

belonged to the Duke of Modena. On it is represented St. George in armour, standing, and piercing a dragon at his feet. On his right is his charger ; at the side of the head is an inscription in Greek. A few of the principal outlines of the figures are represented by very broad bands of metal, which appear to be part of the solid background. The remainder of the lines are very fine fillets of copper, set on edge, and gilt. The enamels are opaque. A portion of the border of gilt metal remains, representing scrolls and figures of saints and angels, with Greek inscriptions.

These are the only specimens of this kind of enamel which appear to be undoubtedly of Greek workmanship. I shall reserve for a future occasion such specimens as seem to have been executed by artists of the Byzantine school in other countries, or by the native artists themselves.

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#### SOME REMARKS ON SEALS, WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR A PRACTICAL MODE OF CLASSIFYING THEM.

SEALS, in some of their various kinds, have now, for a considerable time, deservedly held a distinguished place in the estimation of those who have been engaged in antiquarian researches. They present a wide field for investigation and speculation. The reader, who may be curious to learn something of its extent, or of their history, may consult with advantage the treatise contained in the fourth volume of the *Nouveau Traite de Diplomatie*. The mediæval use of them, originally in the form of rings, so convenient for an unlettered age and race, may be traced to an early period of the Frankish and Germanic history. But among the Anglo-Saxons the general practice of authenticating writings, even the most formal and important, was by signing them with a cross. Edward the Confessor, however, had a seal, and other instances of Anglo-Saxon seals have been alleged, which some antiquaries have regarded with suspicion ; and it is foreign to the present purpose to enter upon the question of their authenticity. Certainly seals did

not come into general use in this country till a few years after the Conquest : from which time, for upwards of three centuries, they were the peculiar means of authenticating written instruments of every sort among all classes of society. Beside their legal character and importance, the valuable information which they imparted to the historian, antiquary, genealogist, and herald, has contributed to the regard in which they have been held far more than their curiosity as remains of mediæval art, or the interest naturally belonging to them as indications of individual taste, and the means whereby a large portion of the ordinary business of life was transacted, and of the intercourse of society was carried on, until they were by degrees in a great measure superseded by the autographs and personal signatures of modern times, and left for legal purposes as a formality involving no longer the necessity of their being identified as the particular seals of those who used them.<sup>1</sup>

On the revival of letters, the novelty and intrinsic excellence of the ancient classical literature to a great extent engrossed the attention of men of studious habits, till the inherent charm which there is in the history of a man's own country began to reassert its influence ; and as minds thus better disciplined were brought to the subject, historical evidence was more correctly appreciated, and more diligently sought for. The charters of the intervening ages were examined, their credit tested, and their seals scrutinised and compared. Traces of this begin to appear in the sixteenth century, yet chiefly on the continent ; but in the next century seals were very generally adduced and appealed to as proofs for divers purposes ; and since that time they have ever been regarded with interest, and had a place assigned them among the contributories to our knowledge of bygone times. The notices of them by Selden, Dugdale,

<sup>1</sup> This remark is not intended to apply to such modern seals as are used without any signature to identify them. Nor would I be understood to mean, that at any time it was absolutely necessary that a charter or deed of a private individual should have had his *own* seal attached to it. Even in the reign of Henry III., as appears from Bracton, it was sufficient if the grantor, before witnesses, sealed the deed or otherwise recognised the seal as his, though it were in reality another's. This, probably, accounts for many anomalous instances

of old deeds being sealed with coats of arms not borne by the grantors. The advantage of the deed being sealed with the grantor's own seal was, that when there was no witness, or when the witnesses were all dead, the seal could be proved to have been his ; which might have been done by comparing it with other impressions that were known or proved to be authentic. Hence, seals with the arms of other persons than the grantors, are less likely to occur when there are no witnesses mentioned.

