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[Deed]. Letter of Attorney for Livery of Seisin of Land in the Towns of Edenbridge, Cowden and Westerham [Kent]

In Latin, manuscript on parchment

England, Kent (land in Edenbridge, Cowden and Westerham), dated 14 March 1467

Single strip of parchment, anopistograph, text complete, written in dark brown ink in a highly abbreviated Gothic English cursive documentary script (cursive anglicana), on 11 long lines, opening initial N with pen flourishing, document with 6 WAX SEALS (of which 5 are intact, with the 6th seal incomplete), red wax, seals bearing heraldry or monograms, seals attached to the lower portion of document on 5 vellum tags cut out from main parchment strip (Document in good condition, with only slight creasing). Dimensions 300 x 110 mm.

Of paleographic and historical interest, this document is an excellent example of a type called "Letter of Attorney" by which one group mandates another group to deliver seisin and possession of land in Kent to two citizens of London and Surrey. Formerly in the celebrated collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps, the document, bearing a scrivener's mark under the main text, is unusual in that it preserves its six red wax seals in generally good condition.

PROVENANCE

1. Dated 14 March 1467, in the seventh year of the reign of Edward IV, this deed does not specify the exact place of copy, although it concerns land in Kent, located in "Edyngbrigge, Cowden and Westram in comitatu Kencie" (fifth line) [Edenbridge, Cowden and Westerham, county of Kent]. The county of Kent is located in the extreme Southeast corner of England, bordering the English Channel. This private deed documents the appointment by six men (see names below) of two men named John Welles and John Burton to deliver possession and seisin of land located in the three above-mentioned towns in Kent to two other men, respectively James Welles, baker, in London [*Jacobo Welles civi et panario Londonensis*] and William Langrigge, mercer, in Southwark, Surrey [*Willelmo Langrigge de Suthwerk in comitatu Suthregiae mercero*].

2. Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), England, his shelfmark on the back of the document: "31689." Sir Thomas, a self-described "vello-maniac," attempted a "frenzied quest to preserve every scrap of paper and vellum fragment he could locate" (see N. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness...* (1995), p. 120). In the fifty-plus years that he collected, Sir Thomas amassed over 50,000 books and 100,000 manuscripts and documents, perhaps the largest private library ever. In doing so, he nearly bankrupted himself and drove his family deep into debt. The complete story of Phillipps's acquisitions and the dispersal of his library required five volumes to narrate (see Munby, *Phillipps Studies*, 1951-60).

TEXT

Incipit: "Noverint universi per presentes nos Thomam Bryan Will[elmu]m Rothely, Laurenciu[m] Test, Johannem Wode seniore[m], Will[elmu]m Rote et Joh[ann]em Beerd gentilmen[um] fecisse ordinasse et loco nostro posuisse dilectis nobis in Christo Joh[ann]em Welles et Joh[ann]em Burton nostros verso et legitimos...";

Explicit: "[...] In cuius rei testimonies presentibus sigilla nostra apposuimus. Dat[um] quartodecimo die mensis marcii anno regni regis Edwardi quarti post conquestum septimo".

The six grantors are: Thomas Bryan, William Rothely, Laurence Test, John Wode Senior, William Rote, and John Beerd "gentilman." The two appointees are John Welles and John Burton. The two grantees are James Welles of London, baker; and William Langrigge of Southwark, Surrey, mercer. The document is signed by Thomas Fermory.

A letter of attorney is a type of deed that gives a person, or in this case a group of persons, the right and power to act legally in his or her place, when the concerned grantors live far from the place of transaction (a letter of attorney establishes a substitute to act for one of the parties in a transaction, usually to grant or receive seisin of land). The text in this letter of attorney is highly formulaic, and the many abbreviations suggest that anyone who needed to would know how to restate their meaning. Much of the present document is taken up by the names of the parties. An interesting feature is the survival of six wax seals attached to parchment tags, some no longer readable, others bearing respectively a crowned monogram "IBS," a head of an ass or horse, a crowned single initial "I," and a scorpion. These six seals likely represented each one of the six grantors who mandated two men to "deliver seisin" of land to two other men in London and Surrey (the legal term "livery of seisin" refers to an open and "notorious" public ceremony conferring ownership of a freehold estate). These relatively small, simple seals are typical of those used by the lesser gentry, town merchants or craftsmen. The name of the scrivener is found in the lower righthand corner: Thomas Fermory. Not until the fifteenth century, the same period that witnessed the origin of merchants' marks as signet rings, did signatures composed of symbols come to have any

force or proof of validity, which explains the importance of the attached wax seals of the witnesses necessary to ensure authentication.

LITERATURE

Brown, Michelle. *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600*, London, The British Library, 1999.

Clanchy, M. *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, Oxford, 1993.

Denholm-Young, N. *Handwriting in England and Wales*, Cardiff, 1954.

Hector, L.C. *The Handwriting of English Documents*, London, E. Arnold, 1958.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Digital exhibition "History in Deed: Medieval Society and the Law in England, 1100-1600", Harvard Law School

http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/collections/special/exhibitions/history_in_deed/deed1.php

Legal terms in land records

<http://users.rcn.com/deeds/legal.htm>