

REMARKS ON AN ANCIENT SEAL OF THE
BOROUGH OF LEICESTER.

By the kindness of Llewellyn Jewitt, Esq., F.S.A., from whose extensive collection it is lent for exhibition, I am enabled to lay before our Society an impression of an ancient Seal of the Mayoralty of this Borough, hitherto, I believe, entirely unknown to local antiquaries.

It is not known at what period the municipal authorities of Leicester first used an official seal, but as early as the year 1262, as we learn from one of the Guild rolls quoted in Mr. Thompson's "*History of Leicester*," p 76, there was "paid for a new seal made for the Guild 4s. 6d.," showing that such a seal had been in use before that date; whilst a number of deeds of different periods, having the common seal of the Corporation, the cinque-foil, affixed, are in the muniment room at the Guildhall, but no seal like that now exhibited has been met with.

The Seal is circular in shape, and the design consists of a figure of the Virgin and Child, seated within a richly-decorated niche or canopy, having at the base a shield of the Town Arms, the cinque-foil, the whole surrounded by the inscription in mediæval letters, "*Sigill meioratus ville leycestrie*." From the architectural details it may probably be assigned to the reign of Edward the Third.

Mr. Jewitt states that the seal is just as it came into his possession, and that he does not know from what ancient deed it has been taken.

The Town Arms, heraldically described as "*Gules, a cinque-foil, ermine*," were adopted, as is well known, from those of the Norman Earls of Leicester, the first of whom, Robert de Bellomont, rebuilt and endowed the Collegiate Church of St. Mary de Castro; and the second, Robert Bossu, was the founder of the Abbey of St. Mary de Pratis.

Whilst both of those religious establishments were distinguished heraldically by the cinque foil as being the arms of their respective founders (encaustic tiles bearing this badge have been dug up within the precincts of both those places), the chief object on the official seal in both cases was, as was customary, the figure of the patron saint, consisting of a seated figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary, holding the infant Saviour in her lap; whilst, according to usage, the cinque-foil was either used as a counter-seal, or appeared on a shield at the base of the design, under the feet of the Virgin, as it is shown in the seal now under notice. A charter to the burgesses of Leicester, granted by Robert Fitz-Parnel, the fourth Norman earl, which is still in the borough muniment room, had formerly appended to it the earl's seal, but which has now unfortunately

become detached from the deed and lost. The reverse of the seal as engraved in Throsby's "*History of Leicester*," shows the cinque-foil as it has continued to appear on the common seal of the Corporation down to the present day.

It may not be out of place to remark, in passing, that the obverse of this seal, as given in Throsby, represents the earl as accoutred, most absurdly, not like a Crusader, in chain mail, conical helmet, and surcoat, but rather like a jovial farmer of the Georgian era, riding to market, in a square cut coat, breeches and boots, or gaiters, and wearing on his head something much more like a carter's hat than a knightly helm!

Probably during the lapse of time the wax of the seal had become rubbed, and the details of the armour obliterated.

The outline of the figure is more accurately represented in a pen and ink sketch in Mr. Carte's MS., which has lately come into the hands of Messrs. J. and T. Spencer, and which, I believe, will be laid before this meeting.

As regards the design of Mr. Jewitt's seal, I would venture to suggest that as the borough authorities adopted for their common seal the arms borne by their liege lord, the Earl, so, when they required a second seal to be used by the Mayor for official acts, in his personal capacity as the chief magistrate, they adopted a seal similar to that used by one or other of those two religious houses in the town before mentioned.

And now as to the time when this seal ceased to be used.

It is well known that after the siege of Leicester, in 1645, spoil was carried away by the royal army, and the hall-book of the Corporation records, *inter alia*, that "Mr. Mayor's mace *and divers of the town seals* were taken away by the unruly soldiers." The matrix of the seal now under notice doubtless disappeared at that time, as we find the following order made at a Common Hall, held on the 22nd August in that year:—"It is also agreed that a Common Seal for the Corporation, a Seal of office, *and the Mayor's Seal*, according to the former seals lately used for the town, and taken away also at the taking of the town, shall be provided at the town's charge."

And in the Chamberlains' account, amongst charges for the new mace, &c., we have the following entry:—

"Item, paid for two seals, viz., the Common seal of brass *and the Mayor's seal of silver*, £1 6s."

An old silver "Mayor's" (or Statute) Seal is still preserved, although it has long ceased to be used.

Some years ago I sent an impression taken from it to the late Mr. Doubleday, of the British Museum, who informed me that in his opinion the workmanship was of the time of the Commonwealth, but that the design was in all probability roughly copied from a seal of much earlier date.

A sulphur cast of this seal is now shown, and it will at once be seen, on comparison, not only how correct was the surmise of Mr. Doubleday as to its being copied from an earlier seal, but also that it is evident the original from which it was copied, although the work was very unartistically executed, was that from which Mr. Jewitt's seal was impressed, and as that silver seal was provided in 1645, it seems equally clear that the matrix of Mr. Jewitt's seal was in use up to the time of the siege, and that it formed part of the spoil carried off by the cavaliers, and in all probability found its way, like the mace, into the melting pot.

It is greatly to my regret that although I have been a member of the Society for many years, my official engagements on the day on which the bi-monthly meetings are held have prevented my attendance on any occasion, and I have now to trespass upon the kindness of my friend, Mr. Thomas Nevinson, to lay these few remarks before you on my behalf.

November 24th, 1873.

The REV. J. H. HILL, F.S.A., in the chair.

MR. JOHN BARRS was elected a Member of the Society.

The following antiquities, &c., were exhibited:—

By MR. TRAYLEN: A small bronze vessel, found about one mile and a half from Castor, in Northants., in an open ploughed field, and the fragment of a celt pierced.

By the CHAIRMAN: Some engravings of churches in Rutlandshire.

By MR. W. G. DIMOCK FLETCHER: The following books, pamphlets, &c.: Collections for Leicestershire [Bibliotheca, Topographica, Britannica, vol. 8], with MS. notes by Mr. John Nichols, purchased at Mr. J. B. Nichols' sale. LEICESTER JOURNAL, Friday, April 4, 1806, containing information about Daniel Lambert. A Terrier of Lands of Mr. Coppin, in Barrow and Quorndon, August 1651. Two early editions of the poems of John Cleiveland (native of Loughborough), 1654 and 1677, with portrait. Civil war tracts: A declaration of the Lords and Commons . . . concerning the miserable distractions and grievances this kingdom now lieth in, by means of Jesuiticall and wicked councellers now about his Majestie; printed July 13, 1642. A declaration of the Lords and Commons . . . upon the statute of 5 H. 4. . . . As also his Majestie's letter to the Sheriff of Leicestershire to execute the said commission according to his Majestie's proclamation; July 1, 1642.—July 4, 1642: The declarations of the Lords and Commons, or five severall passages of state [relating to Leicestershire]. A diary, or an exact journall faithfully communicating the most remarkable pro-