Spelman, Sandford, Madox, and other English writers their contemporaries, and the Treatises of Mabillon, Heineccius, and the Benedictine authors of the *Nouveau Traite de Diplomatique*, show the value and importance that have been attached to them by competent judges in the earlier stages of archaeological science.

In a critical acquaintance with this interesting subject has been found one of the most efficient means of determining the genuineness of charters and the like, of identifying the persons by whom they were granted with their respective families, of appropriating the documents to the proper individuals when there were several of the same name, and of ascertaining the dates of undated instruments. In many cases they have added materially to the information contained in the writings to which they were appended; as by supplying or explaining a name, or mentioning an office which an individual held, or showing some particular relation in which he stood to others. For, since the execution of the seal was rarely contemporaneous with the sealing of the instrument, they are virtually two independent documents brought together, relating to the same person, and serving to explain and elucidate each other.

Apart, however, from written documents, and as detached impressions, seals, or the matrices themselves, are also fruitful sources of information. They not only supply what is deficient in impressions elsewhere found attached, but contribute to our knowledge in various ways that might not at first be anticipated. Official seals, and seals of ecclesiastics, bring to light sometimes the names of those who have filled offices, and enjoyed dignities, and been forgotten; and sometimes revive the knowledge of the existence of offices which had themselves fallen into oblivion. In like manner common seals occasionally attest the existence of communities of which all remembrance had ceased; while personal seals restore to family trees grafts and scions which had dropped away, and would otherwise have remained wholly unknown. On heraldry, which has proved so serviceable in the investigation of mediæval antiquities, they afford most valuable information; since from them we learn the earliest examples of the art, with few exceptions, and much of the subsequent usages and practice of it until the modern system prevailed. Analogous to brasses and other sepul-

chral memorials, they furnish evidence of the state, not only of the art by which they were executed, but likewise of those of ornamentation and design in general, and also illustrate the costumes of different classes of society at various periods ; and in their legends they exemplify the peculiar kinds of letters, and divers unusual modes of abbreviation and forms of expression that were from time to time in use. In addition to which, a large variety of personal seals, remarkable for their allusive and facetious legends and devices, reflect the taste, fancy, humour, and occasionally the superstitions of the age, as well as of the individuals. In an historical point of view, it is not too much to say that seals bear the same relation to subjects, both as individuals and communities, that coins and medals (on whose historical value it is needless to dwell) do to sovereigns and states ; while royal and municipal seals may in this respect rank with coins and medals themselves. Accordingly Peiresc, who had diligently studied these things both in France and this country, and corresponded with Camden, was accustomed to say (as Chifflet writes), "*Sigilla, numismata, aliaque id genus, testes esse antiquitatis incorruptos, quodque ex iis addiscerentur, quæ frustra requireret quis ex historiographis omnibus.*" *Anastas. Childeric. cap. vii., p. 113.*

In Germany and France, where diplomatics, or the art of deciphering charters and the like, and of discriminating the genuine from the false, have for many years been regarded as a science, the subject of seals, which constitutes so important a branch of it, has received a corresponding share of attention, and their history and characteristics have been discussed in a manner unparalleled in this country.<sup>2</sup> But the seals which have been studied by the foreign diplomatists have been chiefly those of sovereigns and the higher orders of the nobility and clergy ; while comparatively little consideration has been bestowed on the personal seals of the inferior nobles and ecclesiastics, and of the humbler classes of the people ; which may be partly owing to the greater importance belonging to other seals, and partly to the fact of personal seals having been much less extensively used in

<sup>2</sup> I must here mention, as an eminent exception to the general manner in which such subjects have been treated by English writers, the very able and instructive

paper on the Great Seals of England, by Professor Willis, in the second volume of this Journal.

