

Interpreting the Winchelsea Town Seal



Winchelsea
Archaeological
Society



The front cover shows the reverse or counter seal; above is the obverse side. Both are wax impressions of the metal seals. They are thought to date from the late 13th century. **The first point to note about the town seal is that it is rather special:**

"This magnificent seal is tense with the spirit and beauty of Gothic art, and not only constitutes one of the finest examples of seal engraving at its best, but a striking contribution to medieval art. The designs in each case are excellent conceptions (that of the reverse being also one of remarkable beauty), finely balanced and centred, and executed with high skill and delicacy. The ship is well drawn, vigorously presented, and studiously detailed, whilst the scene depicted aboard is one of life and activity. Upon the reverse, the exquisite architectural ornament is superbly traced, and although in the impression available the figures in consequence of their minuteness are not particularly lucid, they are sufficiently so to enable us to recognise the extreme skill in which they are presented. The seal as a whole is almost perfect in its artistry, but would have been greatly enhanced by a stronger relief."
Pedrick G, Borough Seals 1904 p 128.

Introduction

A medieval seal was used to prove that a document was really from the perceived sender. The term seal is usually applied to the impression left by the stamping of an engraved metal die or 'matrix' which has been pressed into a material such as wax, but it is also used to refer to the matrix itself.

Winchelsea has two parts to its Seal - the obverse or ship side (see inside front cover) and the reverse or counter seal (on the front cover). The reverse seal shows various images within a range of building structures.

The obverse or ship side is similar to seals from other members of the Cinque Ports, whilst the reverse side is quite unique to Winchelsea.

The Cinque Ports first came together to provide Ship Service to the English crown during late Saxon or early Norman times, specifically during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042 to 1066). By 1190 Winchelsea had begun to assist Hastings in meeting their commitment.

The Obverse or Ship Side

The **earliest known version** was described in an email of June 2021 from Professor Nicholas Vincent to the Mayor, David Page:

"I also attach, from a document now in Bruges, what is likely to be the very earliest seal of Winchelsea, here attached to a document that can be

dated only approximately between June 1237 and October 1272, I would guess from the handwriting somewhere closer to the 1250s or 60s."



It describes itself as 'The Seal of the Barons of the Lord King, of Winchelsea' (SIGILLVM BARONV' DNI REG <DE W>INCHELESE).

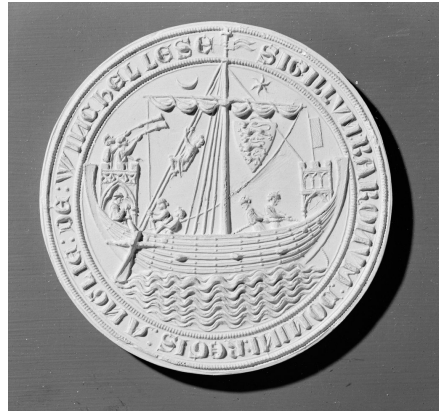
The explanation for why this seal was required comes from Pratt (2005) p 33 based on Williams 'The Heraldry of the Cinque Ports' (1971) p59.

"The return of Rye and Winchelsea to the English Crown (Henry III 1247) from Fecampe would be highly likely to require the manufacture and adoption of a new seal for the Ancient Town of Winchelsea. Although the seal... preserved by Winchelsea Corporation to this day is more likely to be a version made about fifty years later, (when Winchelsea moved to Iham Hill) the design probably originated in 1247."

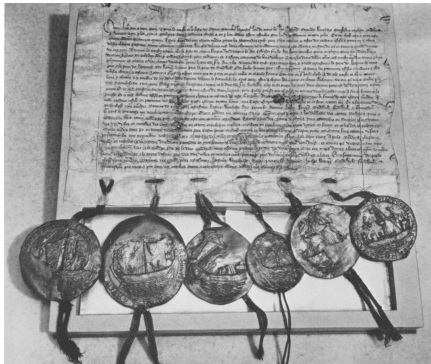
This 1247 seal shows a ship similar to the vessels shown in the Bayeux Tapestry; they are all Viking-style longships with side rudder.



for Winchelsea in 1296, 13 ships with officers and 563 seamen for 15 days per year (Pratt 2005 p62). The following photograph is from the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.



The Inscription,
SIGILLVM:BARONVM:DOMINI:REGIS:A
NGLIE:DE:WINCHELLESE” may be
translated as “The seal of the Barons of
the Lord King, of Winchelsea.’



The second seal of the Corporation of Winchelsea, early 14th century, is similar to that on the inside front cover. It is included in the 1392 Cinque Ports’ Composition shown above which displays the wax seals of six of the head ports. The photograph is from The Heraldry of the Cinque Ports by Geoffrey Williams(1971) p35.

Each seal is attached to the document with a cord. These all appear to be the ship side of the various Cinque Port town seals. This is appropriate for ports which supplied ship service to the King;

It shows an early fourteenth century sailing vessel on which a quarter-rudder is slung on the starboard side. In the bow two men are hauling on the anchor cable which runs aft to a windlass worked by two other men. This is the earliest representation of a windlass on a seal. Size: 11 mm x 94 mm (3.7 inches in diameter).

