Appendix

Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals

The Handlist

Introduction

James Robinson

The exhibition, Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals, which ran from 11 January to 20 May 2007 drew almost exclusively on the British Museum’s very fine collection of medieval seal-dies. The handlist which follows this survey of the exhibition is illustrated for legibility’s sake largely by modern impressions. Where individual items are referred to in the text, they are identified by their respective number in the display sequence in brackets. The Tonnochy catalogue number follows the departmental registration number.

The display was organised thematically to demonstrate the diversity of seal design and its importance as an indicator of status, power and authority. Cases were dedicated to the use of seals by religious foundations, bishops, royalty, the nobility and townsfolk. The practice of using counterseals, the appeal of classical gems and the proliferation of seals using images connected with hunting and love were illustrated with equal weight to convey the taste, refinement and humour which influenced the choice of materials, imagery and legend.

The sheer range of topics covered acts as a measure of just how ubiquitous the act of placing a seal on a document became in the course of a few hundred years from around the close of the 11th century to the turn of the 15th. The revolution which occurred in sealing practices at this time led to a change in the materials used to make seals. Seal-dies which had formerly been made of ivory, jet or stone were increasingly crafted from copper-alloy. This was chosen because it could be cast from moulds in great numbers and its hardness produced greater definition in the engraving which allowed constant, repeated use. The 13th-century jet seal of William Fitzhamon (8.3) was featured in the exhibition as a lingering archaism to demonstrate this point. It stands in startling contrast to the huge volume of mass-produced metal seal-dies that were so much more the character of the age.

Of course, not all seal-dies were made from base-metal. Many silver examples survive, the best quality ones firmly associated with characters of note. Silver was an appropriate material for royal seal-dies, for example, few of which survive since they were usually destroyed upon the death of the monarch. The exhibition included two seal-dies which belonged to medieval queens. The first, owned by Isabella of Hainault, the bride of Philip IV of France who died in childbirth at the age of 21, is truly exceptional. Dating from the period around 1280–90 it shows a standing queen holding a sceptre in one hand and a fleur-de-lys in the other (7.3). She is clad in fashionable robes in the classical style. The lightness of the drapery is rendered with extreme confidence, revealing the anatomy and suggesting movement as the left leg extends slightly forward. The depth of engraving is striking and is made possible by the quantity of silver used to produce the seal-die. The high relief impression it yields would have immediately accorded wealth and importance on any document to which it was attached. Queens generally did not seal in matters of state but restricted the use of their seals to their own affairs and the disposition of their often considerable wealth. The survival of this remarkable seal-die is due entirely to the fact that it was buried with the young queen upon her death. The second seal owned by a queen is that of Joanna, daughter of Henry II of England (7.4). Joanna’s seal-die is silver but of less high quality than Isabella’s both in terms of the alloy used, which is very brittle, and the quality of the engraving. However, it too acts as an explicit advertisement of Joanna’s pedigree. Her two marriages and her paternal relationship are spelt out on this double seal-die. On the front the stands crowned as Queen of Sicily through her marriage to William II. Interestingly she chose not to refer explicitly to her first marital relationship in the legend which reads: s regine iohe filie qvondam h regis anglorvm (Seal of Queen Joanna daughter of Henry, the late king of England). On the reverse seal she is shown seated, but not crowned. The legend describes her as Duchess of Narbonne, Countess of Toulouse and Marchioness of Provence through her second marriage to Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse.

The use of silver for the manufacture of seal-dies was not restricted to royalty. Highly placed nobles were equally likely to use silver as an expression of their status. They too would employ the most accomplished goldsmiths to engrave the die, perhaps occasionally offering an implicit challenge to the authority of their king through the medium of material and artistic excellence. Interestingly, one of the charges against the treacherous Thomas of Lancaster who rose in insurrection against Edward II in 1322 was that his seal was larger than that of the King.¹ A fine looking seal clearly carried implications and could have an impact much greater than the substance of the document to which it was attached. Seals were undoubtedly about display and about the display of authority. In this respect, Robert Fitzwalter’s seal (8.1) says as much about his conflict with King John as it does about his own wealth and prestige. Fitzwalter was one of the principle proponents of Magna Carta and was intensely disliked by the King. His seal-die is of the highest order, a tour-de-force of seal-die engraving which conveys qualities of resolute strength in the figure of an equestrian knight riding above a wyvern. Equestrian imagery was the common convention for the seals of noblemen from the end of the 11th century. Significantly, Robert’s great political ally in the dispute against King John, Saher de Quincy, employs an almost identical design on his seal.² Both knights broadcast their comradeship in arms by a display of the other’s heraldry. On the Fitzwalter seal, the chevrons of Fitzwalter decorate the caparisons of his horse and his shield while the arms of de Quincy are engraved on a second shield placed under the
muzzle of the horse.

