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SIGILLVM NEWSLETTER No. 11 - 2017

English Version

SIGILLVM NEWSLETTER No 11 – SEPTEMBER 2017

Dear Members,

Welcome to your third Newsletter of 2017, brought to you by SIGILLVM. We hope that this regular bulletin will help you to keep up not only with the advertised activities of our association but also with all other news relevant to the study of seals in the widest sense.

Feel free to tell us about anything that might interest our members (publications, conferences, exhibitions, visits, and websites – anything), please use our contact form: <http://www.sigillvm.net/contact-us/>.

The SIGILLVM Newsletter is produced for you – but also thanks to you! Once again, many thanks in advance for your input. Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on our website over the last year. If you have any suggestions for improvements, do let the Webmaster know: [webmaster\(at\)sigillvm.net](mailto:webmaster(at)sigillvm.net)

FROM THE TREASURER

A warm welcome to our newest member, Giovanni Giovinazzo of Turin. We are delighted to have a second Italian member.

Members are reminded that all those who have not paid their subscriptions for 2017, especially those members of the Board who have not yet paid for 2017, should do so as soon as they can.

BOARD MEETINGS

The next meeting of the SIGILLVM Board is scheduled for 8 December 2017, 13.30 in the rooms of the British Academy, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, United Kingdom, SW1Y 5AH.

CONFERENCES AND EXHIBITIONS

Report on the International Medieval Congress 2017, University of Leeds (UK) 3-6 July 2017

Dr Elizabeth New (top right) chaired the final discussions between the audience and our three speakers at this year's SIGILLVM session. Photo: Matthew Sillence.

This year's SIGILLVM sponsored session was entitled 'Seals and Social Strata in Northern Europe'. Our speakers included, Dr Ambre Vilain, Professor Phillipp Schofield and Dr John McEwan. The early start on the Wednesday did not deter conference delegates. The session was very well attended by seal enthusiasts and many more who were new to the field. Dr Ambre Vilain, who joined us from Nantes, led the session with a discussion of seal motifs from Normandy that survive from the excellent cast collections in France. The relatively standardised images, which comprise crosses and foliate designs, have led researchers to suggest that they belonged to peasants. Some designs were clearly more inventive, such as a very crossbow-like lily, perhaps a rebus design, playing on the name of the owner, whilst retaining one of these standard designs.

Professor Phillipp Schofield, from Aberystwyth, discussed the challenges of identifying a class of 'peasant' seals at all in England. Although many of the standardised designs found in France can also be found in England in relatively large numbers through lead seal matrices and through surviving impressions in archives, it is difficult to confidently identify individual peasants as seal owners, particularly as peasant wills may well have been oral or deathbed transmissions.

Dr John McEwan, who joined us from the United States, introduced the audience to the many challenges of the using data drawn from digitised catalogues and other finding aids that record many thousands of seal impressions in the British Isles. Examining seals regionally using such datasets poses many challenges around historical locations, such as inconsistent terminology. For example, should we classify seals from specific places, such as towns or cities, or by a county? There is also the issue of diffusion of seals over time across a region or entire country. If these are plotted, do they reveal how society adopted seals, or do the data simply record the best survivals in certain areas?



The lively discussions after the papers were chaired by SIGILLVM's Dr Elizabeth New. It is clear that sigillographic studies will need to tackle the challenges of identifying social groups from the historical record, and that identifying patterns of seal

designs, seal use, distribution and survival rates will be essential in the endeavour. We are grateful to all of our speakers and delegates for a very thought-provoking event.

Matthew Sillence, United Kingdom – [webmaster\(at\)sigillvm.net](mailto:webmaster(at)sigillvm.net)

Call for the International Medieval Congress 2018: 2-5 July 2018 Leeds International Medieval Congress 2018.

This will be held from 2 to the 5 July 2018 and the theme will be Memory. If there is anyone who wishes to organise a session on seals and sigillography (not necessarily involving memory, though it does seem to me that many seals illustrate memory), I would remind them that the date for Sessions is at the end of September 2017. SIGILLVM welcomes applications for financial support for the attendance of young scholars who are giving papers at sessions on seals. The 2019 Leeds conference will be held from the 1 to the 4 July 2019.

John Cherry, United Kingdom – [membership\(at\)sigillvm.net](mailto:membership(at)sigillvm.net)

PUBLICATIONS

Elton, Stuart F. 2017. *Cloth seals: an illustrated reference guide to the identification of lead seals attached to cloth*. Archaeopress Archaeology. (Available for £60 in print or £16 online. It is a well-illustrated survey of cloth seals with a wealth of detail and will supplant Geoff Egan's 1994 Catalogue as the first port of call for those identifying cloth seals).