There are two castles - fore and rear. The steersman is at the rear guiding the side rudder. Above are two trumpeters with fanfare trumpets, which are associated with royalty. To the side of the mast top are a crescent moon and

etoile or star. These indicate a connection with the Crusades, as seen in the seal of Richard 1st.



**Richard 1 - 1157-1199 -The Lionheart
- Led the Third Crusade**

In the field is the coat of arms for England - three lions.

The Reverse or Counter Seal

Now to look at the Winchelsea reverse or counter seal which “depicts ecclesiastical subjects” (Williams p60).

The reverse is one of those instances, rarely met with, which consist of two or more matrices, one or more supplying the architectural detail and another the statuettes, or subject. Pedrick p128.

From the description by Pedrick (1904)

“The design of the reverse presents, in the first place, an intricate architectural scheme, both xillth

Gothic and castellated in kind, within a beaded border and upon waves, comprising a tower of two stories, the lower having a pointed archway and that above a narrow rectangular window, over which rises an angular embattled tower, with houses to represent the town in the base on either side.

On the left hand of the central tower are two niches, with pointed arches and pinnaced and crocketed canopies, a tall, pinnaced and crocketed spire, surmounted by a cross, standing behind that on the right hand; and on the right hand of the tower three similar niches, with another tall spire behind the central.

On the embattled tower is the half-length figure of a watchman bearing a lantern; in the lower story of the central tower is the seated figure of a saint, before whom kneels a suppliant with hands raised, and in the higher another saint is seen, standing and holding a palm branch.

Of the two niches on the left, that on the right contains the seated figure of a saint with a fawn leaping up to him and a tree ; that on the left a huntsman with a horn in one hand and a bow in the other. The three niches on the other side contain together a representation of the martyrdom of S. Thomas a Becket.

Over the embattled tower is a flag charged with three chevronels ; before the watchman on the right is a

shield of the arms of England ; on one of the left niches a bird ; and upon a bevelled edge in two rhyming hexameter verses the legend : —
EGIDIO. THOME. LAVDVM. PLEBS. CANTICA.

PME. NE. SIT. IN. ANGARIA. GREX. SVVS. AMNE. VIA.

By far the greater part of the ancient town indicated by the houses at the base has completely vanished. The spires allude to two of the three ancient churches of Winchelsea.

The saint who is seated is doubtless intended for S. Thomas of Canterbury, the patron saint of the town, and the one standing for S. Leonard, one of the minor dedicatories of the place.

The two niches on the left illustrate the legend of S. Giles, the other minor patron. S. Giles is the patron of the woodland. The legend here conveyed relates, that the saint, having sought solitude in the forest, there lived in prayer and contemplation, his sole companion being a hind, who nourished him with her milk. One day, when the forest rang with the shouts of the chase, an arrow was aimed at his pet, and to save her S. Giles stretched out his hand and received the bolt himself.

The royal shield alludes to Edward I; the three chevronels are the bearings of Hubert de Burgh, the Justiciar of Hen. III., who vanquished the French

off Sandwich with a small squadron of Cinque Port ships. “

These features will be discussed as follows:

- 1. Structure - gothic arches, tower and base**
- 2. Niches - St Giles, St Thomas, in central tower**
- 3. The top - watchman, banner flag, bird**
- 4. Rhyming legend**
- 5. Identification of the tower above the waves?**

1. Structure

The most distinctive parts of the seal face are the gothic niches, two on the left and three on the right of the tower. The stonework is reminiscent of the Piscina and Sedilla (basin and seats) on the south wall of the Chancel of St Thomas's Church (at point A in the floor plan on the next page from Martin p 75). The stonework is shown in the photograph on the next page. Note the “crocketed gables and pinnacles” - Cooper p124 - similar to those in the seal.

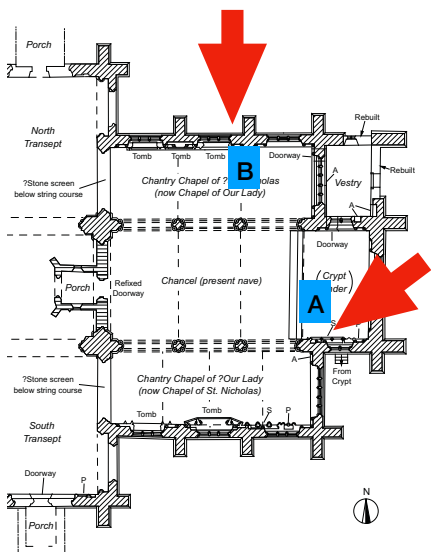
Could these be the inspiration for the seal niches that represent the churches of St Thomas and St Giles?

Croquets, in the form of stylized carvings of curled leaves, buds or flowers, are used at regular intervals to decorate the sloping edges of spires, finials and pinnacles (Wikipedia)



Between the two sets of gothic niches on the seal is a tower of two storeys; above this, an angular embattled tower.

Attempts have been made to identify this tower with the lost towers of Winchelsea, the Roundle or Harbour-Master's tower, the square tower in the church graveyard or the tower in the Greyfriars church, but there is not enough evidence to make a positive identification. So is there any similar image in the church? In the north aisle separating the effigies are towers (B).



North Aisle, St Thomas's Church

Note the stone tracery beneath the effigies casting a shadow looking like houses.