Equestrian imagery was not the sole preserve of the male. In the 13th century a number of influential women also chose to represent themselves on horseback on their seals. The values expressed by the equestrian female were very different from those communicated by the male. The emphasis is on leisure rather than action and grace rather than physical might. Wealth and pedigree, however, remained an integral part of the image. When Joanna Stuteville is shown on horseback in her seal of about 1265–75 she displays her patrimonial lineage in a prominently positioned heraldic shield held in her left hand. Joanna was her father's sole heiress and no reference is made to either of her two husbands in what appears to be a statement of independent wealth. Occasionally, there is no explicit, heraldic allusion to the elevated social rank of the subject at all. Elizabeth Sevorc's exemplary seal-die showing her perched daintily on a beautifully rendered, naturalistic horse which moves out of the frame of the seal and intrudes into the space occupied by the legend (8.8). Elizabeth is finely dressed in robes which gather in a multitude of folds about her legs. She is shown hunting with a falcon in one hand and an eagle's claw in the other which may be a family symbol. This, however, cannot be confirmed and no other visual attempt is made to describe her family relationships. Her social position is clear.

Hunting, after all, was the exclusive occupation of the aristocracy. The Latin legend describes Elizabeth as 'lady of Sevorc'; she is not referred to as 'daughter' or 'wife'. The identity of Elizabeth of Sevorc is not certain. Sevorc probably belongs to Isabella of Hainault, wife of Robert Fitzwalter, was clearly designed to make an impact. The engraving is executed with a lightness and freedom which is rarely achieved on such a small scale. Furthermore, the seal-die was originally richly gilded and would have appeared to be made of gold.

Hunting was a privileged pastime but hunting imagery proliferated in seal design at a very popular level. The seals carrying these images are often comic in their appeal and illustrate the notion of the world turned upside down. Consequently an image of a hound ridden by a hare is surrounded by a legend derived from a hunting cry, 'sohov foreli'. Such seals were produced in vast quantities, particularly in the 14th century, and were most frequently not personalised by the use of a name in the legend. Often termed 'banal' seals for this reason, they serve as evidence that seal-dies were marketed and bought ready-made for their novelty value. Many of the seals are given a voice in the legend. A seal which occurs in large numbers using the device of a squirrel, for instance, has the English legend: 1 KRAK NOTS. Banal seals are more inclined to use the vernacular in their legends and act as a further manifestation of increased vernacular writing from the 14th century onwards. A series of seals using the motif of lions in different guises demonstrates how Latin, French and English co-exist in popular seal usage at this time. A sleeping lion declares: WAC? [Wake] ME NO MAN (10.5), with a hint of menace which reinforces the legends on other leonine seals where a lion boasts in Latin that he is strong: SUM LEO FORTIS (10.3), or in French that he is king of the beasts: JE SU REV DE BETTES. Depictions on seals of the natural world, real or imagined, offer charming glimpses of a light-heartedness slightly at odds with the seriousness of business. Even the Sheriff of Oxford could not resist playing games with his seal and employed the image of an ox at a ford beside the city walls to make a rebus on Oxford (11.2). However, when it came to the representations of cities on official city seals, the greatest dignity could be invested in their depiction. The 13th-century seal for Boppard-on-Rhine (11.1) is a superlative example of its type. It shows the cathedral in the centre rising above the city walls which encircle it. The Romanesque cathedral is engraved with such verismimilude that it appears entirely recognisable as the building which still stands at Boppard today. The engraver's management of perspective is admirable as he expresses the recession of the city walls by removing details of the brickwork. This illusionistic device contributes to the sensation that the cathedral soars above the city almost in an element of its own.

