



SOCIETY OF
ANTIQUARIES
OF LONDON



SIGILLVM
Network for research
HISTORY, ART, PRESERVATION AND USE OF SEALS

Resources for the study of seals and seal matrices in the Society of Antiquaries of London circulated before the online conference ‘Images and Identities – Seals of the People of Britain’ to be held on Monday March 15th and Monday March 22nd, 2021. Prepared by John Cherry with help from many others.

Library. The Library of the Society of Antiquaries has a fine collection of books on seals and matrices including a collection from Roger Ellis. The catalogue of the Library is freely available on line

<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flibrary.sal.org.uk%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cdwilsonhiggins%40sal.org.uk%7C53c76947259d40f4524808d8d8ba2c46%7Ce6ab1284bf474cd18432a7f78f853f40%7C1%7C0%7C637497641404628444%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ikk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=s21%2FK1JEg%2FvuUqbRezG7D8eZyNmzX6NbNHNJNjP%2Ba14%3D&reserved=0>

Publications. Nearly all the Journals issuing from the Society such as *Vetusta Monumenta*, *Archaeologia*, *The Proceedings*, and *Antiquaries Journal* have references to seals and seal matrices. Some older issues of the various journals are freely available online and selected articles in more recent issues of *Antiquaries Journal* are open access

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquaries-journal/past-title/archaeologia/all-issues/3FE3FEE2AFD48FB8F10AB01F8CDD5A3E>

All 7 volumes of *Vetusta Monumenta* (1718-1906) have been digitised and are freely available to browse online:

<https://dl.mospace.umssystem.edu/mu/islandora/object/mu%3A478>

A project to create a scholarly digital edition of *Vetusta Monumenta* with commentary for volumes 1-3 is underway. Volume 1 and part of volume 2 have been completed so far: <https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/index>

Manuscripts. The Society's manuscripts were catalogued by Pamela Willetts, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Society of Antiquaries of London* (2000). This includes [MS 369](#), [MS 370](#) and [MS 371](#), drawings of seals by B. Howlett (died 1827) for the counties of Surrey, Hants, and Leicester, and [MS 206](#), original deeds, many with seals. The records from the printed catalogue of manuscripts are available online through The National Archives website and can be searched via their Discovery catalogue.

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/ce08ce46-b389-4770-be06-094974239365>

The Society will be launching its own online catalogue for manuscripts, archives and museum collections later in the year. The manuscript collections are not yet digitised, though images from selected items are available on the 'Collection Highlights' pages of the Society website:

<https://www.sal.org.uk/collections/explore-our-collections/collections-highlights/>

Prints and Drawings. There are various collections of prints of Seals notably George Vertue's drawings for the Seals published in *Vetusta Monumenta* I, plates 53-4, 58-60 (see above for online access to VM vols 1 and 2), and Harley collection vol. 2 *Charters, Seals, Coins*.

Seal Casts, Detached seals, Matrices. These are ordered following Birch's British Museum Catalogue (1887-1900). The Society's collection of personal seals is particularly strong in heraldic seals. A small collection of seal matrices, acquired mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is displayed in the Fellows' room and the remainder, including the Pierre Chaplais collection (358 items of a wide range of dates and from a wide range of sources), is kept in the Museum room.

Some of these casts or impressions, for which the only finding source in the Antiquaries is a card index, have been selected here. The number of personal seals without heraldic arms in the Society's collection is not large and this selection does not reflect the proportions of the different types of non-armorial casts in the collection. Here there has been a deliberate choice of more womens' seals and seals of craftsmen. The information on the cards on which the impressions and casts are mounted varies widely. Even where given, it is

sometimes so abbreviated as to be difficult to pursue. Note the distinction between **impression** from a seal matrix, and a **cast** from a sealing.

Women's seals



1. Agnes, wife of Walter. An impression of a round seal with stylised lily (fleur-de-lis). Made with a lead? matrix, the handle of which can be seen at the top of the impression. The matrix once belonged to Lt. Col. Bennet Stanford



2. Helias D'Aubigny. Pointed oval cast of an equestrian lady with hawk. From British Library Harleian Charters 45.b.28. Most equestrian seals whether of men or women are engraved on circular seals. This example sits rather awkwardly on a pointed oval



3. Thomas Aldwood. Round seal showing two people facing each other. 1348. From the seals in Durham Cathedral, but does not appear to be included in the website for Durham Cathedral Muniments



4. Maud Bloss. An impression from a lead seal matrix found at Pevensey Castle. It shows a crescent and a six-pointed star.