It does appear that the designer of the seal has incorporated features from the interior of St Thomas's - the Sedilla in the chancel and the tower in the north aisle. So it is doubtful if we can make

any connection between a real tower and the one depicted just above the water, unless it refers to Old Winchelsea.

The effigies were originally thought to have been salvaged and moved to their site from Old Winchelsea, but recently (Blair et al 2000) they have convincingly been shown to be early-14th century in date - the seal date.

2. Niches

The two niches on the left of the tower represent St Giles Church - the less important of the two churches in Winchelsea. It existed on the western side of Rectory Lane (the A259) serving the poorer parts of the town and was decommissioned in the early 1540s.

Cooper p143 describes it as consisting *"of a nave, chancel, one aisle, and a small tower with one bell."*

"St Giles was a hermit or monk active in the lower Rhône most likely in the 7th century. A town that bears his name grew up around the monastery he purportedly founded, which became a pilgrimage centre and a stop on the Way of Saint James." (Wikipedia).

The painting shows St Giles with an arrow in his hand; it was aimed by huntsmen at the hind. The forest is represented by the sloping tree. St Giles recovered from his injuries and later became a patron of the physically disabled, with pilgrims flocking to his shrine.



Detail of Saint Giles and the Hind, by the Master of Saint Giles c. 1500.



The three niches on the right of the tower represent St Thomas's Church, of which part is still standing - the east end and ruins of two transepts. There was thought to be a central tower with a spire as shown in the Corporation seal.



One of the earliest known depictions of Becket's assassination, c.1175–1225.

In the centre of the three niches Archbishop Becket is at the altar in Canterbury Cathedral (1170) taking communion. The cup or chalice is more clearly visible on the original Winchelsea matrix. The armed assassins are in the left and right niches; other faces are visible behind St Thomas.



In the centre of the tower on the second storey is “A saint standing full-length, holding a palm-branch” according to Pedrick.

This saint is identified by Pedrick as “*S. Leonard, one of the minor dedicatories of the place.*” St Leonard’s church was in Iham, which

was separate from but adjacent to Winchelsea on Iham Hill. The ruins of the saxon church of St Leonards lie beneath the ruins of the mill next to the Beacon. St Leonard is usually thought of as the patron saint of prisoners - hence the chains in his left hand as shown in the following image.



St Leonard standing holding a palm in his right hand and chains in his left, from... ca. 1500-1527. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The image depicts St Leonard, a revered saint known for his compassion and dedication to prisoners, in an awe-inspiring pose. With his right hand raised, he holds a palm symbolising martyrdom and victory over death. In his left hand, he gently grasps chains that

represent liberation and freedom. Created between 1500-1527 by the renowned Italian artist Marcantonio Raimondi

It is difficult to make out the details of this figure, so any theory as to identity is speculative. Would the Winchelsea seal have contained a reference to a church in Iham, which was not part of Winchelsea? However the palm branches are associated with Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem on a donkey.

The lower niche in the tower "Contains an ecclesiastic, seated, to the r. and a suppliant, with hands uplifted in prayer before him, on the l. - British Museum"

Two people appear on the left with one sitting on the right. The website winchelsea.com describes this as representing the Annunciation, announcing Jesus's birth and arrival. If Mary is represented then that could explain why this part of the matrix is removable. It may have been damaged as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries and shrines during Henry V111th reign.

3. The top of the Tower

The **watchman** at the top of the tower also has christian connotations - a prophet - Jesus told His disciples to "watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." Mark 14:38 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." Matthew 24:42 - the second coming! This may appear fanciful to

some, so alternative solutions will be examined.



The hat or half-length jacket suggests:

1. **A watchman.**
2. **Gervase Alard.**
3. **Master James of St George.**
4. **Archbishop Robert de Winchelsea.**

It is unlikely to be the King as no crown is included. The Winchelsea depiction of a watchman with a lantern seems unique. The nearest seems to be this seal from Bristol. The Great Keep of Bristol Castle shows a figure on top of the tower but blowing a trumpet.



The first seal of Bristol

Image from "Civic Treasures of Bristol" by Mary E. Williams, published by City of Bristol, 1984.

An instance of a watchman with a lantern is at Lausanne Cathedral. All year round, from 10:00 pm to 2:00 am, the night watchman, wearing a big black hat and carrying a lantern, steps out to the bell tower railing to serve as a living clock for the people of this picturesque city on the shores of Lake Geneva.



At least the hat seems to resemble the figure on the Winchelsea seal. There is a similarly shaped hat for the watchmen of Prague.

In 1285 King Edward passed the Statute of Winchester which ordered towns to appoint watchmen to patrol gates and walls at night. Watchmen carried lamps and had to arrest suspicious strangers and take them to the constable in the morning.

They called the hue and cry if they discovered a crime. The Statute provided that **anyone**, either a constable or a private citizen, who witnessed a crime shall make hue and cry, and that the hue and cry must be kept up against the fleeing criminal from town to town and from county to county, until the felon is apprehended

and delivered to the sheriff. **All able-bodied men**, upon hearing the shouts, were obliged to assist in the pursuit of the criminal.

It was the primary legislation enacted to regulate the policing of the country between the Norman Conquest and the Metropolitan Police Act 1829.