Medieval city life was both hectic and prosperous. The administration of its affairs was complex and the seals which document it are suitably diverse. In England, they range from deputed royal seals, which incorporate all of the panoply of royal heraldry to the simple signs used by purgers (11.5), vinters (11.7) and other tradesmen. The escalation of royal bureaucracy meant that it was impossible for the king to be present always when a transaction occurred that required his authority. Royal authority extended into English towns for purposes of justice and defence but one area of particular interest, because of the revenue it provided, was that of customs and excise. Wool was a huge asset to the English economy and Edward I was a keen supporter of the English textile industry because of its great profitability. The Customs Seals that were devised under his reign were produced from double seal-dies decorated with the royal coat of arms on both sides (12.3). The emphatic use of royal heraldry was a means of expressing the power of the king without him being present. The King's Great Seal, however, tended to imply his personal presence in the act of sealing. Its iconography was established from the time of the Norman Conquest when William I chose an equestrian figure for the front of his seal and an image of the King enthroned on the back. Though this order was permanently reversed by his son, William II, and subsequent monarchs, the imagery remained essentially the same. It encapsulated the two basic qualities of medieval kingship: the king as the dispenser of justice, and the king as military hero.

Copies of the Great Seal were produced for felonious purposes from fake seal-dies, illustrated in the exhibition by a 12th-century forgery of the back of Henry II's second Great Seal which was in use from 1171–74 (7.1). The forgery is made from lead, a metal not appropriate for the production of a royal seal, and includes in its legend a misspelling of the Latin for Aquitaine. Security surrounding the use of seals led to an increasing need for counterseals. Those most vulnerable to fraud were the very rich in positions of authority with extensive estates to manage. From the 1140s ancient Greek and Roman intaglios were set into gold or silver surrounds for use as counterseals by the wealthy and well-educated. They signified
both taste and learning and presented the additional benefit of not being easy to imitate. The Latin legends that surround them varied from the basic: SIGILLUM SECRETI (Secret seal) (6.2), to the instructive: PONITE LITERAS ISTAS INSIGL SILV SECRT (Place your letters under a secret seal) (5.3). The latter legend is combined with a red jasper intaglio of the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61). The gem portrait is of the highest quality and rarity and was undoubtedly recognised in the 13th century as an object of great virtue. Some legends refer neither to the nature of the seal nor to the act of sealing, but express instead an awareness of the gem’s iconography. When the owner of a seal incorporating a gem of Dionysus chose the legend: JESUS EST AMOR MEUS (Jesus is my love), it was undoubtedly an implicit reference to the Eucharistic resonances offered by the pagan god of wine (6.3).

A display case in the centre of the exhibition was devoted to an arrangement of objects which demonstrated the power of seal imagery when used in contexts other than the sealing of documents. A pilgrim’s ampulla from Canterbury, cast in the round from a complex, five part mould, is decorated on the reverse with a vessica shaped design which places at its centre the martyrdom of Becket and uses as a pseudo-legend the words: OPTIMVS EGRORVM MEDICVS FIT TOMA BONORVM (Thomas is the best doctor of the worthy sick).9 Ampullae filled with a mix of the blood of Becket and holy water were sold in large quantities as a remedy for sickness. Here seal imagery is invoked as a way of validating the power of the saint while, at the same time, authenticating the contents of the souvenir. The power of seal imagery to suggest quality, authentication or legality probably remains as relevant today in the popular consciousness as it did during the golden period of sealing, before the practice became outmoded by the use of signatures in the 16th century.

Notes
1  Cherry 1997, 126
5  Tonnochy, cat. no. 753.
6  Ibid cat. no. 754.
7  Ibid cat. no. 742.
8  Harvey and McGuiness 28.
9  PE 1921,2-16,62.
Section 1  Churches and Monasteries

1.1  Seal from Chichester Cathedral
Silver, England, 1200–40
P&E 1923,10-15,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 794)

Churches and monasteries were wealthy institutions, able to afford seals made of precious metals. The style of building on this seal suggests it was copied from an earlier Anglo-Saxon seal. A document with a seal made from this die is now in the British Library (Cotton Charter xii 60).

1.2  Seal from Inchaffray Abbey
Bronze, Scotland, 1300s
Given by Sir Maurice Rosenheim

This seal is used to make a double-sided wax impression. The front depicts the patron saint of Inchaffray Abbey, St John, standing inside the building.
On the back is his symbol, the eagle.

