

The Old and New Seals

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Gosport Seal

In 1845 at a meeting of the Archaeological Institute, Sir Frederick Madden exhibited a wax impression of what he called the Common Seal of the men of Alwrestoke. This seal was used on all official documents of the Urban District Council of Gosport and Alwrestoke until 1922 when the town became a Borough. The accompanying illustration is reproduced from one in the Proceedings of the Institute, which is probably the most authentic picture of this 13th Century Seal.



Gosport Crest

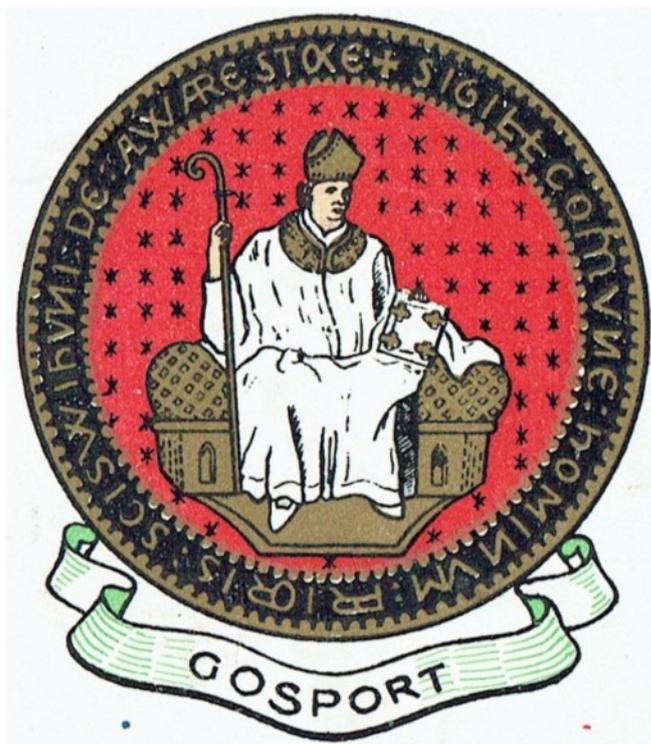
Also in 1845, Mr. J. Doubleday presented to the British Museum a plaster cast of the seal, presumably from the same wax impression. From this the Museum made a permanent cast, which is still there; it is the same size as the above illustrations, in bold relief and in excellent condition.

Common Seal of the Men of Alwrestoke

In 1606 the silver matrix of the seal was kept with a 13th Century charter granted to the men of Alwrestoke (including Gosport, Bury, Brockhurst and Forton) by Andrew de Londonia, Prior of the Covent of St. Swithun. Their right to use a common seal depended on this charter. Since 1606 there is no further record of the matrix, and it is not known what became of it, but Sir Frederick Madden in 1845 thought that it must have been used not long before then to make the wax impression which he held. A very full description of the charter is given by Dr. L. F. W. White in his book 'The Story of Gosport.'

The Latin inscription round the seal reads 'SIGILL' COMMUNE : HOMINVM : PRIORIS : SCI SWITHVNI : DE : ALWARESTOKE.' (Each letter N is reversed). It has been translated 'This is the Seal of St. Swithun's belonging to the Tenants of Alwrestoke.' Opinions differ on whether the seated figure is Saint Swithun or Prior Andrew de Londonia. The book with embossed cover which he is holding is probably the Gospels.

The Gosport Historic Records and Museum Society is obtaining an impression from the British Museum cast and this will be on view to members in due course.



Gosport Heraldic Crest

The following explanation of the Gosport Seal, designed by Mr. A. Martin Snape, was made in 1922 at the time of the Incorporation of the new Borough of Gosport and was adopted by the Council as the official version.

The story is legendary and there are several alternatives, one of which being that it was King Stephen who was caught in the storm. The earliest known document calling the town God's Port is dated 1682 but earlier records refer to 'Gosport' and/or 'Gos eport . '

'In the year 1140 A.D. Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, took shelter from the storm, which was raging outside, in the harbour, and beached his vessel on the western shores. Out of the thankfulness which was in his heart he called the name of the place 'God's Port.'

Henry of Blois was the youngest brother of King Stephen, and the grandson of William the Conquerer, soldier and priest, castle builder, and collector of works of art, he encouraged all those pursuits which alone can bring prosperity. The original Parish Church of Alverstoke and Farnham Castle were built by him and the Hospital of St. Cross at Winchester is a lasting memorial to his name.

The country was bordering on anarchy in his time, some fighting for the King, while others upheld Queen Matilda. No man's life was safe, but Henry of Blois gave sanctuary to the plough. This meant that all who were engaged in agriculture were as safe as the priests at the altar. It meant the difference between life and death to the husbandry, and ensured the country freedom from starvation.

The ship on the Seal represents Henry of Blois sailing into the harbour. Many another seaport town has chosen a ship for its seal, but almost invariably with sails furled.

It is thought that the ship with sails fully set is more fitting as a good omen for our town, which by obtaining its Charter, may ride into the open seas of brave adventure and leaving behind many of the difficulties and limitations, find peace and prosperity.'

Jesse F . Lee, J.P. Charter Mayor (4th November 1922)
An explanation of the Gosport Seal that was produced in 1922

