

X. *Observations on the First Common Seal used by the Burgesses of Bristol. By the Rev. JAMES DALLAWAY, F. S. A. In a Letter to HENRY ELLIS, Esq. F. R. S. Secretary.*

Read 4th December 1823.

College of Arms, London, Nov. 29, 1823.

DEAR SIR,

I OBSERVE, that several communications respecting municipal Seals have been formerly made to the Society, and am consequently induced to address you upon the subject of *one*, which presents a fair claim to their notice.

The first municipal Seal now extant, which was used by the commonalty of the burgh of Bristol, is no less curious for the excellence of the engraving, as a work of art at the time of its execution, than the historical design, concerning which, I request to submit some Observations which have occurred upon a careful examination of it.

I have referred the adaptation of this design to a single event in the history of Bristol, of importance enough, as I now beg to suggest, to have been thus commemorated; when the privilege of using a Seal was first conceded to the burgesses, by King Edward the First, as lord of the castle, in the early part of his reign.

Upon an inspection of the more ancient Borough Seals, I believe that it will be found, that the device of a castle is peculiar, in a great degree, to those which were under the jurisdiction of a feudal lord, from whom they derived all their municipal privileges, and that the representation of a castle was retained upon those seals as evidence of their original dependance, long after their liberties were confirmed.

The seal under consideration, (Plate VIII. fig. 1.) is circular, having a diameter not exceeding three inches, cast in a composed metal, the basis of which is brass, and very skilfully intagliated or engraven. The Device is a Castle, having a high portal, or gateway, inserted between four towers rising from the banks of a river, and surrounded by a wall. The tower on the left hand is considerably larger than the others, intended to represent the keep. It has three tiers of circular arches; that on the right hand, does not exceed half the dimensions of the keep, upon the top of which is placed a warder blowing a trumpet: the other two are low and diminutive. Of the great gateway, the arch is circular, and the door of timber frame has ornamented hinges of iron, but there is nothing to mark a portcullis. I have given a more minute description, because I have good reason to think that a representation of the castle of Bristol, as extant when the seal was made, was purposely intended. The earliest Seal of the city of Norwich bears a similar resemblance to its contemporary castle. The legend is engraven in the Lombardic character, "SIGILLVM. COMMVNE. BYRGENSIVM. BRISTOLLIE." But the obverse is the immediate subject of this disquisition. This is doubtless an equally exact representation of the other great gate of the ancient castle, which rose, flanked by towers, above the ditch into which the river Avon was admitted, and by which means, upon any disagreement with the burgesses, their maritime vessels might be seized and impounded. At the end of a wall is a lofty circular arch, having a high embattling or embrasure, upon which stands a man with his arm held out, and as if beckoning with his forefinger to a ship or large vessel rigged with a single mast and sail, and a pilot steering it with a rudder projected from the side,^a rather resem-

^a The most ancient rudder by which the ship was guided, in the time of the Romans is called by Virgil "*clavus*," (in distinction from "*remus*,") and was attached to the side of the ship.

"Ipse sedens *clavumque* regit, velisque ministrat."—Æn. l. x. 218.

And in the 9th plate of the Bayeux tapestry (published by the Society) the pilot holds the rudder in one hand, and the sail in the other. Upon the Trajan column, the *clavus* appears to have been likewise attached to the side of ships, and it is probable, that

bling a broad plank, than the rudder of later usage. A similar form may be traced in the earliest delineations of the Norman æra.

Legend : SECRETI . CLAVIS . S^V . PORT . NAVITA . NAVIS
 ^b PORT . CVSTODIT . PORT^o . VIGIL . INDICE . P^oDIT .

“Secreti clavis sum portus. Navita navis
 Portam custodit. Portum vigil indice prodit.”

“I am the key of the secret port. The pilot steers the helm of the ship. The warder points out the port, with his fore-finger.” The arch-way and tower are intended to represent the secret port large enough to admit vessels of considerable size, as an inlet or slip, immediately communicating with the larger or common port of the town, and occasionally serving the purposes of protection or annoyance.

To whatever circumstance this device, evidently historical, may indisputably owe its origin, it was certainly the prototype of all the City Seals, however varied (as the building of the castle itself varied) in their mode of describing the circumstance; and likewise of the Arms of the City.

There are strong coincidences by which I am confirmed in an opinion, that the following event, which took place in 1275, gave occasion

this usage prevailed during the whole period of the Roman empire, and that it was transmitted by them to the conquered provinces. That the Normans adopted the form and place of the rudder from them, the Bayeux tapestry affords us several instances, with some variation, indeed, in its lower part. See plates i. ii. vi. vii. viii. ix. And in illuminations of a MS. of Henry Knighton. C. C. Coll. Oxon. D. 4. f. 5.

