

The Admiralty Seal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester

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Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was appointed Admiral of England on 12 October 1462, and, apart from a brief intermission from October 1470 to April 1471, served in that office until, as king, he appointed John Howard, 1st Duke of Norfolk, to succeed him on 25th July 1483. Only one seal matrix associated with him as admiral survives and this note attempts to explain its significance and explore its problems. It is offered to Anne Sutton out of friendship and as a mark of my great respect for her scholarship.

The seal was purchased by the British Museum from Mr James Vickery in 1880 for £17 (BM MME 1880,3–10,1). By then it already had a long history. It first appeared, a few years before 1781, in the house of Mr Jackson, an innkeeper at St Column in Cornwall. It was purchased from him by Mr. Joseph Hankey, an attorney of the same town, and in 1782, passed to Mr Dennis, an attorney of Penzance in Cornwall. Subsequently it passed to the Revd Richard Haydon, rector of Oakfield, near Bampton, Devon, and then to his son, Revd James Parkin of Oakfield, who possessed it in 1862.¹

Not surprisingly, a number of admiral's seals have been found in the south west of England. Apart from Richard's, others are those of John, Duke of Bedford, (Tonnochy, no 26) found at or near Poole in Dorset and John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon and Lord of Ivry, (Tonnochy, no 24) which was found at Ken Manor House, Somerset.²

The seal matrix (plates 1 and 2) is bronze gilt, with a high pierced ridge at the back. The central device is a single-masted ship on the sea with rudder and anchor, the mainsail charged with the duke's arms (quarterly France and

¹ The seal matrix was published by J. Milles, 'Illustration of an unpublished seal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester', *Archaeologia*, vol. 7 (1785), p. 69; C.S. Perceval, 'Remarks on an admiralty seal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester', *Archaeologia*, vol. 46, pt 2 (1881), pp. 366–70; T.J. Pettigrew, 'On the seals of Richard Duke of Gloucester and other admirals of England', *Collectanea Archaeologica*, vol. 1 (1862), pp. 171–81, pl. xv, fig. 1, has good references to the early history of seal matrices; A.B. Tonnochy, *Catalogue of British Seal-Dies in the British Museum* London 1952, pp. 10–11, no. 27; W de Gray Birch *Catalogue of Seals in the British Museum* 1, London, 1887, no. 1050; P. Tudor-Craig, *Richard III*, catalogue of an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, 1973, no. 145; R. Marks and A. Payne, *British Heraldry*, catalogue of an exhibition at the British Museum, 1978, no. 215, p. 112. There is a manuscript reference in BL Add. MS 47,464 (also known as Laing's MSS catalogue), no. 315.

² Tonnochy, *Seal-Dies*, nos 24, 26.

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Plate 1. The obverse of the seal matrix of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as Admiral for Dorset and Somerset. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

England, a label of three points ermine); on the top of the mast a crow's nest surmounted by a cross; castles decorated with fleurs-de-lis and battlements above on stern and prow; on the prow a flaming cresset, on the stern a standard with the duke's arms supported by a greyhound; there is foliage in the field. The legend reads:

S: Rici. Duc:glouc:admiralli:i:com:dors.t.somr

which may be extended:

S[igillum]: Ric[ard]i: duc[is]:glouc [estrie]:admiralli:en[gl] [ie]:i[n]:com[itatus]:
Dors[etie] [et] Som[er]s[etie]

and translated:

The seal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Admiral of England, in the counties of Dorset and Somerset

The diameter is 7.55 cm. The legend is surrounded by a band of stamped cinquefoils.



Plate 2. An impression from the seal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as Admiral for Dorset and Somerset. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Admiral's seals

Admiral's seals of the fifteenth century provide a remarkable series of illustrations of ships of the period. The ship is shown in the centre, with an heraldic display on the sail. The ships have fore and aft stages or castles, rigging, crow's nests, lanterns and cressets. With respect to Richard's seal, Brindley comments that the cresset in the fore stage is apparently in place of a lantern in the stern.³

It is necessary to distinguish between the admiral of England, Ireland and Aquitaine, and the lesser admirals for the regional fleets of the north, west, and other areas. The first person to be described as 'the Admiral of England and Ireland' was Edward of 'York', Earl of Rutland, who was appointed on 12 August 1396. His seal does not survive. There is a subsequent series of seal matrices for the admirals of England for Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter, John, Duke of Bedford, and John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon. It is likely that Richard, Duke of Gloucester, had a seal matrix as admiral of England,

³ H.H. Brindley, *Impressions of Seals Exhibited in the Seal Room of the National Maritime Museum*, London 1938, pp. 28–29. Coloured and heraldic decoration on sails: H. Szymanski, 'The history of decorated and coloured sails', *Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 13 (1927), pp. 160–66.

