

The Seals of the Bishops of Bath and Wells.

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I HAVE been asked by Canon Church to lay before you this evening some account of the seals of the bishops of Bath and Wells.

Before doing so, it will perhaps be as well if I indicate briefly the principal characteristics of episcopal seals generally, more especially as there is no text book on the subject of seals to which to refer you.

The seals of bishops possess one especial value that no other class of seals possesses—except the royal seals—in that they are practically *dated* examples, the engraving of the seal being coincident with the known date of the bishop's election or consecration. A long series of episcopal seals forms, therefore, a valuable comparative scale by which the approximate date of almost any medieval seal may be fixed. Nor is this all; the series also furnishes us with a chronological record of the progress of art in seals, and of the gradual evolution and development of the most elaborate seals from perfectly simple forms. That this is a very important matter is evident when we find, as we do, that the seals represent the best art of each period.

Looking at the great value of episcopal seals, it is very desirable that a more complete series should be formed than

is at present attainable. From the Norman Conquest to the Reformation, there ought to be, if we add together the number of bishops consecrated and translated—for translation always entailed the engraving of a new seal—over 700 episcopal seals, without including counter-seals, *secreta*, and others. Yet the finest collection in England—that of the Society of Antiquaries—only contains one-fourth that number. This deficiency exists, not because the seals are all lost, but on account of the little interest taken in the subject of seals generally; and proper search would certainly bring to light a great many not yet known. As an instance of what can be done let me refer you to the admirable paper by the present Bishop of Salisbury on the seals of his predecessors, communicated to the Royal Archæological Institute at their Salisbury meeting last year, and printed in Volume XLV of the *Archæological Journal*.

Episcopal seals are divisible into five classes:

- (1) Seals of dignity, with
- (2) their Counter-Seals; with which we must include
- (3) Private seals or *secreta*;
- (4) Seals *ad causas*;
- (5) Seals for special purposes, such as the palatinate seals of the bishops of Durham.

As no seals of class 5 are found amongst those of the bishops of Bath and Wells, I need not again refer to it.

The seal of dignity, or the bishop's great seal, was used for charters and other instruments affecting the rights and property of the see, or to authenticate copies of important documents, such as papal bulls, etc.

The counter-seal, or *contra-sigillum*, so called because it was impressed at the back of the great seal, was, I presume, used to prevent the seal being tampered with for fraudulent purposes. It was frequently identical with the *secretum* or *sigillum privatum*, the seal used for deeds concerning the private estate of the bishop himself.

The seal *ad causas* was essentially the ordinary business seal, and appended to copies of acts of court, letters of orders, marriage licenses, and similar instruments.

The signet, which was not necessarily an episcopal seal at all, was used for sealing the bishop's private correspondence. It is occasionally found as a counter-seal to the great seal.

Episcopal seals, like all others, consist of two parts: (1) the device or subject that occupies the field; (2) the marginal legend or inscription.

The seals of dignity are, with two or three exceptions, always pointed ovals in shape. This is not from any fanciful symbolism or supposed ecclesiastical significance, but simply because it is the most convenient shape for a standing figure, which was the chief device on the early episcopal seals, as it is, too, on many seals of ladies, which are also pointed ovals.

The pre-Reformation seals of dignity are divisible into two great classes: (1) That in which the device, or the chief part of it, is formed by the bishop's effigy; (2) that in which the device consists chiefly of splendid tabernacle work with subjects or figures of saints, the bishop only appearing as a small kneeling figure in base. Seals of the first class are found from 1072 to about 1375; those of the second class from 1345 till the Reformation, the two types occurring side by side for about thirty years.

The seals of dignity of the pre-Reformation bishops of Bath, and Bath and Wells, of which examples are known, are only thirteen in number, representing eleven bishops, two having each used two distinct seals. Few as they are in number, being about one-third only of the possible total, they very fairly illustrate the manner in which the simple seal like that of bishop Robert developed into the gorgeous canopied figures of saints that cover Bekington's fine seal.

The earliest of our series is the seal of bishop Robert (1135-66). It represents the bishop in albe, chasuble, mitre, etc., holding his crosier in the left hand, and giving the bene-

diction with his right. The field is plain, and the crook is turned inwards.

Our next seal—that of Reginald Fitz-Jocelin (1174-91)—resembles his predecessors, but the mitre is worn with the horns in front. There is a curious band across the breast, like a *pallium* with the ends cut off. The field is plain, but the effigy is larger than that on bishop Robert's seal.