^b “Portam navis” is translated (*meo periculo*) at the steerage or helm of the ship, for I am unable to adduce any instance of its having been so used either in classic or monkish latinity. Such a pleonasm as “navita navis” can scarcely have been intended, and it was not the fact, that the pilot kept the gate (*of the castle*). The play upon the words “*porta* and *portus*” was too delightful to have been rejected by a rhyming monk; and he therefore used the former in a sense for which he had no authority. In the 14th century the *clavus* above mentioned, appears to have been superseded by a rudder affixed to the stern, more resembling those of modern usage, and as may be seen in one of the illuminations of the Froissart, in the British Museum, like one half of folding gates, turning upon a hinge.

for this representation. This seal was used jointly for public acts, and for deeds issued by individual burgesses.

The first mention I have seen of a common seal of the burgesses, is in the charter granted them by King Edward III. in the 47th year of his reign, 1373, for the choice of a sheriff. "Sub sigillo communi dictæ ville Bristol;" but this circumstance does not prove, that the common seal was then first made, but rather, that it had been previously extant.

I will now subjoin the historical fact, as related by the chroniclers of that age.

A large ship, which, by stress of weather, had been driven about, in the British channel, was discovered, when becalmed, (*expansis velis*) hovering at the mouth of the Avon, by some pilots (*cives not nautæ*). Walsingham says only four, who were in small boats. The ship excited the greatest astonishment both from its size and furniture, and the certainty that persons of great consequence were on board. The *cives* (pilots) induced them by promises of safety, to enter the harbour of Bristol, for it was not possible, that they could have compelled them by actual force. Wykes, it is true, says *puppim ipsam cum totâ sarcinâ capientes, invitos perduxerunt, intrinsecus,*" (into the creek and water-gate, of the castle,) that is, after they had perceived that they had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and that all opposition would be useless. But Speed, from T. Walsingham, says only, that they were surprized.

Almeric de Mountfort had taken his sister, the daughter of the great Simon Earl of Leicester, (slain at the battle of Evesham,) accompanied by certain ladies, knights, and priests, with an intention of landing her on the Welsh coasts, and giving her in marriage to Leoline, or Llewelin, Prince of North Wales, who was then at war with King Edward the First. The treachery, or successful manœuvre, was the piloting of this ship, carrying, possibly, the marriage portion of the bride, with other splendid furniture, into the creek or *secret port* of the castle, instead of the *open port* of the town; and there surrender-

ing the prize, into the hands of the king himself, who, it may be inferred, was at that time keeping his court within his castle of Bristol.

The lady was treated with the courtesy, and the men with the savage barbarity, peculiar to that æra. Wykes relates, that these “*cives*” of Bristol gave “*prædam ipsam non ignobilem Domino Regi, triumphali lætitiâ;*” and it is borne out by these circumstances, that the device or delineation of this achievement was represented upon the common seal of this burgh and port, and a superscription was added in monkish Leonine verse, obscure in itself, excepting that it be allowed to allude to this historical fact in particular; and it was then, first of all, confirmed by the royal authority.

In Peter Langtoft’s Chronicle,^c Almerike de Montfort is said to have been condemned by the parliament, held at Northampton. The whole family of Simon de Montfort had effected their escape into France. He gives an account of the transaction above alluded to, with a certain variation of some of its circumstances; but those are not less applicable to the device of this seal. A metaphrase may be more convenient for the present purpose; the original being subjoined in a note.^d

^c “Almerike ov Montfort deprived was þere
And þe tressure that he had in kepýng.”

Edit. Hearne, p. 222.

^d “The next zere followand of Edward coronment;
Leulyn of Walsland, into France he sent
Ðe Montforts doughter to wedde, her frenses all consent,
Almirike her ledde to schýp, now ere hir went
Now they sail and row to Wales to Lewellynes,
A burgeys of Bristowe chargyd was with wines
He overtoke þere schýp, wþens hir were?
Hii said wið King Philipp to Wales wold hir fare.
What suð þis burgeys? disturbed his wensýng,
Ðe may and hir hernesse did lede unto ðe king;
Ðe mayden Edwarde toke, als he was full courteis,
In safety did hir loke, and thankid þe burgeys.
Whan Lewlyne hard say to warre sone he began,
For tene he wend to die, þat taken was his leman.”

Edit. ut sup. v.