1.3  Seal from Langdon Priory
Bronze, England, 1250–1300
P&E 1913,11-5,3 (Tonnochy cat. no. 844)

This seal from Kent combines the patron saint of the priory, the Virgin Mary, with a scene depicting the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Cathedral there in 1170.
Section 2  Monasteries and Religious Seals

2.1  Seal from Boxgrove Priory
Bronze, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1852,4-5,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 831)
This is one of the most complex seal matrices from the Medieval period. It was used by placing layers of wax between each part. Pins fixed the parts together and pressure was applied by a roller. When the die was removed, the top layer of wax was carefully cut away to reveal the figures below. A bar provided a second line of writing around the rim to hide the join.

2.2  Seal from Cottingham Abbey
Bronze, England, 1322
P&E 1913,11-5,2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 841)
The legend on this seal is in French rather than Latin which was commonly used on Church seals. It tells us that Thomas, Lord Wake, founded the abbey in 1322; his coat of arms appears on the front and images of himself and his wife on the reverse.

2.3  Seal of the Salisbury Vicars Choral
Bronze, England, probably 1800–88, copying a seal from 1270–1300
P&E 1920,10-28,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 813)

2.4  Seal from Knoll Collegiate Church
White metal, England, 1396–1413
P&E 1838,12-32,12 (Tonnochy cat. no. 843)
Section 3  Bishops’ Seals and Seals with Images of Saints

3.1 Seal of an unknown bishop
Bronze, France or Germany, 1100–1200
P&E 1872,6-3,211
Bishops’ seals were often destroyed as a security measure, which may explain why this seal is broken.

3.2 Seal of Conrad II, Bishop of Hildesheim
Bronze, Germany, 1246–49
P&E 1864,8-1,4

3.3 Seal of Agostino de Fieschi, Bishop of Sargona, Corsica
Gilt bronze, Italy, 1510
Donated by John H. Rassweiler
P&E 2004,10-5,1

3.4 Seal with an image of St Peter
Jet, England, c. 1250–1300
Donated by Stanley Austin
P&E 1922,11-11,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 921)

3.5 Seal with an image of St Andrew
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1838,12-32,11 (Tonnochy cat. no. 631)

3.6 Seal with an image of St Michael
Bronze, Germany, 1300–1400
P&E 1887,7-6,20

3.7 Seal of Robert, Prior of Dover, with an image of St Martin
Bronze, England, 1330–50
P&E 1872,5-20,17 (Tonnochy cat. no. 840)

3.8 Seal with an image of St John the Baptist
Bronze, Germany, 1200–1300
P&E 1844,9-28,1
Section 4  Seals with Religious Imagery

4.1  Seal showing the Lamb of God  
Bronze, England, 1300–1400  
P&E 1922,6-7,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 900)

4.2  Seal of Indulgence  
Gilt-bronze, Europe, 1400–1500  
Sloane Bequest, P&E 1838,12-32,9  
This seal was used by the hospital of St Peter in Bodrum (Turkey) to grant indulgences.

4.3  Seal showing the flagellation of Christ  
Bronze, Germany, 1250–1300  
P&E 1875,1-20,36  
This seal belonged to the Commander of the Teutonic Order of Knights in Werden.

4.4  Seal with the ‘Pelican in Piety’  
Bronze, England, 1300–1400  
P&E 1936,10-15,2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 596)

4.5  Seal showing Adam and Eve  
Bronze, England, 1300–1400  
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks  
P&E 1860,9-20,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 930)

4.6  Seal showing the Virgin and Child  
Bronze, England, 1300–1400  
P&E 1923,1-10,2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 882)  
The guild of St Mary, who owned this seal, founded Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

4.7  Seal showing a priest celebrating Mass  
Bronze, England, 1300–1400  
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks  
P&E 1889,5-7,32 (Tonnochy cat. no. 934)

4.8  Seal showing a deacon  
Bronze, England, 1300–1400  
P&E 1838,12-32,22
Section 5  Counterseals

5.1  Private counterseal of William de Luda
Silver and gemstone, England, c. 1270–1300
P&E 1956,12-3,1

5.2  Impression of counterseal of Richard of Dover
Parchment and beeswax, England, 1177
On loan from John H. Rassweiler

5.3  Seal showing Antoninus Pius
Silver and red jasper, England, 1200–1300
Purchased with funds given by John H. Rassweiler
P&E 2006,10-4,1

The high-quality intaglio represents Antoninus Pius who reigned as Roman emperor from AD 138–161. The Latin legend around the seal offers the advice: ‘place your letter under a secret seal’.