McEwan, John Alexander. 2017. "The Past, Present and Future of Sigillography: Towards a New Structural Standard for Seal Catalogues." *Archives and Records* 1–20.

Prévost, Agnès. 2016. "Le parchemin, témoin des sceaux disparus". *Revue Support/Tracé* 15.

Our thanks to SIGILLVM members for reporting these titles.

VARIA

Websites

Harold M. Mernick has a useful website on the Great Seals of Britain. See <http://www.mernick.org.uk/seals/>

Stuart F. Elton also compiles and researches the 'Bagseals' site. <http://www.bagseals.org/gallery/main.php>

Talks and Workshops

Journées européennes du patrimoine.

Atelier jeune public: Vous aimez les puzzles? Devenez restaurateur de sceaux!. À partir de 7 ans. Aidez-nous à restaurer les collections brisées par une catastrophe. Archives nationales, site de Paris. 16-17 September 10.00-18.00. Led by Agnès Prévost, from l'atelier sceaux des archives nationales.

[Read more](#)

20ème Rendez-vous de l'histoire: Edition 2017, Eurêka - inventer, découvrir, innover, Blois, France

Agnès Prévost, Les sciences expérimentales au service de l'histoire: Le cas des sceaux plaqués mérovingiens et carolingiens, 7 October 2017, École du Paysage.

[Read more](#)

Reproduction of Seal Matrices

I would like to draw your attention to a firm in Cheshire that produces museum replicas for museums and detectorists. It is called Museum Reproductions and has a website: <http://www.museumreproductions.co.uk/shop/>

Among other products such as coins and rings, it reproduces seal matrices, which are very realistic. These, in every case, have the letter 'R' stamped on the coin or artefact to denote the fact that it is a reproduction and, although it is quite small, it will be spotted by a dealer or collector. They would not risk their reputation by omitting to stamp the 'R', even if requested to do so.

However it has been drawn to my attention that matrices which are either very similar to their matrices, or may, indeed, be their matrices without the letter R, have appeared on eBay.

One such shows the beheading of Thomas of Canterbury (shown right), and is no. 101 on their shop list.

Apparently, this was copied from a genuine seal matrix, submitted to them, but they have no record of where or when the original was found, or who sent it to them. Copies of this seal matrix have appeared on eBay both in lead (the material used by Museum Reproductions) and also in silver. Buyers beware. The original does not appear on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) website. If anyone knows the where it is, I would be delighted to hear.

This may be an appropriate moment to remind you of the value of the PAS website. I recently came across a fine gilded seal of the Abbot of Coggleshall, the Cistercian abbey in Essex, England. PAS reference: SF-B902E6.

John Cherry, United Kingdom

Research Varnished and painted medieval beeswax seals

In the Middle Ages a thin layer of a liquid was occasionally applied to cover a wax seal. When this layer is transparent I call it varnish, and when it is opaque I name it paint. This difference in naming cannot always be applied, as varnish with time may become less transparent.

The 13th-century seals described in the inventory of *De Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland (The Charterbook of Holland and Zeeland)* this layer, if present, is always described as (bruin)geverfd, i.e. (brown-) painted. However, such seals pressed in England in the same centuries and now, I believe, in The National Archives are described by Walter de Gray Birch in the period 1887-1900 as varnished.

The geographical and chronological distribution of varnished seals is limited. In The Netherlands (brown)painted/varnished seals are mostly mentioned for Holland and Zeeland in the 13th and 14th centuries. In the charterbooks of Gueldre and (North)Brabant such seals are very rare. The same holds for seals conserved in the archives of the provinces Groningen (at Groningen city), Drenthe (Assen), Gueldre (Arnhem) and Limburg (Maastricht). The same is true for seals in Cologne and North France. Why these differences? Why are some whitish seals either painted green or red?

The varnished seals in The National Archives (London) have been described mostly in the books 1 (1887) and 2 (1892), by De Gray Birch. In the other four books (1894-1900) varnished seals are rarely mentioned. I hope to publish a paper on the subject Varnished/painted medieval seals. Maybe more attention will be paid to these seals in future.

Anton C. Zeven, NL-Wassenaar - [anton.zeven\(at\)hetnet.nl](mailto:anton.zeven@hetnet.nl)

Members' Publications

Publication of the proceedings of the 2015 conference on Seals and Status held by Sigillvm and the British Museum at the British Museum in December 2015 is being edited and is on course for publication early in 2018

SIGILLVM encourages members to submit their latest publications to our bibliography section of the website, which can be found by logging into the Membership area: <http://www.sigillvm.net/login/>. A <media 82_blank external-link-new-window "Opens external link in new window">video guide</media> is available on the website to help you add to our Bibliography.

SIGILLVM Newsletter Editor: Matthew Sillence, Webmaster

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