“ In the year after King Edward’s coronation, Llewellyn Prince of North Wales sent into France to offer marriage to the daughter of Simon de Montfort, to which proposal her friends consented. And as they were now sailing or rowing towards Wales, to Llewellyn, Almerick her brother having her under his protection, a certain burghess of Bristol, who was in a vessel laden with wines, overtook the ship and demanded who they were? they answered that they were going with King Philip into Wales. What did this burghess? He misdirected their voyage by a stratagem, and took the maid and all her wedding furniture to King Edward. The maid the king took, and confined her for security, treating her with courtesy, for he was himself very courteous. The burghess he thanked and rewarded. When Llewellyn was informed of this event he prepared for war, for he was vexed mortally, at the detention of his bride.”

Trivetus, in his account of the place where Leoline’s ship was first discovered and detained, is evidently mistaken. It was near a small island called Silley, on the Glamorganshire coast, and not the rock, better known by the same name at the land’s-end Cornwall.^e

Elenor de Montfort was born in England and educated in France, married to Prince Leoline at Worcester, upon his pacification with Edward I. in 1278, “*et anno sequenti mortua est.*”^f

Such is the historical fact upon which I would ground my opinion, that it supplied the subject of the obverse of the Great Seal of the Burgh of Bristol, which, from the circumstance of its castle having been both a garrison and a royal palace, was considered during the first Norman centuries as the metropolis of the West of England. The usage of the Lombardic character in all inscriptions for a great part of the thirteenth

^e “*Comitissa de Leicester, vidua Simonis de Montfort, fill’am suam transmisit in Walliam Principi maritandam; qui suspectum iter habentes per Angliam immenso multi maris spatio, ad insulas Iduras (quæ terminos Cornubiæ respiciunt) devehuntur.*” p. 248. Sayer’s Mem. of Bristol, vol. ii. p. 70.

^f Ex registro Abbat. de Kainsham.

and the first years of the fourteenth century,^g will fix the true æra of the seal under discussion, to 1275; when Edward the First, being resident in his castle of Bristow, and having there received so acceptable a prize “*triumphali lætitiâ*,” it was very probable that he allowed an event, and the service so performed by the men of Bristow, to be commemorated upon their Common Seal as a royal boon or indulgence.

It is expressly said by Langtoft, that “*he ðankede þe burgeys* ;” and it might have been by this recognition. The royal, baronial, ecclesiastical, and municipal seals of this æra, are most of them executed with extraordinary skill and care, as to architectural representation, though those of men are beyond proportion, in this, as well as in other instances.

As I have been politely favoured with impressions in wax, taken from the ancient Seals now preserved in the archives of the city, by E. Ludlow, Esq. the Town-clerk, I am greatly obliged to him for the present opportunity of submitting them to the inspection of the Society. A description of them shall be attempted, as a continuation of the former subject.

II. This seal, which bears the full face and bust of a king crowned, crossed by a lion passant at the breast, and with a castellet on either side, is known from the legend to have been first issued by Edward I. It is likewise in the Lombardic character; *S. EDW. REX. ANGL. AD. RECOGN. DEBITOR' AP'D. BRISTOLL.* That the two castles are affixed, is an undoubted evidence that the first Edward is meant, because they appear so placed upon his Great Seal, with reference to his Queen Elinor of Castile, as also upon several others. (See Plate VIII. fig. 2.)

III. This smaller seal, an impression from which is affixed to a deed in 1352, is inscribed: “*SIGILLVM . MAIORITATIS . VILLE . BRISTOLLIE.*” (See Plate VIII. fig. 3.) It is a variation from the original already described, retaining the design.^h The ship has so far entered into the water-gate

^g The last Great Seal of England, the legend of which is inscribed in the Lombardic character, is that of Edward the Third, first used upon his claim of the crown of France, in 1338.

^h In Vincent's Collection of Drawings from Seals (MSS. Coll. Arm. No. 88. p. 42) there is a later variety, in which the quarter for France has only the three fleurs-de-lys adopted

of the castle as to conceal its mast and sail. Upon the prow is displayed a pennon, large in proportion, bearing the arms of France and England quarterly, as they were first borne by King Edward III. and the Gothic letter **B** behind it. The water-gate only of the castle, not the keep as in the former instance, is represented, and there are two warders with trumpets instead of one. On the highest turret there is a beacon, and near it a vane, upon which is a fleur-de-lys. The castle is no longer delineated as a Norman fortress; but the towers, which are lofty and slender, attached to the angles, have deep machicolations as introduced in the middle centuries after the Conquest.

IV. Is a Seal of small dimensions. (See Plate VIII. fig. 4.) Within a circle, covered with fleur-de-lys, is a leopard's face open-mouthed, with the tongue depending, and very deeply engraven. Legend; "S. MAIOR . STAPVLE . BRIST." Bristol was one of the seven staple towns in England, confirmed by King Edward the Third, in 1354, 27th of his reign, by whom it was enacted, in each of these towns, a seal should be kept by a distinct officer, styled the Mayor of the Staple.