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but neither it nor any impression survive.⁴ In four respects, this seal matrix is remarkable. It is the largest of the surviving seals of the fifteenth century, both for admirals of England and for the minor fleets. It has a handle that is completely different from the admirals' seals of the early fifteenth century. It has a notable heraldic display, and is solely for use in the counties of Dorset and Somerset.

1. **Size.** There is a difference in size between the seals of the admiral of England and those of the minor fleets. Richard Cletherowe, Admiral of the West of England, sealed modestly with a diameter of 4.4 cm. Compared to this, Thomas Beaufort's two seals as admiral of England, Aquitaine and Ireland, are 6.3 and 5.5 cm in diameter. There appears to have been a gradual increase in the size of the seal of the admiral of England through the fifteenth century, although John, Duke of Bedford, reduces the size to 5.7 cm. Curiously, his lieutenant general's seal is bigger than his own, at 6.9. When John Holland becomes admiral in 1435, his reaches 7 cm. This is, however, exceeded by Richard of Gloucester, who, for two counties, has the largest of all at 7.55 cm.⁵

There is a gap in our knowledge of the size of seals until the changes in the Navy and the Admiralty under the reign of Henry VIII. Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, who seals in 1525 as vice admiral of England. Two later seals are those of Lord John Russell, who seals in 1540 as the Lord High Admiral of England Wales and Ireland at about 4 ins and Michael Stanhope, Vice Admiral of Suffolk of 1540, who seals at 7.7 cm.⁶

2. **Handle.** In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at least two different types of handles were in use on English official and aristocratic seals. The first has a conical handle often surmounted by a trefoil top and the second has a long ridge on the back often pierced by one or two holes. The seal of Richard has the latter type. Conical seal handles with trefoil tops were used throughout the fourteenth century. A notable example is on the seal of Winchester College of 1386. Admirals' seals of the early fifteenth century have this type. The seal of William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk 1445–50, is a good example of a late conical handle with a trefoil. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the type of handle with a long ridge and a number of perforations in the ridge becomes popular. The seal of John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, as Lord

⁴ Thomas Beaufort: Tonnochy, *Seal-Dies*, nos 22, 23; John Duke of Bedford: *ibid.*, no. 26; John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon: *ibid.*, nos 24, 25. Study of John Holland's seals as admiral: J.A. Walker, 'John Holland, a fifteenth-century admiral', *Mariners Mirror*, vol. 65, no. 3 (1979), pp. 235–42.

⁵ Cletherowe: Tonnochy, *Seal-Dies*, no. 21; Beaufort, *ibid.*, nos 22 and 23; Bedford, *ibid.*, no. 26; Holland, *ibid.*, nos 24, 25.

⁶ Arthur Plantagenet: H. Stanford London, 'The Greyhound as Royal Beast', *Archaeologia*, vol. 97 (1959), pl. xliii, from a cast owned by the Society of Antiquaries. Lisle's seal is 6.7 cm. Lord John Russell: de Gray Birch, *Seals*, no. 1053; BL Add. Ch. 24,478.

Lieutenant of Ireland, 1484–7, with a high ridge at the back with three perforations (Tonnochy 208) provides a good example of the ridge type.⁷

The reason for the change is obscure. It may simply have been fashion since the diameters of the seal are much the same. The development of handles on admirals' matrices after Richard is unknown since the next admiral's seal matrix to survive is the double-ended ivory matrix of Sir George Carey.⁸

3. The greyhound. The banner of the duke's arms on the ship is held aloft by a greyhound. The greyhound as a royal beast was discussed by H. Stanford London in 1959 when he referred to this seal. It had been suggested earlier that the use of the greyhound as a badge was related to the honour of Richmond, but as Richard did not acquire the honour of Richmond until after the duke of Clarence's death in 1477, the origin of the greyhound on this seal, possibly of 1462, had to be found elsewhere.⁹ Stanford London traced the use of the greyhound badge back to Edward III. It was used by each of his five sons, including Edward Mortimer, Duke of York and Earl of March. It was as the heir of Roger Mortimer, Edward Mortimer's son, that Edward IV was to claim the crown of England, and it is therefore likely that the greyhound was displayed by Richard of Gloucester to demonstrate his descent from Edward III.

