406 to c. 1480). Fig. 15 (Richard II.), Fig. 16 (Henry V.), and Fig. 17 (Henry VI.) are photographs of nobles in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and illustrate the ship (in whose form there is little variation throughout the series) and the stem ropes. Figs. 1 to 14 are sketches of the stems of the ships to show the variation of the ropes. As Figs. 15-17 illustrate the general features of the ship, in Figs. 5 and 6 alone are the details of the forestage given. It is six-sided always, or nearly always, throughout the series. The forestay and bowsprit (if present) are also omitted in most of the sketches.

On the other hand, the number of planks shown is that on the coins. It will be noticed that Figs. 4 and 6 and 15 show an embattled forestage; this is characteristic of the last issue of King Edward III., and disappeared with the end of the heavy coinage of King Henry IV. The presence or absence of an anchor cable (Fig. 4) will be referred to later on.

Taking the whole series, we find the number of turns of the stem ropes is greatest in the coinage of King Edward III. (The lower numbers on coins of half-values, as, *e.g.*, Fig. 5, are probably due to the difficulty of inserting details on small pieces, and may be disregarded.) The turns are often four in nobles of the House of Lancaster and after that decline, to disappear entirely in the reign of King Henry VII., though the ryal of King Henry VIII. has perhaps one stem rope. Not only this, but they show a kind of decadence in their latter days; thus in the Lancastrian period we see them begin to be confined within the outline of the stem and thereby lose the appearance of being really passed round it. I am not sure that this feature does not exist in some of the earlier coins, but it is conspicuous in the later ones (Figs. 8, 9, etc.). Fig. 10 is from one example in the British Museum, the stern ropes and planking are badly confused, and it looks as though the engraver did not understand what he was representing.

A similar confusion appears in a seal of Thomas Beaufort, 2nd Duke of Exeter, Admiral of England, Aquitaine and Ireland, 1416-1426 (Brit. Mus. Seal xliii. 138), which I have described on p. 46 of *THE MARINER'S MIRROR*.

In the Angel of King Henry VI. the stem ropes appear as flat bands (Fig. 11), and from King Richard III.'s time onward they are always thus. Also one of the ropes is often distinctly bigger

than the other, as shown in Fig. 14. With regard to the possibility that the ropes appearing without strands might be the result of wearing of the coins, I was assured by Mr. G. C. Brooke that the examples quoted here must have borne plain bands when issued for circulation. The general impression given by the whole series is that in the earlier coins the artist was representing, though perhaps imperfectly, something which ships really carried, and this something persisted in a conventional form on the coins after the fitment had ceased to exist in real ships.