A question may arise, whether the architectural delineations of churches or castles engraven upon Seals are mere inventions, or in some instances accurate representations of buildings at the time they were made? I submit my opinion, that an analogy to the prevailing style was always intended. Conventual seals, upon which a church is the device, cannot perhaps be proved to represent accurately, that of the Convent to which they belong, as in the instance of that of St. Augustine, Bristol, yet the arches are circular, as were those of Fitz-harding's edifice. Upon a minute examination of the series of Royal Seals, from

by King Henry the Fifth, and the beacon is omitted. The legend is "Sigillum Majoritatis ville de Bristoll." It is affixed to the following deed. "Ego Thomas Halleway de Bristollia concessi tenementum, &c. Et quia sigillum meum quam plurimis est incognitum sigillum majoritatis ville Bristoll apposui. Dat. 10 Henrici 6ti 1432." Thomas Halleway was Mayor 1434, and founded a Chantry in the parish church of All Saints, with a competent endowment, in 1450.

Fig. 1.

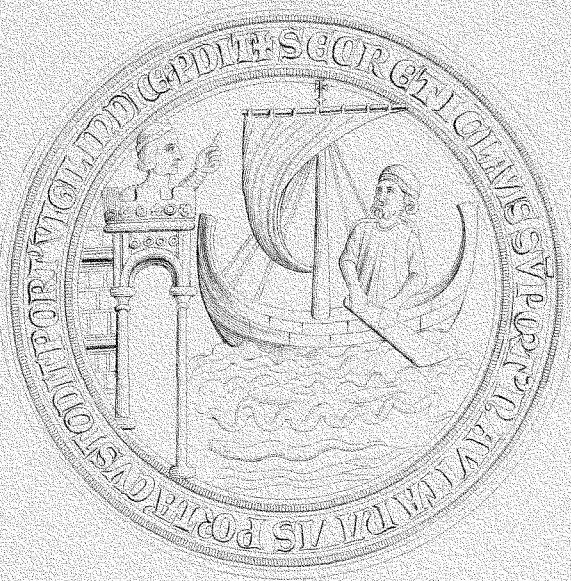
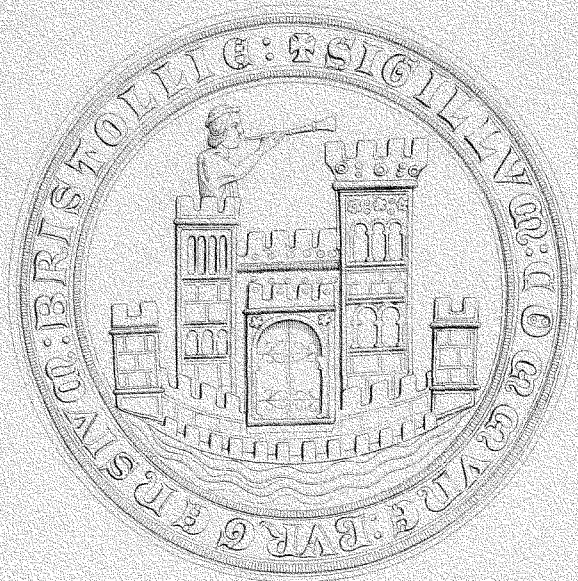


Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

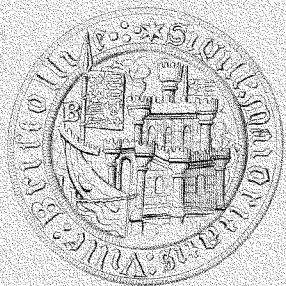


Fig. 4.



Seals of the City of Bristol

the Conqueror to King Henry VII. it will be seen that the architecture or shrine work of the thrones upon which each monarch is sitting, is at first composed of simple round arches, and that they then follow the style of the Gothic architecture, even to its final exuberance, in niches and canopies. It may be said, that they did not describe the precise form of any contemporary building, but that they sufficiently demonstrate the style.

We have still an opportunity of comparing the Castle of Norwich with the representation of one upon the Seal of that city, and shall find them analogous, in all respects, if not exactly resemblant. This reasoning may be applied to the more ancient Bristol Seal, as far as it relates to the general form of its castle, and more particularly of the water-gateway above the Avon.

As perspective or proportion were equally beyond the powers or conception of the graphic artists of that æra, we must be satisfied with a general idea only of all they intended to represent, and conclude that they described to the extent of their talents the transaction before mentioned, omitting none of the chief circumstances which if not of national were of local importance, as belonging exclusively to the History of the City of Bristol.

I am, dear Sir, very respectfully yours,

JAMES DALLAWAY.