

The Priory Seals

Did you notice our society badge at the top left corner of the front cover of this journal? As the "Augustinian" name implies we base many of our officer titles and activities on the words that would have been used by the Augustinian Prior and Canons, who occupied the Bridlington Priory for over 400 years up to the dissolution of the monastery by Henry VIII in 1537. In 1922 we adopted one of the Priory seals as the basis for our badge.

The shape of seals in medieval times was significant. Ecclesiastical organisations used elliptical shaped seals with pointed top and bottom like our badge. Seals of this shape were also used by noblewomen, but most seals in use were circular. The seal was used to impress an image into sealing wax on important documents such as charters. The sealing wax was usually red, although green wax was used sometimes, most notably for government Exchequer documents. In effect the seal was the medieval equivalent of a signature.

The Bridlington Priory 1467 seal is described by the late Rev. C V Collier, an Augustinian, in his study of original medieval Burton Agnes Hall documents as, "Pointed oval about 2 x 1 3/8". A figure of the Virgin crowned holding the holy child, within a niche; below is a figure kneeling before a prie dieu". A prie dieu is a small desk to hold a book whilst kneeling in prayer. There is also a photograph of this seal in his work.

Bridlington Priory seal of 1467



Virgin and Child

Figure kneeling before a prie dieu

However, the 1514 seal is described by Collier as, "Pointed oval, 1 x 1 3/8" diam. Standing figure of the Virgin and Child. The Virgin is crowned, and the child has a circular nimbus, within a niche with elaborately crocketed canopy, and sides divided into two lights with traceried tops. The inner sides of the central niche is ornamented." There is no mention of the prie dieu

and there is no prie dieu on the seal we have chosen as our badge.

There was also a seal with two adult figures in a double niche and our society "Prior" has this seal on his chain of office. A replica of the seal attributed to Prior Gregory, c.1180, has four heads in circles arranged on the traditional "pointed oval" shape.

The Prior probably had his own personal seal for use on his personal letters, etc. It is likely that the Priory seal was broken and remade with differences when a new Prior was elected. This would explain the differences in the descriptions above. During a "visitation" by the Archbishop in 1321, effectively an audit of conduct and procedures, we hear that "Peter de Wynthorp had resigned the office of Prior and his resignation had been accepted by the Archbishop, his seal of office ought no longer to remain unbroken in his possession, and that having summoned him to chapter they were to receive the seal from him, and in the presence of the whole convent break it, and reduce it to a mass (et in massam redigatis)." Indeed it was normal practice in the secular world to break a seal when the person authorised to use it died.



The seal on which our Prior's chain of office is based



Seal on which our badge is based