5.4  Seal showing Lucius Verus
Gold and nicolo, England, 1200–1300
On loan from Messrs French and Terris

Like the previous gem, this intaglio of Lucius Verus (reigned AD 161–169) is of high quality and in a precious metal mount. The legend reads: sigillum secreti, ‘secret seal’.
Section 6  Legends on Secret Seals

6.1  Seal of William de Bosco
Silver and yellow jasper, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1956,12-3,3

This seal bears the name of William de Bosco, but after 1200 most users of secret seals did not include their name in the legend, using the Latin word for secret instead (secretum). The gem represents the winged horse, Pegasus.

6.2  Seal with legend ‘secret seal’
Silver and sard, England, 1300–1400
Donated by John Henderson
P&E 1878,3-20,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 703)

The gem represents Mercury, the messenger of the gods, and was perhaps chosen for this reason.

6.3  Seal with legend ‘Jesus is my love’
Silver and sard, England, 1300–40
Donated by Trinity College Cambridge
P&E 1923,5-8,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 897)

The choice of an image of Dionysius, the god of wine, combined with the word ‘Jesus’ in the legend may refer to the celebration of Communion.

6.4  Seal with and the legend: ‘Who carries me fares best’
Silver and sard, England, 1300–1400
P&E1896,3-26,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 760)

The Roman intaglio of the god Hercules again seems to relate to the message of the legend.
Section 6  Legends on Secret Seals cont.

6.5  Signet ring with the legend ‘I hide secrets’
Gold and sard, England, early 1300s
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
AF 558

6.6  Seal with legend ‘I am the seal of loyal love’
Silver and sard, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1896,3-26,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 760);
P&E 1865,2-8,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 721)

6.7  Seal with legend ‘I write about unknown things’
Silver and carnelian, England, 1200–1300
Donated by Willoughby A. Littledale
P&E 1925,2-9,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 765)

6.8  Seal with legend ‘I cover the enclosed secrets’
Gold and jasper, England, c. 1300–30
P&E 1881,3-2,1
This superb gem is medieval in date, and depicts a woman in fashionable contemporary dress.

6.9  Seal with legend ‘seal of love’
Silver and green paste, England, 1300–1400
Donated by Revd Dr Sparrow Simpson
P&E 1875,2-1,12 (Tonnochy cat. no. 717)
As this medieval gemstone depicts the Lamb of God, the sentiment is likely to refer to religious rather than romantic love.
7.1 **Fake seal of Henry II**  
Lead, England, c. 1170–1200  
Donated by Captain Duncomb  
P&E 1854,7-19,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 4)

Faking seals was a widespread problem. This fake seal in lead is a copy of Henry II’s second Great Seal. Henry spared one man from hanging for forging royal seals, but by c. 1200 the crime was strictly punishable by death.

7.2 **Signet ring of Richard I**  
Gold and glass, England, 1189–99  
P&E 1962,11-1,1

The Latin legend describes this ring as the private seal of King Richard. The gem intaglio depicts Mercury and can be dated c. AD 400.

7.3 **Seal of Isabella of Hainault**  
Silver, France, 1180–90  
P&E 1970,9-4,1

The carving and realisation of this silver seal are of extraordinary quality. Isabella, the wife of Philip II of France, died at the age of 21 in 1190. Her seal describes her as the Queen of France and was buried with her at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

7.4 **Seal of Joanna, daughter of Henry II of England**  
Silver, England, pre-1196–99  
P&E 1897,5-8,1&2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 5)

Joanna became Queen of Sicily through her first marriage to William the Good. Her second marriage added the titles of Duchess of Narbonne, Countess of Toulouse and Marchioness of Provence.
Section 7  Royal Seals cont.

7.5  Seal of the Prince of Wales (later Henry V)
Bronze, England, 1408–13
P&E 1987,4-4,1
This seal was made for Henry when he was Prince of Wales. After Owen Glendower’s revolt against the English failed in 1408, Henry wanted to reinforce his power and control in Wales. His seal shows him in a position of authority as the Lord of Carmarthen.

Section 8  Noble Lords and Ladies

8.1  Seal of Robert Fitzwalter
Silver, England, 1213–19
P&E 1841,6-24,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 332)
Robert Fitzwalter, shown fighting a dragon, was one of the barons who made King John attach his seal to Magna Carta. The shield of arms placed close to his horse belonged to his allies, the de Quincy family.