Winchelsea was a walled town with gates at which 4 or 6 men at each gate were required to be present between sunset and sunrise. As a town so closely associated with Edward 1, it would have been expected to adhere closely to the regulations and perhaps to be a model for others to copy.

If the purpose of the seal is to demonstrate the faithfulness of Winchelsea to the King, then perhaps they were one of the first towns to appoint official night watchmen for whom the hat was part of their uniform.

The lantern is important. Why is it there? A signalling lantern to guide ships into the harbour? Or perhaps to show people in Winchelsea that their watchman was present and they were safe.



Gervase Alard was born in Winchelsea; his tomb is in the south aisle of the St Thomas's.

Admiral Sir Gervase Alard, Bart. (1270–1340), was an English knight and naval commander who was appointed Admiral of the Cinque Ports Fleet and Admiral of the Western Fleet of the English Navy. He served under King's Edward I, Edward II and Edward III of England from 1296 to 1340.

He is known as the first serving naval officer to be granted in 1303 a commission to the rank of Admiral of an English fleet. In 1294, he was the first Mayor of New Winchelsea.

He is wearing a surcoat, an outer garment that was commonly worn in the Middle Ages by soldiers. It was worn over armour to show insignia and help identify which side the soldier was on.



Edward 1 instructing Master James - Is the hat a mark of his appointment as Master of the Royal Works in Wales?

Master James of Saint George (c. 1230–1309) has been described as "one of the greatest architects of the European Middle Ages". He was largely

responsible for designing and building King Edward I's castles in North Wales, including Conwy, Harlech and Caernarfon (all begun in 1283) and Beaumaris on Anglesey (begun 1295).



Master James statue at Beaumaris Castle - note the cloak together with a set square and dividers.

Among other features introduced by Master James in Beaumaris castle was an innovative defensive design:

“the outer gate was non-aligned with the inner gate meaning any intruder who penetrated the outer gate would be forced to transverse an open area on a predictable rightward path to attempt to reach the inner gate, exposed to intense defensive attacks the entire distance.”

Both **the Winchelsea Strand Gate** and New Gate have this feature.



Strand Gate

Welsh castles have circular towers but not Caernarvon. Recent work (2010) by historian Abigail Wheatley suggests that the design of Caernarfon was an assertion of Edward's authority, but that it drew on imagery from Roman sites in Britain. The intent was to create an allusion to Arthurian legitimacy for the king.



The Roman pharos at Dover

Edward 1 was very interested in King Arthur. He and his wife went to Glastonbury in 1278 for re-exhumation of the bodies of King Arthur and Queen Eleanor.

The Eagle Tower at the western corner of Caernarvon Castle was the grandest. It has three turrets which were once surmounted by statues of eagles. The tower contained grand lodgings, and was probably built for Sir Otto de Grandison, the first justiciar of Wales - a regent and deputy presiding over the court of a Norman or early Plantagenet king of England.



There is an archival gap in the career of Magistro Jacobo (James) between **1275** when he is last recorded in Savoy and **1278** when first recorded in Britain. Marshall has suggested that he may have been working at this time for the family of Otto de Grandison who were linked through his younger brother to the Manor of Iham.

After Edward 1 had paid his visit to Old Winchelsea in **1277**, he sent Sir John Kirkeby, Bishop of Ely and Treasurer of England, to view a plot to make a new town; and thereupon a site was fixed, on which a new town should be built. That site was a hill, then called Iham, partly within the manor of Iham which then belonged to William de Grandison and Isabella, his wife.

William was Otto's younger brother.

So could Master James have advised on the defences of New Winchelsea on his way to Wales? Maybe not the lantern holder. So who was?

The photograph below shows Archbishop Giovanni Columbo, wearing a galero with ten green tassels on each side. He was Archbishop of Milan from 1963 to 1979 and was elevated to the rank of cardinal in 1965.

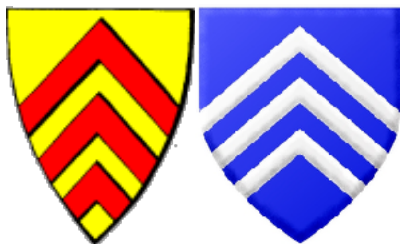


'Generally, priests, abbots and ministers have a black hat with cords and tassels, the number depending upon their rank.'
Wikipedia.

So perhaps the figure on the tower, with tassels at the back, is a minister from St Thomas's, a prior from Greyfriars or perhaps Archbishop Robert de Winchelsea, who married Edward 1 to his second wife Margaret in 1299.

What is the significance of the three Chevrons?

Cooper (p199) mentions that the banner to the left of the "watchman", bears the arms of Lewknor. Sir Roger de Lewknor held one of the original tenements in Q17 (Rookery Field townhouse) adjacent to Greyfriars. Is this enough to warrant appearing on the seal? Doubtful.



On the left are the arms of the de Clare family, on the right the Lewknor family. Those of de Clare seem a better fit to the chevron - thicker lines, smaller angle between the lines.

The three chevrons are also shown on the Faversham seal where they are described as the chevron standard of the King's Admiral, Gilbert the Earl of Clare.

The seal from Faversham is 13th or early 14th century. It "could represent the scene in 1293 when Gilbert, with the aid of the barons of Faversham, had defeated the French fleet in the Channel." However there appears to be no evidence that Gilbert was the King's Admiral or was involved in this sea battle.

