



× SIGILL : WILL : I : DE : BOSCO

[*A Medieval Seal set with an ancient gem.*]

In 1856 the Seal (an illustration of which accompanies this notice) was found in a garden on the West side of Bury St. Edmund's. This Seal passed into the possession of Mr. Joseph Warren, who exhibited it at a meeting of the Institute at Norton, in 1856, and who, with his usual liberality, has placed the woodcut at the disposal of the Council. The Seal, which may be ascribed to the twelfth or thirteenth century, is an interesting example of a mediæval Seal set with an ancient gem.

When Christianity became the religion of the State, Paganism was too deeply rooted in the popular mind to give way at once; for centuries the people clung to the shrines and statues of their gods, and when in process of time these had passed away, there yet remained innumerable smaller Pagan works which could not be destroyed; every object of art represented some mythological subject, and so contributed to keep alive and sustain old prejudices. Foremost among these objects were engraved stones which, being small and

easily concealed on the person, would help to preserve the remembrance of the ancient faith without exciting the suspicion of the orthodox. In early Christian times, and down to a comparatively late period, these gems were supposed to possess particular virtues, according to the representations engraved upon them.

Mr. Wright* has drawn attention to an inventory of the Abbey of St. Albans, in which mention is made of an ancient cameo of which Mathew Paris has left a drawing and description. The Abbey also possessed many other engraved cameos. In the inventory of the ornaments in the Treasury of St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, in the year 1295, given in "*Dugdale's History of St. Paul's,*" a great number of cameos and engraved gems are mentioned. The same learned writer has given the text of a curious inventory of engraved gems and their virtues, preserved among the Harleian MSS. in the British Museum. The first on the list is a gem representing Pegasus or Bellerophon. This stone was good for warriors, and gave them boldness and swiftness; also freeing the horses of riders who carried such stones about them from disease. Mr. Warren's Seal has a spirited figure of the winged horse—no unfitting cognizance of a Norman knight, the companion, possibly the kinsman, of the Bigots.

There can be no doubt that engraved stones were held in the highest esteem during the middle ages; yet from the age of Charlemagne down to the fifteenth century the art of executing them was lost in the West: Pepin sealed with an Indian Bacchus, Charlemagne with a Serapis. In an inventory of Charles V., 1379, we find mention of cameos, but no notice of Christian emblems forming the subjects, as would certainly have been the case had the engraving been contemporaneous. Among the Archiepiscopal Seals at Canterbury numerous examples exist of antique gems used by dignitaries of the Church. Such a Seal, being the *secretum* of Thomas à Becket, is now preserved in the Public Record

* *Archæologia*, Vol. XXX., p. 444.

Office. An illustration and description of this interesting Seal is given in the "*Archæological Journal*," Vol. XXVI. It is of oval form, the device, a nude figure standing with one hand resting on a short column, possibly representing Mercury; the rim bears the legend × SIGILLVM TOME LVND. Is it mere conjecture that when the Archbishop selected this device for his secretum he was not unmindful of the office of Mercury as the messenger of the Gods? No gems, according to Mr. King, are known to exist with figures in armour or ecclesiastical costumes, or having architectural decoration; the whole skill of the engraver was confined during this period to signets in metal. This has been ably shown in an article upon Mediæval Gem Engraving, in the "*Archæological Journal*," Vol. XXI. Towards the end of the fifteenth century the glyptic art began to recover under the patronage of the Medici, themselves collectors of ancient gems. In the sixteenth century the revived art culminated; yet in the seventeenth century engraving on stones was so little cultivated that the knowledge of many of its processes was lost.

A paper upon Mediæval Seals set with antique gems, to which this notice is much indebted, accompanied by numerous illustrations, will be found in "*Smith's Collectanea Antiqua*," Vol. IV., and a more ample account of the whole subject may be seen in "*King's Handbook of Engraved Gems*," c. xxix, xxx.

The family of De Bosco (or Bois) was early established at Fersfield, in Norfolk. At the time of the Conquest, the Manor formed part of the possessions of the Abbey of St. Edmund, and soon after was granted, together with the Manors of Norton and Brisingham, by Abbot Baldwin to Roger Bigot, Earl of Norfolk. In the reign of Henry I. the Manor of Fersfield was held of the Earl by Robert de Bosco, and in the reign of Henry II., was confirmed to his son and heir William de Bosco, by Hugh Bigot, the brother and heir of Earl Roger. In the century following, the De Boscos, by marriage and purchase, increased their posses-

sions considerably. In 1298 when Sir Robert de Bosco (who succeeded his brother Gilbert de Bosco) died, he was seized of Manors at Fersfield, Garboldisham, Denston, Burston, &c., and in 1285 he had received the privileges of a pillory, assize of bread and beer, view of frank-pledge, wef and stray for his Manor of Fersfield. The eldest son of this Sir Robert married Christian, daughter of Sir William Latimer, and widow of Sir John Carbonel, of Waldingfield, in Suffolk, and died in 1311, leaving an only son, Robert, and a daughter, Alice. The son dying unmarried, the whole estate passed to his sister, Alice Howard, wife of Sir John Howard, the ancestor of the Dukes of Norfolk, who became possessed of all the Manors, Advowsons, &c., of the De Boscos.

Sir Robert de Bosco, who died in 1298, left several sons. To his third son, William, he left the Advowson of Fersfield, and forty acres of land. Subsequently, William de Bosco became Rector of Garboldisham, and afterwards Rector of Great Cornard, in Suffolk. He was alive in the year 1351, for in that year he released to his niece, Alice Howard, all his claim upon the Manor and Advowson of Fersfield, with remainder to her son Robert, by Sir John Howard. In the North nave of the chancel at Fersfield, under an arch, lies the effigy of a priest. Blomefield (who repaired the tomb) considered it to be the resting-place of William de Bosco, the Patron and Rector of the church, and probably the builder of the chancel. To this member of the family of De Bosco it is probable that the seal found at Bury may be assigned.

The family took the name of De Bosco, or Bois, from the great wood which joined to their mansion-house and was not cleared until the time of Elizabeth. Blomefield considers the family to have been a branch of the Bigots, the arms borne by the Boises, viz., ermine a cross sable, varying only in field and colour from the arms borne by the Earls of Norfolk.