We now come to two small seals used by Savaric (1192-1205), (1) as bishop of Bath, and (2) as bishop of Bath and Glastonbury. Which is the older I am not prepared to say. Each bears the same device, viz., the bishop's effigy on a plain field. The seal as bishop of Bath and Glastonbury shows a Y-shaped orphrey on the chasuble.

The seal of Joscelin, which follows, is a most charming simple example. The device is the bishop's effigy standing on a corble, and vested in albe, amice, dalmatic, chasuble, and fanon, with mitre and crosier. At the neck is the singular ornament known as the *rationale*, which is found on seals from 1189 to 1280.

All the seals described have plain fields.

We now reach an example, that of Roger of Sarum (1244—1247), which gives us the first step towards the gorgeous seals of a later period in the addition of a sunk panel on either side the bishop's effigy, containing the head of a priest. The field is also covered with a diaper of lattice-work, with quatrefoils at the intersections. The bishop has the *rationale* at the neck, and on his right, on the field, is the numeral III, the reason for which does not appear.

For the next three bishops—William Bitton I, Walter Giffard, and William Bitton II—no seals have yet been found.

For Robert Burnell (1275-92) we have two seals; (1) as bishop of Bath, (2) as bishop of Bath and Wells. Both are identical in design, and were probably cast from the same mould, the difference being in the legend. The device is a very fine and bold figure of the bishop in albe, amice, dalmatic

with orphreys and wide sleeves, fanon, and ample chasuble, with mitre and crosier. On the field of each seal, on either side the bishop, are two keys with the bows interlaced, for St. Peter, and a saltire for St. Andrew. The effigy stands on a carved corbel.

The seal of Burnell's successor, William de Marchia (1293-1302), is known only from a much mutilated impression appended to a deed at Wells of 1295. All that is left is the trunk of the bishop's figure.

Of Walter de Haselshawe's seal (1302-8) no impression is known.

The seal of the next bishop, John de Drokenesford (1309-1329), is only known to us by a much injured impression, which shows that it was of no ordinary interest. The device was the episcopal effigy standing under a rich trefoiled canopy or penthouse, without shafts. On the left side of the figure may be made out the hilt of an upright sword, with an object below like a figure with outstretched hands. The rest of the seal is unfortunately lost.

Ralph de Shrewsbury's (1329-63) seal is a fine example, and of interest as showing the increasing richness of the details. It bears a figure of the bishop standing on a rich corbel, under a cusped and crocketed canopy with pinnacles, but no shafts. The field is diapered, and has on one side a pair of keys, the bows interlaced, and on the other the saltire of St. Andrew.

Owing to the length of this bishop's episcopate, we find that the seal of his successor, John of Barnet (1364-66), is in an advanced style of art which bishop Ralph's seal hardly prepares us to expect. It is a most beautiful composition, the device being the bishop's effigy within a splendid pinnacled canopy, with elaborately panelled and buttressed side shafts. The bishop's effigy is represented three-quarter face, a most unusual arrangement on English episcopal seals, the only other example known to me being the beautiful seal of Richard de

Bury, bishop of Durham (1333-45). It is possible that both seals were the work of the same man.

Of the next six bishops no seals of dignity are known, but of the seventh, Thomas de Bekington (1443-65), a nearly perfect impression is preserved at Winchester college.

Bekington's seal is the only Wells example of the seals of my Class 2. The device consists of three elaborate niches, with pannelled buttresses, containing figures of St. Andrew in the middle, and of St. Peter and St. Paul on either side. Above is a smaller series of niches, with Our Lady and Child in the centre, and a demi-figure of an angel on each side. In base is an arch set in masonry, with a three-quarter length figure of the bishop praying, and on either side a shield of arms. That on the dexter bears the royal arms, but the sinister shield has some curious figure I cannot make out.

The seals of the six succeeding bishops are as yet unknown.

Before describing the post-Reformation bishops' seals, it will be convenient to notice a few of the characteristics of the seals already examined.

Owing to the small size of the figures, the seal engravers do not appear to have been so careful to denote minute details of costume as we find on a monumental effigy, and even the chasuble is almost always left plain. The crosier is shown with the crook turned indifferently inwards or outwards as regards the figure, and is also found held in either hand, and thus disposes of the silly theory that bishops and abbots may be severally identified by the way in which the staff is held.