4. Dorset and Somerset. This is the seal of the admiral of England in the counties of Dorset and Somerset. Richard was appointed admiral of England, Ireland and Aquitaine on 12 October 1462¹⁰ to succeed William Neville, Earl of Kent, who had been appointed on 30 July 1462.¹¹ However, two weeks after Neville's appointment, on the 12th August 1462, Richard was granted lands in Dorset including the lordship of Corfe Castle. Many of these were confiscated from John de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Here Richard is described as the 'admiral of the sea'.¹² Although he was not admiral of England at this stage, this appears to be the only reference to Richard as admiral, apart from his appointment and his seal. C.S. Perceval argued that Richard was at first appointed to a limited admiralty for Dorset and Somerset on 12 August, but there is no evidence for this in the grant of August 1462.¹³ It is unlikely that the lordship of Corfe Castle involved any rights over the Somerset coast, and one of the peculiarities of the coupling together of these two counties is that their coasts face different seas. It is true that in the sixteenth century there was a special arrangement for the Lords of Corfe Castle to hold admiralty

⁷ Winchester College: H. Jenkinson, *Guide to Seals in the Public Record Office*, London 1968, pl. III. William de la Pole: Tonnochy, *Seal-Dies*, no. 345; John de la Pole: *ibid.*, no. 248.

⁸ Sir George Carey: *ibid.*, no. 952.

⁹ Stanford London, 'Greyhound', pp. 139–63, esp. 150.

¹⁰ *CPR*, 1461–67, p. 214.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1461–67, p. 195.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1461–67, p. 197.

¹³ Perceval, 'Remarks', p. 367.

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jurisdiction over the Isle of Purbeck, but it is uncertain whether this goes as far back as the fifteenth century.¹⁴

There are a number of other admirals who were assigned responsibility for particular counties. In the fifteenth century, soon after the creation of the admiral of England, Aquitaine and Ireland, the Lord Admiral sometimes appointed a lieutenant or commissary to act for him, either generally and or in specified counties or districts. In 1443 John, Duke of Exeter, appointed Henry Harrington to be his lieutenant or commissary in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex,¹⁵ and in 1461 Edward IV granted to Robert Radclyf the office of admiral of Norfolk and Suffolk and 'the coasts thereof with the accustomed fees and profits appertaining thereto'.¹⁶

Another county admiralty seal whose study might throw some light on Richard of Gloucester's seal was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1825. This is a curious seal of fifteenth-century design and lettering, but the sail on the ship bears the Stuart royal arms. The inscription was read by John Nichols in 1825 as *S'.jo.h'g'fo oray admiralli angl in com Ebor*. He suggests that the matrix was still surviving in 1825, and, if it could be found today, it might be possible to ascertain whether or not it was a fifteenth-century matrix altered in the seventeenth century, and how much it was altered.¹⁷

It seems clear that the seal discussed here was used by Richard for a specific region, the area of Dorset and Somerset. Richard was only ten years old in 1462, and would not have been capable of presiding over admiralty courts himself. Admirals of England customarily appointed vice admirals to fulfil admiralty functions on their behalf. There was a fifteenth-century seal matrix for the Office of the Sub Admiralty of England, now in the Rawlinson collection in the Ashmolean Museum. Its date is uncertain, but it is most likely to be of the reign of Edward IV. It shows a man of war sailing to the left; on her sail are the arms of England. There is a white hart on the banner at the poop, which would seem to date it to the reign of Richard II, but this is too early for royal arms and the style of the seal. The White Hart was also used by Edward IV to whose reign it most probably belongs.¹⁸

¹⁴ The maritime history of the area during the fifteenth century is well outlined by M. Oppenheim, 'Maritime history', VCH, *Dorset*, vol. 2, pp. 175–228, esp. 191–94. As a whole the ports of Dorset were Yorkist in their sympathies.

¹⁵ BL Add. MS 30,222, f. 18d.

¹⁶ Patent Rolls 1 Edward IV, part 2, m. 24 (*CPR, 1461–67*, p. 41). Also R.G. Marsden, 'The vice admirals of the coast', *EHR*, vol. 22 (1907), pp. 468–77.

¹⁷ *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 95, Dec. 1825, pl. ii, fig. 2, pp. 497–98.

¹⁸ Oxford, Ashmolean Museum Rawlinson 233; de Gray Birch, *Seals*, no. 1041; Brindley, *Impressions*, p. 27 (5.4 cm).

Conclusion

In the reigns of both Edward IV and Richard III, naval power was taken seriously in England. A royal navy was created in the 1470s and was ably employed in the five early years of the 1480s.¹⁹ The seal discussed here is significantly different from the earlier admirals' seals. It is the seal of Richard as admiral of England and for the counties of Dorset and Somerset. Dorset may have been singled out because he held the castle of Corfe, but the association with Somerset remains unexplained. This seal matrix, probably for a vice admiral responsible for the south western coasts, represents a period of renewed interest in the navy and admiralty under the Yorkists.

¹⁹ C. F. Richmond, 'English naval power in the fifteenth century', *History*, vol. 52 (1967), pp. 1-16.