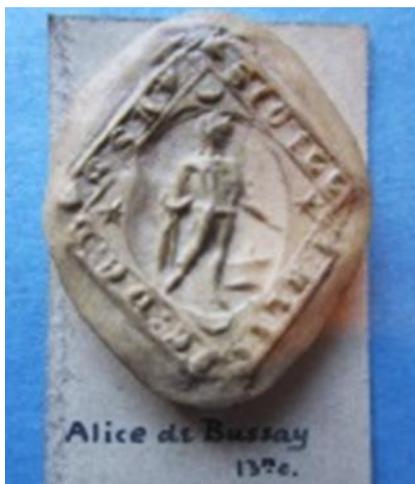
5. Eva de Broc Standing woman. This cast shows a standing woman holding a bird in her left hand.



6. Petronella Brusbarn . A gutta percha impression probably from a matrix. Gutta percha, a type of rubber, was popular for making impressions in the period 1840 to 1880. It shows a stylised lily.



7. Anastasia de Burgate. A woman holding a hawk and what has been seen as a claw. If it is the bird had a very long leg, but it may be an attempt to engrave a lure, the pair of wings on a rope, used to recall the hawk.



8. Alice de Bussay. From The National Archive, Ancient Deeds L2339. An image of this is available through TNA/PRO 23/488. The date of the original seal is between 1242-66.



9. Maud, Lady of Waringford. c. 1149. England?



10. Rameta de Staunford, standing woman with hawk. Note six fleur-de-lis, three on each side. What is their meaning? Is this a heraldic or non-heraldic personal seal?



11. Isabel de Pascis. A standing woman holding a stylised lily in left or right hand. Impression from matrix?



12. Cecily Hewartha. A curious name and curious design of four lions with one head. This device is one way of depicting several animals with one head or several animals with one head serving as a common head to all three. Three hares with separate heads are sometimes depicted together so that they each appear to have two ears, but only three ears are depicted.



13. Agatha Trusbut. In order to begin to understand this seal one must understand that the name Trusbut had a punning representation as a water bouget (a leathern vessel in which water is carried). Here Agatha is using a realistic depiction of the vessel on her seal. Later the water bouget was used as a heraldic device. So this woman used a device which puns on her name. An Agatha Trusbut

is mentioned in Dugdale's *Baronage* under Trusbut family, who gave a donation to Warter Abbey, Yorkshire <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/vol3/pp235-238>

Scottish seals



1. Robert Bruce the Younger. What relation was he to Robert the Bruce, king of Scots? 13th cent. Also Birch 17,102 (BL xlvi.1040), Laing *Scottish Seals Supplement* no 140; plate iv., fig 3. Pre-heraldic or was he a lowly member of the clan?

Seal of merchants and craftsmen



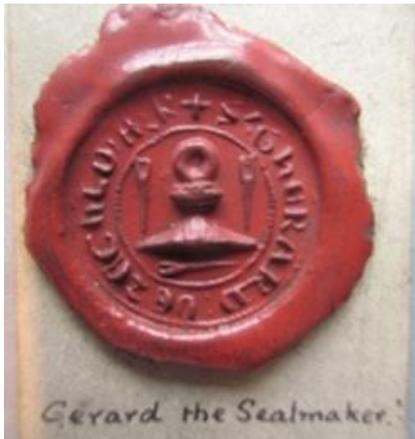
1. Daniel le Breton. This shows a pottery vessel where the engraver has cleverly shown a French form of vessel. Daniel presumably imported wine from the west of France. Are the tools at the side measuring implements for the wine trade? For barrels? Perhaps even an early corkscrew?



2. Thomas Bate. The matrix was found at the port of Winchelsea, Sussex. It has a merchant's mark. Merchant's marks were studied by F.A. Girling, *English Merchants Marks* OUP 1964, and E.M. Elmhirst, *Merchants Marks*, Harleian Society, Vol 108, 1959. There is also a very useful article by J. R. Rylands (of the Manchester University Library) 'Merchant's marks and other personal marks' in *Transactions of the John Rylands Library*, 1910. ([62-2-Rylands_Merchants marks pdf.pdf](#))



3. Walter the Farrier 1242. The seal shows a horseshoe and nail. Walter was presumably a farrier, so perhaps a form of advertising?