On the subject of the legends I have as yet said nothing, and now let me first remark that the style of the lettering is of especial value in dating a doubtful seal; thus we find:

- (1) from 1070 to 1175, Roman capitals, which almost insensibly change into,
- (2) from 1175 to 1215, a kind of rude Lombardic;
- (3) from 1205 to 1345 we have a good Lombardic, which gives way almost universally to

(4) a bold black letter, in use from 1345 to *circa* 1425.

This was succeeded by

(5) from *circa* 1425 to 1500, a fine close black letter, which was followed

(6) after 1500 by Roman capitals.

The legend on bishop Robert's seal is unfortunately incomplete, but it probably read :

+ SIGILL[VM ROBERTI DEI GRACIA] BATHONIENSIS
EPISCOPI.

Bishops Reginald, Savaric, Joscelin, Roger, and Burnell omit the SIGILLVM, and style themselves in the nominative. Savaric's two seals entitle him BATHONIENŒIS EPISCO[PVS] and BATHONĒ ET GLASTON EP̄S respectively. Joscelin, and presumably Roger, as also Burnell on one of his seals, style themselves bishops of Bath. Burnell on his second seal is the first to adopt the title BATHONIENSIS ET WĒLLĒNSIS : EP̄S., which was seemingly followed by all his successors. Legends were invariably given in Latin till about 1750, after which they appear in English.

The seals of dignity of the post-Reformation bishops need not detain us long.

The first of these, that of William Knight (1541-47), is of totally different style to those I have described, the ornamentation being purely Renaissance in character. In the centre is a figure of St. Andrew holding his cross and book, beneath a recess with horizontal lintel supported by triple shafts. Above is a half-length figure of Our Lady and Child, between two angels holding cords and tassels which hang down at the sides of the central subject. In base, held by two angels, is a shield of the bishop's arms—*per fesse, in chief a double-headed eagle rising from a demi-rose, in base a demi-sun in splendour.*

Knight's successor, William Barlow (1548-53) used a seal of somewhat similar character. In the centre, under a square-headed recess with rayed pediment and supported by two

baluster-shafts, is a figure of St. Andrew holding a large cross and book. The side spaces are filled in with flower work, and in base is a shield of the bishop's arms.

No seals of the next seventeen bishops have come under my notice.

The seal of Charles Moss has a somewhat elegant shield of his arms impaled by those of the see, surmounted by a mitre; and this device is followed, with the least possible degree of ornament, by bishops Law, Bagot, and Lord Auckland, whose seals may safely be pronounced to exhibit the lowest style of degradation of seal-engraving. The last of the series, that of the present occupant of the see, Lord Arthur Hervey, exhibits much more enrichment, and has the spiritual and secular jurisdiction symbolised by a key and crosier placed in saltire behind the shield. The field is also diapered, and the lettering of ornate character.

We now come to the counter-seals, with which may also be included the private seals or *secreta*, the use of each being interchangeable. Of pre-Reformation examples only ten are at present known. The earliest of the series is that of Reginald (1174). It is a small pointed oval bearing simply an effigy of the bishop, with the marginal legend:

+ RAINAVD D&EIL GRACIA BATHONI&EENSIS &E;PISCOPVS

This is the usual type of counter-seal in use from 1185 to 1207.

Our second example, that of Joscelin (1206), is an instance of the next type of counter-seal which was in use from 1205 to 1414. The device consists of the figures of SS. Peter and Andrew holding up a seat or throne on which is Our Lady and Child, with, in base, under a cusped arch surmounted by a tiny model of a church, a half-length figure of the bishop praying. The marginal legend is:

+ HII : TIBI : PATRONI : SINT : IOS&E;ELIN&E; : BONI

The next example, that of Roger of Salisbury (1244), is of the same type as Joscelin's seal, but plainer. The device is

St. Andrew crucified, with the *Manus Dei* above, and a half-length figure of the bishop praying in base. The legend is :

+ ΩΑ : ΙΥΒΕΤ ΑΝΔΡΕΑΣ . . | ΛΙΝΕΝΟ ΒΙΒΕΤ ΤΗ ΓΡΑΣ

The counter-seal of Robert Burnell (1275), which is our next example, is only known from a much injured impression appended to a deed at Wells of 1290. In the centre were sitting figures of SS. Peter and Andrew, and in base under an arch the bishop praying. The legend has gone, all but two or three letters. It is to be hoped that a perfect impression of this fine seal may come to light.