8.2  Seal of the Guild of St George
Gilt-bronze, Italy, 1200–1300
P&E 1936,10-15,1
St George became very popular in Europe after the Third Crusade, 1189–92. This seal was used by the Guild of St George in Ferrara.
Section 8  Noble Lords and Ladies cont.

8.3 Seal of William Fitzhamon
Jet, England, c. 1200–30
P&E 1978,1-2,1
Jet was never a common material for seals (it is a rare material and shatters easily); metal seals were preferred.

8.4 Mathilda Scalers
Silver, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1920,4-15,8 (Tonnochy cat. no. 621)

8.5 Seal of Christine de Waig
Lead, England, 1200–1300
Donated by Maurice Rosenheim
P&E 1913,7-10,9 (Tonnochy cat. no. 627)
Christine de Waig’s seal describes her as the daughter of Roger de Waig.

8.6 Seal of Mas, wife of Antonio
Bronze, Italy, 1300–1400
P&E 1886,3-21,10

8.7 Seal of Eva Machenheimer
Lead, Holland or Germany, 1400–1500
P&E 1875,1-20,35
Eva Machenheimer’s seal depicts the coats of arms of her husband’s family.

8.8 Seal of Elizabeth of Sevorc
Gilt-bronze, France, 1260–1310
P&E 1987,1-3,1
Women are rarely depicted on horseback on seals. Elizabeth of Sevorc is called ‘Lady Elizabeth’ in her legend. No mention is made of her husband or father and so it is possible that she had lands and wealth of her own.
Section 9  Hunting and Love

9.1 Seal with legend ‘Think of doing well’
Bronze, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1936,10-15,3 (Tonnochy cat. no. 763)

9.2 Seal with legend ‘Alas, I am caught’
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1870,4-2,76 (Tonnochy cat. no. 748)

These images depict hunting scenes but such legends could also refer to the pursuits of love.

9.3 Seal with legend ‘Seek hares in woods and pleasures in words’
Bronze, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1986,6-6,1

The legend is a clever play on words as the Latin for ‘hare’ and ‘pleasure’ are similar.

9.4 Seal with an image of a rabbit
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
Donated by Mrs Way.
P&E 1910,2-9,4 (Tonnochy cat. no. 755)

9.5 Seal with legend ‘You have my heart, do not deceive it’
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1837,10-18,9 (Tonnochy cat. no. 733)

9.6 Seal with legend ‘Break, read, conceal’
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1987,4-3,13
Section 9  Hunting and Love cont.

9.7 Seal with legend ‘By the Cross, women are mad’
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
P&E 1889,5-7,30 (Tonnochy cat. no. 762)

The legend, in English, is an oath against women and may have been used on letters between men as a joke.

9.8 Seal of Windsor Castle
Bronze, England, c. 1400
P&E 1858,2-18,3 (Tonnochy cat. no. 192)

Stags were hunted in the royal forests, which were reserved for the king’s use.

9.9 Seal of Jacques de Chabanes, Knight
Bronze, French, 1400–1500
P&E 1889,5-12,1

9.10 Seal of Robert, called the Wolf
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1856,6-27,136 (Tonnochy cat. no. 614)

9.11 Seal of Robert Archer
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
Donated by Mill Stephenson
P&E 1927,2-16,11 (Tonnochy cat. no. 556)

The images on both of these seals are rebuses on the owners’ names.


Section 10 Exotic Beasts

10.1 Signet ring of the Percy family
Gold, England, c. 1470–1500
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
P&E AF771

Signet rings were used as counterseals, or private seals, for extra security. They were particularly popular from c. 1400. The lion on this signet was the family crest of the Percys. It is used here with the motto 'Now is thus'.

10.2 Seal of Giovanni di Sasolo
Bronze, Italy, 1300–1400
P&E 1886,3-21,27

10.3 Seal with legend 'I am a strong lion'
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
Donated by Mill Stephenson
P&E 1927,2-16,5 (Tonnochy cat. no. 741)

Lions, as fierce, noble animals were favoured by knights as a sign of nobility.

10.4 Seal with legend 'Shame on he who deceives'
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
P&E 1865,12-20,91 (Tonnochy cat. no. 745)

10.5 Seal with legend ‘Wake me no man’
Bronze, England, 1300–1400
P&E 1889,8-3,6 (Tonnochy cat. no. 744)

10.6 Seal of John de la Pole
Gilt bronze, England, 1484–85
P&E 1838,12-32,16 (Tonnochy cat. no. 208)

This grand seal of John de la Pole declares him to be the nephew of Richard III. This is his seal as Earl of Lincoln and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The coat of arms at the centre is held by two yales. A yale was like a goat, with boar’s teeth and coloured spots.
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Section 10 Exotic Beasts cont.

