



ANCIENT STEELYARD WEIGHT FOUND AT CLAYDON, NEAR IPSWICH.

ANCIENT STEELYARD WEIGHT.

(temp: XIII Century.)

COMMUNICATED BY THE
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An interesting, and as far as I am able to ascertain, unique specimen of the Weight or Equipoise formerly used at the end of the beam in that mode of weighing, called the Auncel Weight, as used in the thirteenth Century, was recently found at Claydon, near Ipswich, in the grounds of F. Hale, Esq.; embedded in the soil at a depth of something like twelve feet below the surface. From the spot where it was discovered, (by the side of the lane, near to, and leading from the high road to the church,) I am inclined to think it may have been accidentally dropped by merchants, into a then existing ditch; both the nature of the soil, and the surroundings, favour this conjecture. In no other way can I account for the Weight being found at such a spot, or at so great a depth, it having apparently remained undisturbed from the very first, and there being no trace of any ancient occupation to connect the relic with former days.

The Weight has an outer coat of bronze, very thin, and is filled with lead. At the base the surface metal is completely worn away, and the rough material appears. It weighs 2 lbs. and half an ounce, and measures in height to the top of the attachment $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Its circumference at the broadest part is $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. There has of course been a diminution from the original weight, consequent on the wearing away of the lower part, but I am unable to express any opinion as to the extent of the loss.

The Weight is bell-like in shape, and exhibits around its body three armorial escutcheons, which may be thus described :—

1. A Lion rampant (Poictou)
2. The double headed Eagle of the "King of the Romans"
(Richard II, son of King John).
3. Three Chevronels and an annulet in base.

The two former bearings are by no means uncommon, but I have been unable positively to identify the latter, and no such arms are recorded to any one in the College of Arms. The three chevrons appear on the well known shield of the Clare family, while the annulet as a mark of cadency would denote the fifth son. Some clue may I venture to think, be found in the fact that Edmund of Almaine, Earl of Cornwall, the son and successor of Richard Plantagenet, second son of King John, intermarried with Margaret de Clare, daughter of Richard, Earl of Gloucester. Margaret de Clare was divorced from Edmund in 1294 and Edmund himself died A.D. 1300. I am, however, quite unable to say *why* this Weight was impressed with this particular shield.

In a parliament at Westminster under Richard I. (1197) it was ordained that the Weights and Measures throughout the land should be uniform, and that the custody of the Assize or Standard Weights, &c., should be committed to certain persons in every City and Borough. The Weights consequently may have borne in different districts, the peculiar stamp of the chief person having authority in such matters, or have carried his arms.

Through the aperture which stands out from the upper part of the Weight, the suspending hook passed, which beside serving the purpose of a handle, was doubtless found convenient for keeping a number of such Weights together.

As to the particular use to which this Weight was put I have but little doubt. During the reign of Edward III. the town of Ipswich is known to have advanced considerably in wealth and importance, owing in a large

measure to the countenance given by the King to the wool trade. The King himself had extensive stores of this commodity in the town. Two thousand bags of wool, made up of gifts to the King, were by his authority shipped from the port of Ipswich, in the charge of Brabant merchants, in order to facilitate his designs against the French, the wool thus collected being placed under his seal. So great was his concern with regard to the wool traffic, that he allowed no merchant to export or sell wool without his express permission. An order concerning the weighing of wool in the Town of Ipswich, (37 Edward III. A.D. 1363) granted permission on the petition of "Our beloved merchant John de Wesenham," that he and his partners having much wool, hides, and sheep skins, in the town of Ipswich and its neighbourhood, might be allowed to embark them to "our town of Calais." "And therefore" the licence proceeds, "we command you, that you, with the weights and other instruments appointed for the weighing of wool in the said town

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go personally to the said port of Ipswich and weigh all the wool of the said John and his partners which are in the same place and its neighbourhood, etc." The King likewise granted to John de Portrare 184 bags of wool from the port of Ipswich in part payment of £2500 promised to be paid him for the redemption of the two Crowns of Queen Philippa which were held by him in pawn. The collection of such immense stores of wool apparently made from the adjacent villages and towns, in small quantities, would involve constant use of the Steelyard and authorized Weights, which were probably called into requisition at some special halting place in each locality that furnished its quota.