The fifth of our series is the beautiful counter-seal of John de Drokensford (1309). It is divided into three tiers, the central of which contains SS. Peter and Andrew under pointed arches : above is our Lady and Child sitting under a cinque-foiled canopy ; and in base under a cusped arch is a three-quarter length figure of the bishop praying. The legend is partly destroyed :

* SERVANT' INDEMPNEM Ε : ΩΙ

Two fragments of this seal are appended to deeds of 1321 and 1328 at Wells.

The only known impression of the counter-seal of Drokensford's successor, Ralph of Shrewsbury (1329), is appended to a Wells charter of 1344. It is unfortunately mutilated. The device consists of three beautiful canopies with figures of Our Lady and Child, and SS. Peter and Andrew, and under an arch in base the bishop praying. The legend is all broken away. Possibly this is the bishop's seal *ad causas*, but the question cannot be decided until other impressions are forthcoming.

All the six examples I have just described are pointed oval in shape. The remaining four of the series are circular.

The first of the round seals is the *secretum* of John de Barnet (1364). It bears three canopies with figures of St. Paul in the centre, between a king and queen holding books.

In base is a shield of arms—a *saltire* and in chief a coronet with three *fleurons*—supported by two griffins. Legend:

S' IOHANNIS DE BARNET

The figure of St. Paul proves that this seal was engraved for John de Barnet while archdeacon of London, before his election as bishop of Worcester in 1361; and the royal figures therefore probably represent Ethelbert and his queen.

Our next example, the *secretum* of Ralph de Erghum (1388) was certainly made for him before his consecration as bishop. Device: St. Anne teaching the Blessed Virgin to read, in a traceried compartment, cut away on one side to admit a suppliant figure of Ralph de Erghum. In base is a shield of arms, bearing three chaplets. Legend:

sigillum: radulphi: de: erghum

The counter-seal or *secretum* of John de Stafford (1425) is somewhat larger than the two last described, being $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter. It displays two eagles (in allusion to his Christian name) holding up a large shield of arms—on a *chevron* within a *bordure engrailed* a mitre. Legend:

[Si]gillum: joh̄is: stafford: bathoniensis & wellensis e[pi]

There also exists appended to a deed of the bishop when lord chancellor, in the British Museum, a small signet bearing the same arms as on his *secretum* and a legend which cannot be read, the only legible word being STAFFORD. The lettering is in Lombardic characters and is one of the latest examples of such on an episcopal seal.

Of the post-Reformation seals of this class I have only met with the two signets used by Richard Bagot, bishop from 1845 to 1854. One bears a shield of the arms of the sees of Bath and Wells quarterly, impaling Bagot, the other a mitre and three shields for Bath, Wells, and Bagot arranged in cross.

Of seals *ad causas* only a few examples have been found. The single medieval example is that of John de Harewell (1367-86). In the centre are St. Andrew and St. Peter, and

above Our Lady and Child, all under ogee canopies with sprigs at the sides. In base under an arch is a full face three-quarter length figure of the bishop in cope and mitre with his crosier, praying. Legend :

s' iohis : de[i : gra] : b & Well ep[i : ad] : cau[fas]

The only other old example is that of Gilbert Berkeley (1560-81). It bears a figure of St. Andrew sitting on an elaborate throne, with flower work at the sides, and in base an ornate shield of the bishop's arms. Legend :

+ SIGILLVM * GILLBERTI * BARCKLEY * BATHON + ET +
WELLEN + EPI + AD : CAVSAS

The seals *ad causas* of four recent bishops, viz., Law, Bagot, Lord Auckland, and Lord Arthur Hervey are the same as their seals of dignity with the omission of the legend.

I have now described all the seals of the bishops of the see of Bath and Wells that have come under my notice. It is much to be regretted that the series is so incomplete, but I hope that these few remarks may be the means of bringing to light those that are not at present forthcoming.

P.S.—Since the above was in type, Canon Church has sent me for examination a deed dated 1263, with a seal of bishop William Bitton I. appended.

The seal is unfortunately much mutilated. It shows the remains of a fine figure of the bishop, in chasuble with pillar orphrey and diapered lining, on a field covered with a lattice diaper. On the dexter side of the figure is seen a church tower, surmounted by a spire; the other side is unfortunately broken away. Of the legend, only the letters "SI" of *Wellensis* are left.

The counterseal was one of great beauty. It had in the centre two figures seated side by side; clearly St. Peter and St. Andrew, as a portion of the latter's cross is seen in his uplifted right hand. In base under a trefoiled arch, flanked by pinnacles, was the bishop praying. Of the legend, all that can be read is: RMANOR.