Instead we turn to Pedrick on the Winchelsea chevrons and an earlier sea battle - "*The three chevronels are the bearings of Hubert de Burgh, the Justiciar of Hen. III., who vanquished the French off Sandwich, 1217, with a small squadron of Cinque Port ships. Hubert set sail to intercept the French fleet and at the resulting Battle of Sandwich he scattered the French and captured their flagship, The Great Ship of Bayonne, commanded by Eustace the Monk, who was promptly executed.*"

Williams p 38 points to the involvement of Winchelsea mariners in this battle but produces no supporting evidence. He noted that "*Hubert de Burgh's fleet was reckoned to have included a goodly proportion of Winchelsea men*". **Is this backed by any evidence?**



An 1873 illustration of the Battle of Sandwich (sometimes Dover) which was the first naval battle in Northern Europe fought fully at sea - August 1217. There is a good description of the battle in Pratt (2005) section 8 and H L Cannon (1912).

The sea battle was part of what is now called the First Barons' War. Under King John, the Winchelsea mariners became disillusioned and sided with the rebels.

From 1205 to 1208, Eustace worked for King John I of England. With the English sovereign's blessing he seized the Channel Islands and was allowed to hold them for John, while using Winchelsea as his English base.

In 1212, Eustace switched his allegiance to France and was chased out of England. When Prince Louis sailed for London, he went in Eustace's fleet. It was thanks to Eustace's help that Louis was able to capture London and the Cinque Ports. He declared himself King.

William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke (1146 or 1147 – 14 May 1219), also called William the Marshal. He served five English kings—Henry II, his sons the "Young King" Henry, Richard I, and John, and finally John's son Henry III.

In 1189, he became the de facto Earl of Pembroke through his marriage to Isabel de Clare whose father was **Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke.**

On 11 November 1216 at Gloucester, upon the death of King John, William Marshal was named by the king's council (the chief barons who had remained loyal to King John in the First Barons' War) to serve as protector of the nine-year-old King Henry III, and regent of the kingdom. In spite of his advanced age (around 70) he prosecuted the war against Prince Louis and the rebel barons with remarkable energy. In the battle of Lincoln (May 1217) he charged and fought at the head of the young King's army, leading them to victory. He was preparing to besiege Louis in London when the war was terminated by the naval victory of Hubert de Burgh in the straits of Dover.

In this battle, *"The French fleet was attempting to bring supplies and reinforcements to Prince Louis, later King Louis VIII of France, whose French forces held London at that time.*

A Plantagenet English fleet (supporting Henry III) was commanded by Hubert de Burgh and attacked a French fleet led by Robert of Courtenay and Eustace the Monk off Sandwich, Kent.

The English captured the French flagship and most of the supply vessels, forcing the rest of the French fleet to return to Calais.

*Eustace, a notorious pirate, was executed (by Stephen Trabee or **Stephen of Winchelsea**) after being taken prisoner. The battle convinced Prince Louis to abandon his effort to conquer England."* Wikipedia.

William the Marshal summoned the Cinque port mariners to take part in the Battle. They complained vigorously at their treatment by King John, but using bribes and inducements they were persuaded to support the new King (Henry 111).

William C. Wades in "The Symbolisms of Heraldry" (1898) notes that the chevron's shape resembles the roof of a house (protection). It was awarded to a coat of arms as a "reward to one who . has achieved some notable enterprise... sometimes... those who have built churches or fortresses, or who have accomplished some work of faithful service."

Does this mean that despite its flirtations with the rebel barons, Winchelsea with its service to King Henry 111, Edward 1 and 11 was protected by the King? Were the three chevrons a sort of battle honours - that the town mariners had fought for these Kings in certain sea battles? There is still much to be uncovered, but it is clear that the explanation of the chevrons is much more interesting and complex than a reference to the de Lewknor family.

Was the Bird a Dove?

Inderwick says that although the bird on the seal appears as a "huge antediluvian seagull it is a dove whose history I conceive to be as follows:

"Edward the Confessor (1042 to 1066), the Father of the Cinque Ports, bore on

the top of his sceptre the figure of a dove, emblematical of mercy and peace. The dove disappeared from the king's sceptre until Edward 1 reassumed "the emblem, bearing it on the top of his sceptre in exact imitation of Edward the Confessor, and as an intimation to the world that while bearing the same name as the sainted king he would follow him in his acts of clemency and piety."

In heraldic art, the dove is often distinguished by a small curled tuft on top of its head and represents "loving constancy and peace". This tuft is missing but the identification as a dove might be as a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Church.



4. Inscription around the seal

Round the outside of the counter seal is a rhyming legend of two hexameter verses. Its translation is disputed.

EGIDIO : THOME : LAUDVM : PLEBS :
 CANTICA : P(RO)E : NE : SIT : IN :
 ANGARIA GREX : SVVS AMNE : VIA

According to Cooper p 201, “Mr J D Parry’s translation, which, to the Rev Edmund Cartwright, seems to express the meaning as near as it can be made out, was,

‘To Giles’ and Thomas’ praise, ye people chanting pray;
 Lest in the Angarian road their flock be washed away.’