In the old Chamberlains' Accounts of the Borough of Ipswich, now in private possession (1464, 3 Edw. IV.) I find the following entry:—

Itm̄ payd for mendyng of y^e weytys in y^e Wulle hows xxj^d

Later on (A.D. 1474) it is ordered that the wool

weights of the Town shall be according to the custom of London. The Bailiffs were also especially enjoined to try Weights twice or thrice in the year. In the Great Domesday Book (*Liber Quintus*) the following regulation of an early date is laid down:—

“ffor them that use to sell by weight or mesure

“And that all psones usyng to by or sell by weight or by mesure shall have ther weights & mesurys ensealed accordyng to the Standard of o’r so’laigne lord the Kyng upon peyn of forfaiture of all suche goodes so weyed and mesured And Impsonment of the trepasour at the furst tyme And at y^e secude tyme upon payne of forfaiture of the same goodes And the body of the trepasour to stonde upon the pillory And the thirde tyme upon payne of forfaiture of the same goodes And the body of the trepasour to forswere the Town by the space of a yere and a day.”

Although the Weights used at these several periods were altogether of a different character, (seeing the Steelyard Weight, owing to great deceit practised in its use was prohibited by Statute in the 34th year of the reign of Edward III., and the even balance or scale commanded to be used in its stead) yet it is evident from the whole of the foregoing that an extensive use was made of the Standard Weight in weighing the wool, brought largely from the neighbourhood to the common depository in Ipswich, the weighing apparatus accompanying the ‘staple’ in the manner indicated. In this way I venture to think the Weight in question may have been used in the locality where found, and then lost.

Bronze equipoises of a very similar kind were in use among the ancient Romans: one having a remarkably fine head of the Emperor Hadrian was exhibited at the meeting of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology held at Bury Saint Edmund’s, January 26, 1859.

Two Steelyard Weights found near Norwich, four sided, and with the handle sloping off to a point forming an integral part of the Weight itself, and pierced by a hole for attaching to the beam, were exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries in 1832*. A similar Weight is described and engraved in the Archæological Journal

* Archæologia, vol. xxv, p. 539.

(Vol. ii, 203). One found at Lewes, without the upper portion, is figured in Appendix *E* to Lower's *Curiosities of Heraldry*, where there is a lengthy account. Though varying in form, and found in different localities, they appear in date, workmanship and material, and with slight exceptions, heraldic bearings, identical. The Rev. C. R. Manning tells me that he possesses a similar Weight, with the perforation for attachment at one of the angles. Mention is made of such a weight in Price's *History of Oswestry*: a Bronze Steelyard Weight was dug up some years ago at Toddington, Beds. (see *Gentlemen's Magazine*, vol. xiv, 3rd series, p. 49, 1863). A leaden heater-shaped Weight, impressed with the Royal Arms, was found at Croyland near the Monastery, and a bronze Weight of like form, which is mentioned with other examples in the *Archæological Journal* (Vol. xvii, p. 165) has a square perforation for the purpose of suspension, in one case in the upper part of the shield, and in the other at the lower extremity. A Steelyard Weight in the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries has around the edge the angelic salutation, *Ave Maria etc.*; this was found with another like Weight at Wharfedale in Yorkshiré.

In conclusion I have to express my obligation to Mrs. Cotton, of Silent Stréet, Ipswich, for having brought the Weight to my notice, and for so kindly furnishing me with an excellent drawing of the same with the armorial bearings, (from which my own is taken) and which together were exhibited at the recent Ipswich meeting. My thanks are equally due to F. Hale, Esq., of Claydon, in whose possession the Weight remains, for allowing me to inspect the place where it was discovered, and generally for his kind attention.

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