those countries than in England. There frequent recourse was had to notaries for the attestation of transactions, and the authentication of instruments; whereas here, so great was the credit given to personal seals, that notaries were rarely employed except in ecclesiastical matters; and the use of seals prevailed among all grades and classes of persons, male and female, ecclesiastic and lay, whether secular or regular, bond or free. For every one who had occasion to execute a deed, whether in a transaction relating to land or otherwise, though it were a mere agreement, or a release from a previous agreement, or an acquittance, had need of a seal. And deeds were then used for the most trifling purposes, not being the formidable looking things they are now, but generally little larger than a bank note, and occasionally not containing many more words than a modern receipt. It is sometimes stated that every man who was liable to be sworn on an inquest was required to have a seal, whether he were a bondman or freeman; but the record which has been referred to as an authority for this, namely, the so-called statute of 14. Edw. I., or *Statutum Exoniæ* (which in fact was not an Act of Parliament, nor is the alleged date of it to be relied on), does not go to that extent. It is confined to those who were to be sworn on certain inquests for inquiring into the conduct of coroners on that particular occasion. It shows, nevertheless, that seals were sometimes used by bondmen; for, failing a proper number of freemen, there were to be bondmen sworn, and all were to have seals and affix them to the presentment. A very large number of personal seals of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, have come down to us; and of their varieties, I cannot give the reader a better notion than by referring him to the very interesting Paper by Mr. Hudson Turner on the subject in the fifth volume of this Journal.

Beside the personal seals of the laity, there were a large number of official seals and common seals of communities, both lay and ecclesiastic; and the seals of the clergy individually were also very numerous. For it may be justly supposed that they were no less necessary for persons in office and bodies corporate than for private individuals; and all the dignities and preferments in the church bore more or less the character of offices, even when they were not strictly

speaking official. Indeed, the seals of ecclesiastics constitute a remarkable division of the subject. In the year 1237, when heraldic seals were becoming general among the nobility, Cardinal Otto, the Papal legate in this country, thought it expedient to have some regulations made respecting them ; and, accordingly, among divers other constitutions or canons passed at a synod held in London, over which he presided, was one whereby, after mentioning that, since the use of notaries did not prevail in this kingdom, it was the more necessary to have recourse to authentic seals, in order that there might be a sufficiency of them the synod decreed that not only archbishops and bishops, but likewise their officials, and also abbots, priors, deans, archdeacons, and their officials, and also rural deans, and the chapters of cathedral churches, and other colleges and convents, either together with their rectors (or heads) or separately, according to their usage or statutes, should have seals ; and that, for the sake of distinction, every one of them should have his or their own proper seal, on which should be engraved in plain characters the name of the dignity, office, or college, and also the name of the person who enjoyed any permanent dignity or office, and that such seals should be deemed authentic ; and those respectively who undertook any temporary office, as rural deans and officials, should, at the termination of their office, resign their seal to him by whom they were appointed, and which seal should have engraved on it only the name of the office. Some directions then follow as to the custody of common seals of ecclesiastical bodies, and the dating of instruments, which, however, do not concern my present purpose.<sup>3</sup> I do not find any general canon of the Church to the like effect, and from the manner in which this constitution is mentioned by Heineccius and the Benedictines, I infer that there is none, though the seals of foreign ecclesiastics in regard to their legends are very similar to those of this country.

After all that has been said respecting these remains of medieval times, it is hardly possible to appreciate the interest which attends the prosecution of the subject, or the assistance in other branches of knowledge which is to be derived from it, without inspecting and comparing a considerable number of examples of various kinds ; nor without such means at

<sup>3</sup> See Math. Paris de anno, 1237; and Wilkin's Concilia, I., pp. 647, 655.