Though this rendering (of the second line) is obviously absurd, it is not very easy to arrive at the true sense.”

Amne means river. Via means road.
 Angaria means compulsory service - Wikipedia
 Grex - a group, company or crew;
 congregamini means collect into a flock, congregate.

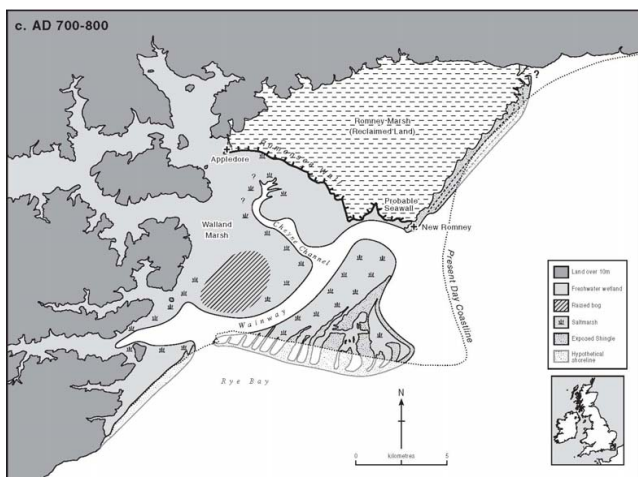
So referring to the Cinque Port ships,

angaria grex might translate as: “the fleet with its crews required by the king for compulsory service”.



The arrow marks the U.S. military base at Hampton Roads.

Cooper uses the expression ‘roadstead’, referring to the Camber, to describe the place where the fleet were dispatched and troops embarked. So could ‘pray for the King’s fleet as it congregates in the roadstead’ be a better overall translation of the second verse?



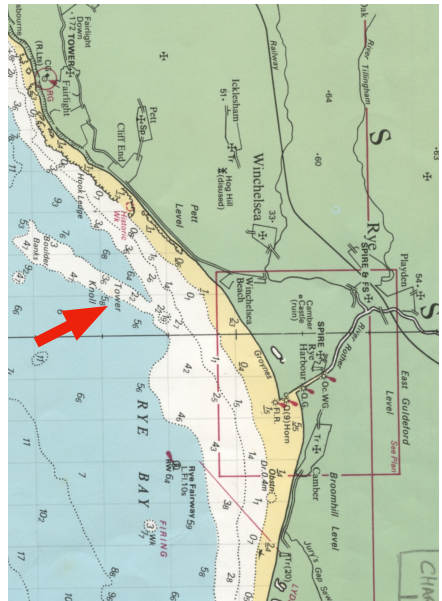
Reconstruction of Rye Bay about AD 700-800 showing an entrance to the Roads - Long et al 2006



5. Identification of the tower above the waves?

New information has appeared that may throw light on where a tower was situated. It was found in Stromness Museum on a nautical chart of the east coast of Great Britain published in 1887 by Charles Wilson (late Norie and Wilson). What is of interest are two features on a sand ridge in Rye Bay near Pett Level, called Tower Knoll and Boulder Bank; the ridge extends towards Hastings. The map on the right is from the Imray Laurie Norie and Wilson Ltd chart of 1998 - depth in metres. The ridge and the two features are still present.

The image of the tower in the seal has the sea at its base. Could it have been at Tower Knoll to warn about the rocks



at Boulder Banks and at Cliff End; was Tower Knoll the site for a fire tower

showing the southern safe extent of Rye Bay? If there was a tower here, how old might it be?

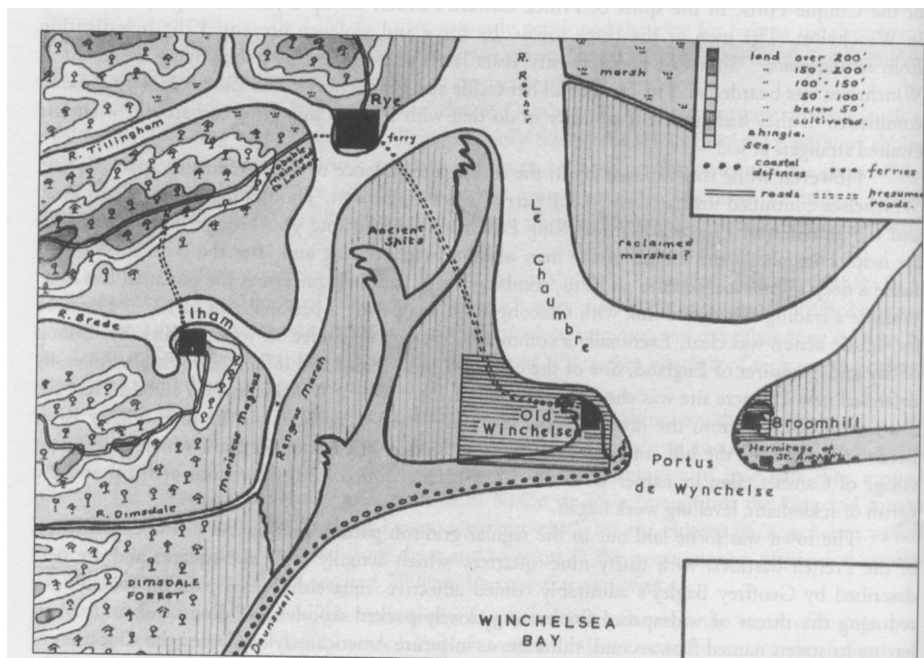
Or, could this tower be a harbour light for access to Old Winchelsea?

