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**The Seals of Tewkesbury Abbey**

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## THE SEALS OF TEWKESBURY ABBEY.

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HAVING recently the opportunity of inspecting Seals of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary at Tewkesbury from three distinct sources, some of them being better specimens than those hitherto known, and two (as far as I can gather) now brought to light for the first time, I have thought that a notice of them may be acceptable to the Society.

The earliest is of late 12th century work, pointed oval  $1\frac{7}{8}$  by  $1\frac{5}{8}$ , and is attached to a deed in the possession of the Vestry of St. James, Bristol, which was originally a priory, and a cell to the Abbey of Tewkesbury. The Abbey Church is conventionally shown in longitudinal section with four semi-circular arches, with sloping shingle covered roof over, and projecting curved horns at the ends. A tower rises in two stages from the centre, terminating in a weather cock; at the end of the building is a smaller erection apparently attached, and with conical roof, looking like a chapter house. Inscription in large Lombardic capitals, very obliterated:

“SIGLV . SCE . . . . .”

In the British Museum is a specimen of this seal (No. 4147), but it is described as “only a small fragment of upper part, all that remains being the top of the central tower of the Abbey Church ornamented with projecting curved horns and topped with a weather cock.

LEGEND: + SIG . . . . . IS . . . . .”

The deed referred to above is an indenture made on the Feast of St. Andrew, 1374, between Lord Thomas,<sup>1</sup> Abbat of the Monastery of St. Mary, Tewkesbury, and the convent of the same place, and Brother Thomas de Morton, Prior of the Priory

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chesterton (late Cellarer), Abbat 1361—1389.



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of St. James, Bristol. "In witness whereof the said Abbat and Convent have put their seals to the part of this indenture remaining with the said parishioners, and because the seals of the parishioners are to many persons unknown, the said parishioners have procured the seals of the Deanery and of the Commonalty of the town of Bristol to be put to the part of the said indenture remaining in the possession of the said religious men, and the said Dean and Commonalty at the special request of the said parishioners have put their seals to the part aforesaid." The seal of the Abbat (attached to the same deed) is pointed oval, 2 ins. by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ins. The Abbat stands holding a pastoral staff in his right hand and a book in his left. The Inscription is very much defaced and illegible, the field is filled with delicate scroll work of the 14th century. The specimen in the British Museum, No. 4152, is described as "very imperfect. The Abbat standing on a corbel (?) lifting up the right hand in benediction, in the left a book.

LEGEND: DEI GRA ABBAS S . . . ."

Another seal of an Abbat (Henry Beoby) is mentioned in the British Museum catalogue (No. 4153) as "only a fragment. Pointed oval, the heads of the Virgin and child under a carved canopy."

The third seal is of the 13th century and is pointed oval, 2 ins. by  $1\frac{3}{8}$  ins. The Virgin and child are seated on a throne with panelled pinnacles at the back and panelled arms. The Virgin is turned to the right and holds her child on her left knee looking towards her. The arm of the chair on the sinister side has a curious appearance; the wax being flattened resembles a dove or bird alighting on the arm of the chair, but on closer examination this is seen to be accidental. In the base under a trefoil arch the Abbat kneels in prayer, the base of the chair shewing on each side with trefoliated panels.

Legend in Lombardic capitals between plain borders:  
 ". . ILL ABB'IS ET CONVE . . . THEWKESBVRY."

This beautiful seal is on a deed in the possession of the Bristol Museum and Library (No 57). Thomas,<sup>1</sup> Abbat of the Benedictine Abbey of Tewkesbury, appoints Brother Richard Worcestre, Prior of St. James, Bristol, to take possession of the Church of St. Philip and Jacob in their name and receive the tythes, &c., which church was canonically appropriated to the monastery of Tewkesbury by the Lord Henry, Bishop of Worcester,<sup>2</sup> and confirmed by his Chapter. The deed is dated at Tewkesbury, 20th August, 1393.

Seal (No. 4) is identical with the British Museum specimen 4148. It is pointed oval, about 3½ ins. by 2 ins., and is of the 15th century. It is thus described in the Museum catalogue: "In three heavily-canopied niches the Assumption of the Virgin, standing with hands uplifted in prayer, within an oval vesica of clouds upheld by an angel above it. On the left, St. Peter with nimbus, book and keys; on the right, St. Paul with nimbus, sword, and book. Each saint slightly turned to the Virgin. Over the central canopy a smaller niche containing the Trinity. In base an angel holding in front a shield of arms; a cross engrailed (Tewkesbury Abbey) supported by two lions couchant guardant addorsed. Legend in black letter:

"Sigillum commune ec . . . ie . . . ncte.  
Marie de Tewkesbury."

Dugdale's *Mon. Angl.*, vol. ii., plate 9, fig. 3.

The inscription on the present specimen is entirely destroyed.

Seal No. 5 is pointed oval, 2½ ins. by 1½ ins., and is of the 15th century. The specimen in the British Museum (4150) is described as "only a fragment containing the central part with Virgin and two saints." The present example is in far better condition, and may thus be described:—

In three canopied niches the Annunciation of the Virgin,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Parker, Abbat 1389—1421.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Wakefield, Bishop 1375—1395.

the angel kneeling before the Virgin, who stands with hands clasped. Label from angel's hand, "Ave Maria." The lily pot between the two figures and the sacred dove above. On the left St. Andrew with nimbus and cross; on the right St. James with pilgrim's hat and staff. In base a demi-figure of mitred Abbat holding crosier. On dexter side a shield, three lance rests or clarions (Robert, Earl of Gloucester, founder of St. James' Priory, Bristol). On the sinister side a shield, lion rampant.

The inscription is entirely destroyed. A similar seal is shown in Dugdale's *Monasticon*, vol. ii., p. ix., and described as that of Henry, Abbat of Tewkesbury, temp. Henry VIII., from an impression in the Chapter House, Westminster Abbey. But the seal under consideration is attached to a deed dated 1485, and I can trace no Henry as Abbat before Henry Beoly (1509). The discrepancy may be accounted for if we suppose that Abbat Henry, in making a new seal, retained the old subject and substituted his own name for that of his predecessor. Such alterations of names on seals are not unknown.

The two seals (4 and 5) are attached to a lease dated 20th April, 2nd Richard III. (1485), from the Lord Abbat<sup>1</sup> of the Monastery of St. Mary, Tewkesbury, to John Forster, of certain tenements situate in Stepe Street, in the suburbs of Bristol. They are in the possession of the Bristol Charity Trustees, to whom I am indebted for inspection, and my thanks are due to Mr. Walter A. Sampson for kindly taking impressions of the whole series.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Cheltenham, Abbat 1481 - 1509.