hand, can the study be advantageously pursued. It is to be regretted that there is no extensive and well-arranged collection to which ready access might be had for the purpose. Fortunately there is something so attractive about them, that some individuals have taken pleasure in bringing many of them together even without regard to any ulterior use to be made of them. The collector of seals may be assured that he renders no inconsiderable service to the cause of archaeology, though he may be prompted solely by the gratification of a natural curiosity ; for there will, I doubt not, be found those who can turn his stores to good account ; and since it is now practicable to multiply examples by means of gutta percha, the more curious and instructive may be placed in their hands without any detriment to the collector. Amidst the great diversity and number of the seals which he acquires, he must soon be sensible of the want of some system of classification, if he would observe anything like an orderly arrangement ; and he probably tries several methods without being able to satisfy himself. Should he seek assistance from any publication on seals, he finds the distribution of the subject, however well adapted for a treatise, does not answer his requirements. The author and collector have very different ends in view. The author may class them according to the various descriptions of persons by whom they were used, or the different purposes for which they were employed ; and treat specifically only of such as he can bring within those several heads. He is not bound to find a fitting place for every seal that may occur. This the methodical collector wishes to do ; but the most experienced, however discriminating, must often be ignorant alike of those who used the seals which he meets with, and of the particular purposes for which they were employed. A mere chronological arrangement is impracticable ; for to many no date could be assigned with sufficient certainty to determine their places. Various modes of classification might be suggested, each presenting some advantage ; but most persons who well consider the subject will, I think, be convinced that no scheme will be found really practicable, however specious, that does not depend on such distinctions as appear on the seals themselves. This may at first seem to lead to a very artificial and unusual distribution, yet, in reality, such is by no means extensively the case ; and a little singularity is



well compensated for, if practicability be attained. There is a character about ecclesiastical seals which makes them readily recognisable. Most of them, in accordance with the constitution of Cardinal Otto, have on them the distinctions prescribed by it; and even the private personal seals of ecclesiastics have generally some figure, device, or legend which serves to distinguish them. The seals of the laity are less easily referable to the different classes who used them, since the titles or other designations of the respective individuals less frequently present themselves; beside which, the several classes of the laity were not so clearly defined as those of the clergy, and such lay distinctions as existed in one country, or at one period, would not be found applicable to those of another. However, the seals of sovereigns and of their issue to some extent, and their respective consorts, which can be identified by the legends and heraldry upon them (and such is the case with most of them), might be arranged in classes apart from the rest; and, in like manner, official seals, and the seals of corporations and similar bodies, appearing to be such on the face of them (as nearly all of them do), may form other classes. But the great mass of lay seals would still remain to be disposed of; and they are far too numerous to be comprised under one head. For these, a method of distribution must be devised, irrespective of rank, sex, station, or use; and such as shall be easy of application, and according to distinctions apparent on the seals themselves.

In classification of any kind it is of course of the first importance that the classes should be well defined; but the great difficulty commonly is, to divide the subject in such a way that the several parts of it taken together shall comprise the whole; and so, in like manner, on every sub-division; a difficulty which is greatly increased when the subject cannot be exhausted, but newly discovered genera and species are continually claiming places. For practical purposes, and it is with them only that we are concerned, this object is best effected by always making the last of any number of heads, into which any class is divided, such as will comprise all of that class which are not comprised in the previous heads: so that in every case the last head (whether on the primary division or on any subdivision) will be residuary and miscellaneous.



The preceding observations will, it is hoped, render more readily intelligible the following Scheme, which has been prepared according to the principles of classification that have been suggested, and has been found to answer its purpose as far as it has been hitherto tried. It is capable of being adapted to the size and nature of the collection, existing or contemplated; for when that is small, the sub-division of some of the classes may be omitted; and when large or indefinite, further sub-divisions may be made, taking care that the distinctions appear on the seals themselves, and that in every case the last of any number of heads into which any class be sub-divided, comprises all of that class which are not comprehended in the others.

## SEALS.

## I.—ECCLESIASTICAL.

I.—Bulls and other seals of *individuals* referring to their *dignities, offices, or preferments.*

1. Popes.
2. Cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops.
3. Abbots, abbesses, and other heads of houses.<sup>4</sup>
4. Other ecclesiastics, secular or regular.