Malcolm Pratt's book 'Winchelsea, A port of stranded pride,' p 6, shows this unpublished diagram from Professor B N Floyd (1962). It shows not just Old Winchelsea on the left or west side of the inlet, but also the Hermitage of St Anthony on the other side of the inlet, near Broomhill. According to David and Barbara Martin (2004) the Hermitage was dedicated to the Franciscan St Anthony (canonised

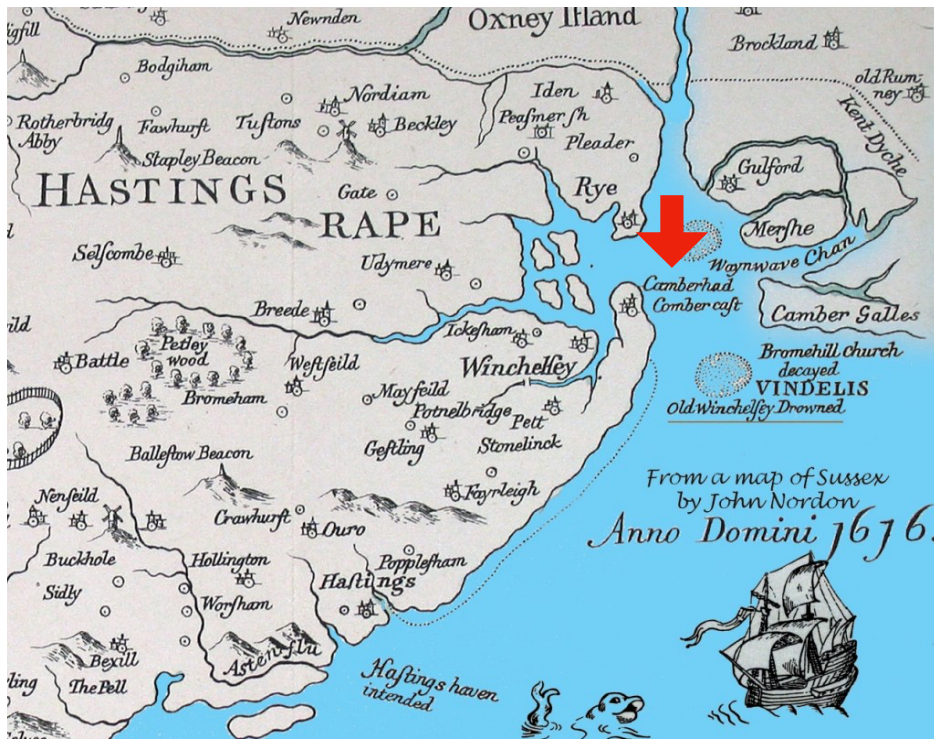
1232) for the maintaining of a light for the harbour.

The Grey Friars (or Franciscans) were established in Old Winchelsea by 1253 and when that town was washed away, the Barons of Winchelsea stipulated to Edward 1 that the New Town should have only one religious house, that of the Greyfriars.

The question arises as to whether this harbour light was linked to Tower Knoll. The building providing the lighthouse service survived until 1536, when it lay on a shingle bank called Old Camber Head. The map on the next page shows Camber Head near Camber Castle. Old



(3) Conjectural map showing the most likely site of Old Winchelsea (B.N. Floyd)



Camber Head was opposite Camber Head. and close to the arrow in a shadowy position presumably submerged.

Jill Eddison wrote that: *"In view of the complete loss and restructuring of the substance of the early medieval barrier, it is extremely difficult to accept the statement of Homan, followed by Gardiner, that the Hermitage (light) at the entrance to the port of Old Winchelsea was the same one as that which was lost with the Old Camber Head in the second half of the 16th century. Every port entrance can be expected to have had lights for*

navigation after dark, and in situations involving revolutionary changes as radical and rapid as those in this area, the lights must have been moved many times, sometimes even annually." in Romney Marsh etc by Eddison, Gardiner and Long 1998 p 75.

However the varied positions of St Anthony's do not tally with the site of Tower Knoll, which is further to the south-west. This supports the idea that **any tower light at Tower Knoll was warning of the cliffs near Cliff End**, whilst St Anthony's moved seawards following the changing harbour entrance.