4. Gerard the seal maker. This is presumably from a matrix, but there is no evidence where it was taken from, which is a pity since it may be the only matrix which shows the tools of the trade. The legend reads +S' Gherard : le Zeghlu k.

This is not English and appears to be Low German or Dutch. Also, the letter *l* in *le* is a very curious form. If found in England, it may have been from a foreign seal maker. If anyone knows where this interesting matrix is now, do let us know!



5. Adam the carpenter de Brinklow. Adam was presumably a carpenter, but chose not to have an image directly related to his trade



6. Robert Archer with bow – c1320. From Bronze matrix. In Maurice Rosenheim's collection. c. 1320. Was Robert an archer or is this a rebus? Is this a seal of his profession or just a name?



7. Bernard Barber. Shows a pair of scissors. Was he a barber? See below (Chaplais no 62) or was his name Bernard Barber?



8. Robert Tupp has a shield with letters and the top of a merchants' mark above. Heraldic or not? Can merchants' marks above or on shields be distinguished as a group from those without?

Names (topographical)



1. Alexander de Astley. *Arch. J.* iv 151 *JBAA* xxi 235
A shield-shaped bronze seal matrix engraved with the image of figure kneeling before the Virgin and Child.



2. Oswald de Bolton. Labelled as an impression from a wooden matrix. Found at Wigan and from Dr Kendrick's collection. Dr Kendrick left his collections to the Bolton Museum and a search in their extensive uncatalogued and unsorted collections has failed to find this matrix. This may be the only record of this very unusual wooden medieval matrix (if indeed it is medieval).



3. Richard de Vierli. Ivory (or possibly bone) matrix found at St Alban's Abbey in the nineteenth century, and now lost. A rare record of a secular ivory (or bone) equestrian matrix from the 12th century.

Chaplains



1. Richard of Kendal, chaplain.
 Found at Jervaulx Abbey Yorkshire.
 Richard praying in front of a double-armed (patriarchal) cross.



2. William de Wald. From a jet matrix carved on both back and front.
 The matrix is in the Fitzwilliam Museum. Interestingly one side (the seal of William) has a stylised lily and the other a hand holding a stem with a leaves and a bud with the inscription *Signum pacis porto* (I (the matrix) carry the sign of peace).



3. Henry the Chaplain. An example of two impressions from a screw-out seal matrix. This type of matrix is capable of producing two impressions, one with the central image and the other with central image and inscription. see PSA XIV 10. Harman Oates collection

Religious themes



1. Henry de Bosco. Pelican in Piety.
Bronze, apparently in Lewes Museum



2. Ralph de Beaumeis. Brass matrix.
Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) with two
birds below.

Metal seal matrices

The Pierre Chaplais collection of Seals : Medieval and Later.

For an example from this collection (the seal of Robert Son of John) see
Elizabeth New in

<https://kk-kz.facebook.com/SocietyofAntiquariesofLondon/videos/unlocking-our-collections-medieval-seal-matrix/1409022105815156/>

In this collection there are 107 seals, of which 67 are medieval. They are mostly non-armorial private seals. There is a typescript list in the Museum.

Three will give some idea of the nature of the collection:

23. Bronze seal with short hexagonal stem and pointed loop knop. Legend IEO SUY NUTEL. A bird with hooked beak and trifurcated tail to right looking backwards. For seals with this legend 'There is no seal like it' see John Cherry, 'IE SU SEL NUL TEL : No seal like it' in *Pourquoi les Sceaux?, La Sigillographie, nouvel enjeu de l'histoire de L'Art*, ed. Marc Gil and Jean Luc Chassel (2011) 195-205.

38. Pointed oval lead seal with a lozenge shaped lug at the top engraved on one side with a quadrilateral line and a cross surrounding the hole. Both sides are

engraved with the asame Legend SIGILL' RICARDI FILI PETI with the final I inserted over the T, or PETR. On one side a fleur de lis and on the other a triangle in base overlaid by a stylised palm frond. While some double-sided seal matrices show husband and wife, this has the same name on both sides. Chaplais suggested that one side, presumably the one with the triangle had been 'cancelled'.

62. Pointed oval lead seal with a loop at the back legend S'NICHOLAI SISSORIS. Design an open pair of scissors. Said to have been found in Abingdon. The device of a pair of scissors, perhaps indicating that the owner was a tailor or barber, is found on other seals (Durham seals 2079), the seal of Bernard the Barber above no. 7, a copper-alloy example (PAS WILT-6C725B S' PEGRI + LEGAL), and on a silver seal, found near Newbury, see John Cherry, 'The Silver Seal of Geoffrey the Barber' in *Transactions of the Newbury District Field Club*, vol. 12, no. 5 (1979), 83-4.