10.7 Seal of Criccieth Town
Bronze, Wales, 1284–85
Donated by R H Wood, P&E 1900,6-11,1
(Tonnochy cat. no. 172)

10.8 Seal of Walter the deacon
Bronze, German, 1200–1300
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
P&E 1877,7-6,35

Both seals depict wyverns, a type of two-legged dragon.

Section 11 Towns and Trade

11.1 Seal from Boppard-on-Rhine
Bronze, German, 1228–36
P&E 1842,9-26,6

The seal of Boppard is a masterpiece of engraving with a representation of the city’s cathedral. Perched on the roof is a magnificent eagle. St Severus, the patron saint, stands in the gateway.

11.2 Seal of Sir Gilbert Wace, Sheriff of Oxford
Bronze, England, c. 1372–79
P&E1903,6-19,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 186)

11.3 Seal matrix of the Bridge Wardens of Rochester
Bronze, England, probably1421
P&E1862,2-19,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 187)
11.4 Seal of the Tailors of Exeter
Silver, England, 1475
P&E 1887,7-27,32 (Tonnochy cat. no. 177)

11.5 Seal of Thomas the Purser
Bronze, England, c. 1300–30
P&E 1856,7-1,2226 (Tonnochy cat. no. 177)

11.6 Seal of Benedict the baker
Lead, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1857,12-11,2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 161)
This seal is much larger than the others but is made of lead which was cheaper.

11.7 Seal of Thomas the vintner
Bronze, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1838,12-32,50 (Tonnochy cat. no. 168)

11.8 Seal of Matthew an English clerk
Bronze, England, c. 1300–30
P&E 1864,8-4,3 (Tonnochy cat. no. 163)

11.9 Seal of the Controller of the Herring Fishery
Bronze, England, 1400–30
P&E 1838,12-32,47 (Tonnochy cat. no. 193)
Section 11  Towns and Trade cont.

11.10 Two seals
Lead, England, 1200–1300
P&E 1856,6-27,125 (Tonnochy cat. no. 573);
P&E 1863,2-10,2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 600)

These simple seals are typical of those owned by large numbers of working men. They are engraved with flowers, stars and crosses.

11.11 Seal of Robert Witside of Dover
Bronze, England, c. 1270–1300
Donated by Maurice Rosenheim
P&E 1913,7-10,12 (Tonnochy cat. no. 634)

11.12 Seal of English merchants in the Low Countries
Bronze, England, after 1462
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
P&E 1880,6-24,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 156)

Section 12  Royal Authority in England

12.1 Seal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester as Admiral
Bronze, England, 1461–62
P&E 1889,3-10,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 27)

Richard is described in his seal as Admiral for Dorset and Somerset. He became King Richard III in 1483.
Section 12 Royal Authority in England cont.

12.2 Royal seal for the Port of London
Silver, England, 1272–1307
Donated by Lady Harriet Fellows
P&E 1850,9-24,2 (Tonnochy cat. no. 34)

Edward I was a great supporter of the English textile industry. This seal conveys his royal authority through the arms of England combined with four swords.

12.3 Seal for the delivery of wool and hides
Bronze, England 1272–1307
Donated by the Lords of the Treasury and Mrs Piggott
P&E 1842,12-32,8; P&E 1856,4-28,2 (Both Tonnochy cat. no. 137)

Customs seals were two sided. Such seals were carefully controlled and carried the royal coat of arms for England on each side. This seal is for customs duties in Carmarthen, Wales.

12.4 Official seal for the Wool Staple, Westminster
Silver, England, probably 1393
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
P&E 1888,11-10,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 36)

12.5 Seal for subsidy on cloth
Bronze, England, c. 1272–1307
P&E 1887,11-27,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 29)

12.6 Seal for labourers’ passes
Bronze, England, 1388
P&E 1863,6-29,1 (Tonnochy cat. no. 191)

12.7 Seal of the Shearmen and Fullers
Guild of the Nativity, Coventry
Gilt-bronze, England, c. 1439
P&E 1989,6-4,1

This seal, granted by Henry VI, allowed the guild to acquire property as a corporation.