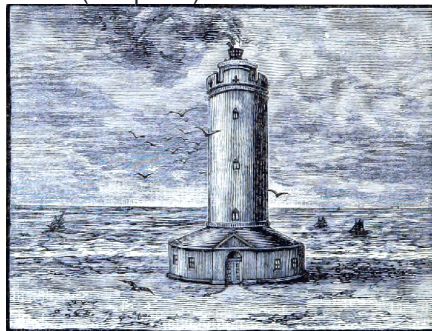
“Authority for private individuals to collect a levy from shipping for a lighthouse dates back to the 13th century when Henry III (1216-1272) issued the first Royal Patent in 1261 which allowed the imposition of light duties on shipping to pay for the upkeep of a light. These Patents were the ultimate permission of the monarch and given under the 'Divine Right of Kings'. To fail to acknowledge this authority was considered treasonable. The Patent was given to the Barons of the Cinque Port of Winchelsea who were entitled to collect two pence from every ship that entered their port. This is the origin of the entire principle by which lighthouses have been operated for centuries right up to the present: a system of taxation known as 'light dues' based on the rule that the user pays.”
https://www.pharology.eu/history/britishisles/BR05_lightdues.html

It is on the basis of this Royal Patent granted in 1261, that after the Roman pharos or fire-tower at Dover, **Winchelsea had the first harbour light in England and was the first authorised to collect light dues.**

Rye Bay has continued to be in the forefront of lighthouse development. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Dungeness was used as an experimental station by Trinity House; in the 1860s it was the first of their lighthouses to be equipped with a fog horn and the first to be given a permanent (if short-lived) electric lamp.

At first only a beacon was used to warn sailors, but this was replaced by a

proper lighthouse in 1615. As the sea retreated, this had to be replaced in 1635 by a new lighthouse nearer to the water's edge known as Lamplough's Tower. It remained in service until 1792. This Dungeness fire tower is seen below. (Wikipedia).



Dungeness Fire-Tower.

Conclusions

This booklet has grown from a talk given by Andrew Scott to WAS on 9th December 2023.

1. The Winchelsea seal is unique, complex and fully deserving of a thorough analysis to clarify its full meaning. This is a first attempt but will undoubtedly require revision as new data is found.
2. A seal demonstrated aspects of a town of which they were particularly proud, such as the churches. It is instructive to note what is not included - the town walls and gates, the cellars, shipbuilding, the three hospitals, aspects of Iham such as the Motte and Bailey castle. Instead the emphasis of the Winchelsea

reverse seal is on the churches and is full of symbolism.

3. Some features, such as the figure in the niche on the upper storey of the tower suggested to be St Leonard, are not distinct enough for confirmation.
4. Parts of the seal referred to the Virgin Mary and to St Thomas a Becket; these parts may have been damaged at the Dissolution of the Monasteries when all traces of the sites of pilgrimage (Becket's shrine at Canterbury and Mary's at Walsingham) were removed. The description noted that parts of the seal matrix for the counter or reverse seal were removable; this may indicate that damaged parts were replaced.
5. The structure of the counter seal containing the tower and gothic representations of St Giles and St Thomas de Becket appear to be based on features in St Thomas's Church - the sedilla on the south wall of the chancel, and in the north aisle the tower between two effigies.
6. The watchman at the top of the tower cannot be positively identified with anyone. Thus, in view of other biblical references elsewhere on the seal, the watchman may be a call to be alert for the second coming of Jesus.
7. It is unlikely that the three chevrons on the tower flag represent the Lewknor family. The three chevrons

look more like the de Clare family crest, and also appear on the Faversham seal. It is more likely that they represent a sort of battle honour for the faithful mariners who took part in victorious sea battles supporting the King. It may refer to the Battle of Sandwich in 1217 in which portsmen from Winchelsea were involved.

8. Even though a tower image may be seen by the effigies in the North aisle of St Thomas's church, the seal image could also represent a fire tower or Tour d'Ordre which may have existed at the Tower Knoll site off Winchelsea Beach; this is marked on nautical maps.
9. The significance of Tower Knoll and Boulder Banks is that they may be sites linked with Old Winchelsea. They unlock any investigation into the site of Old Winchelsea by narrowing the search area within Rye Bay.

Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks to David Page for the photograph and email from Professor Vincent on page 3; to Jonathan Murphy for the two photographs of the sedilla and tower in St Thomas's church on page 7; to Richard Cooper for the nautical map and to Berni Scott for her inspired editing making sense of my disjointed jottings.

Winchelsea Archaeological Society

Winchelsea Archaeological Society (WAS) was founded in 1999 at the suggestion of the County Archaeologist, Dr Andrew Woodcock, to help rectify the surprising lack of physical archaeological (as opposed to documentary historical) evidence about the layout and character of the medieval town and port of Winchelsea. At that time, despite widespread recognition of the town as a heritage site of international importance, there had been only five geophysical surveys, all of small development sites, and few excavations (none at all in the port area).

WAS became a registered charity (number 1143524) in 2011. Its main charitable aims are:

- 1) *To advance the education of the public in the heritage and archaeological importance of Winchelsea (herein referred to as “the area of benefit” by:*
 - *promoting research into that subject and to publish the useful results,*
 - *conducting or assisting surveys and other investigations of the local archaeology and history,*
 - *and by such other means as the Trustees may determine.*
- 2) *To promote for the benefit of the public the preservation and protection of features of archaeological importance in the area of benefit.*

Its recent activities have included:

- 1) Working with the National Trust as Volunteers recording and analysing 80 crates of pottery sherds recovered from Blackfriars Barn cellar.
- 2) Working jointly with FOAM (Friends of the Ancient Monuments) to organise tours of the medieval cellars each weekend during the summer months.
- 3) Developing and running monthly walks in the summer that explore new perspectives on life in Winchelsea.
- 4) A series of ZOOM or online talks during the winter months of the COVID lockdown.

Further details of WAS activities (including the cellar tours) can be found on www.winchelsea.com