Some resources for the study of personal seals

The best introductions to personal seals are E. A. New, 'Reconsidering the Silent Majority: Non-heraldic personal seals, identity and cultural meaning', in *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages* L. Whatley ed. (Leiden, 2019), 279-309 and the chapter on non-heraldic personal seals in P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuinness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, The British Library and Public Record Office, 1996. There is a short bibliography on pages 124-5, and also an appendix of legends on personal seals, omitting those which simply name the owner, on pages 113-9. This contains a bibliography of the catalogues and collections in which personal seals occur.

Progress has been made in the study of personal seals with the publication of -

Phillipp R. Schofield., and Elizabeth A. New, eds. *Seals and Society: Medieval Wales, the Welsh Marches and their English Border Region*, University of Wales Press Cardiff 2018. Not available online but second hand copies are available for around £20. An excellent survey of the personal seals of Londoners between 1050 and 1300 is J. A. McEwan J. A., *Seals in Medieval London, 1050 to 1300*, London Record Society 2016. Again not available on line but can be bought for £40 upwards.

The website Digisig <http://www.digisig.org/> hosted by John McEwan provides a searchable index for seals in publications. To quote the opening - *Digisig enables researchers to access and discover seals in several ways. Standard search enables researchers to query a list of 58,707 seal impressions, seal matrices and seal casts. Catalogue search offers researchers the capacity to run searches of 44,975 seal descriptions.*

The recent AHRC funded *Imprint* project's database is largely comprised of personal seal impressions, some with forensic information about the hand and fingerprints impressed in the back of the wax see <https://www.imprintseals.org/>

For seal matrices one of the best starting points is the *Catalogue of British Seal Dies in the British Museum* by A. B. Tonnochy, British Museum 1952. Personal seals (without arms) can be found from nos 551 to 669. The catalogue is poorly illustrated, but pictures of the matrices can be found on the British Museum web site Collections Online. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection>

The *Catalogue* is not available on line. A second-hand copy is very expensive.

An important regional survey of finds is that for Norfolk. Steven Ashley contributes information of the the round-up of 'Medieval Seal Matrices in Norfolk', a consecutive annual catalogue of recently discovered matrices (almost exclusively metal-detected). This has been published in *Norfolk Archaeology* since 1999 (the first of which covered the years 1996-8). The catalogue was edited by Helen Geake, Andrew Rogerson and Steven Ashley for the first three years, and continued by Rogerson and Ashley thereafter. An important criterion for inclusion in the catalogue is that a cast has been taken from each matrix and is available for study at Norwich Castle Museum.

The next round-up (in preparation for 2020) will include a fourth summary of published seal matrices, the total of which has reached 1,574 examples. This shows little overall change since the last summary (Rogerson and Ashley 2013 'Medieval Seal Matrices in Norfolk, 2012', *Norfolk Archaeology* vol 46, pp 549-54), but it should be noted that lead has now outstripped copper alloy as the most utilised metal.

Personal seals with names those with *mottoes* retain their status as the largest and second largest classes, with their shares of the corpus unchanged at 46% and 24%. Lead matrices account for slightly over 50% of the total. 75% of these are in the *personal with names* class, and it seems likely that many of the illegible lead examples were once also in the same. There are lead examples in some other categories, but in the large *personal with mottoes* class there are only six (1.6%), to be compared with ten of silver, one of gold and 362 of copper alloy. Of fifty-three finger-rings with *initials* all bar two are of copper alloy.

The number of *unfinished* matrices has more than doubled, from twenty-two to forty-six, and the total of copper alloy examples has risen from one to five. This and the recovery of lead matrices in other shapes, especially circular, has reduced the excessively large proportion of pointed oval examples from 82% of the total to 63%.

The early parts of the catalogue of Norfolk seal matrices are now available digitally, up to 2005 (for 2004) as most volumes of the journal have recently been put online at the ADS website [Norfolk Archaeology Journal: Index \(archaeologydataservice.ac.uk\)](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk) and others continue to be added. The catalogue, up to that published in 2017 (for 2016), can also be found at <https://norfolk.academia.edu/stevenashley>.

Durham seals. The collection of the Cathedral archives is available on line http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1vh53wv76d.xml

It has 2,729 private seals and 282 Scottish private Seals.