II.—*Common Seals, secreta, &c., of bodies corporate and the like.*

1. Chapters of cathedral or collegiate churches, with or without the head.
2. Religious communities professed, with or without the head.
3. Other bodies or communities.

III.—*Official Seals*, without name of any individual officer, or with name of officer not an ecclesiastic.IV.—Seals purely *personal*.

1. With name.
2. Without name.

V.—Seals unascertained, &c.—*i. e.*, miscellaneous ecclesiastical seals not comprised under any of the above heads.

## II.—LAY, comprising all that do not appear to be Ecclesiastical.

I.—Seals of *sovereigns*.II.—Seals of *consorts and daughters* of sovereigns.III.—Seals of *male issue of sovereigns*, and *consorts and daughters* of such issue.IV.—*Official Seals*.

1. In the sovereign's name.
2. With name of officer.
3. Without name of sovereign or officer.

<sup>4</sup> The word "houses" is here intended to comprise, not only regular communities, such as those of monks, nuns, and

friars, but also houses or colleges of secular priests or canons, and the like, though not those of cathedral or collegiate churches.

v.—*Common Seals, secreta, &c.*, of corporations and the like.

1. Cities, and towns.
2. Universities, and colleges therein.
3. Guilds, companies, and similar societies.
4. Schools, hospitals, and other communities.

vi.—*Personal Seals*, except those of sovereigns and their male issue, and of their respective consorts and daughters, appearing to be such.

1. With *effigies* seated, equestrian, or standing, with or without heraldry.
2. With *heraldry* of any kind, but no effigy.
3. With *merchants' marks* or *initials* as principal subjects.
4. With *devices* of other kinds, and *names*.
5. Ditto, . . . . . but no name.
6. With *names*, but no device.
7. With *legends* or *mottoes*, but neither device nor name.
8. *Miscellaneous* personal seals.

vii.—Seals unascertained, &c.—*i. e.*, miscellaneous lay seals not comprised under any of the above heads.

After what has been said by way of introduction to the preceding Scheme, I have little to add in explanation of it. In regard to official seals, in every case it is the office, whether ecclesiastical or lay, and not the officer, that is to determine the place of the seal. In like manner our universities and colleges for education are to be considered lay corporations, as in fact they are. See Blackst. Comm. I., p. 471. By *device* is intended such as constitutes the principal subject, and not mere ornament or accessories. It will be obvious, and it is unavoidable, that a seal difficult to decipher or interpret may sometimes require to be placed under a different head when more completely understood: and though the seals themselves are to furnish the distinctions, yet what is found on them will sometimes need explanation; and hence in those cases it may happen, without any inconsistency, that we ascertain, by additional information from other sources, such important facts, for example, as whether an office or community was lay or ecclesiastical, secular or monastic. It is not easy to define precisely certain terms: as, for instance, who is a sovereign, but in the great majority of examples there will be no difficulty; and in the very few doubtful cases it is not of any great consequence should the seal be placed under some head to which, if not a sovereign's, it would belong, until the doubt is removed: and so in

similar cases. If the designation of any head should, from its brevity, seem obscure, probably such obscurity will be dissipated on calling to mind, that no head is intended to comprise what is clearly comprehended under any other which is numbered in the same series. For a purpose of this kind, it is not unreasonable, and has been found most convenient, to *assume* all seals to be lay which do not show themselves to be otherwise; and therefore the term "lay seals" has been made to comprise all seals that do not appear to be ecclesiastical; and in this sense these words must be understood in the last division of that class.

W. S. W.

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#### EXAMPLES OF MEDIÆVAL SEALS.

It has been proposed to bring together, from time to time, notices of the numerous impressions and matrices of seals communicated at the meetings of the Institute. Such collections towards the History of Seals, occasionally illustrated by woodcuts, will, it is hoped, be more acceptable to the readers of the *Journal* than the incidental mention of them in the Reports of the meetings. They will form a suitable sequel to the foregoing scheme for their classification, the want of which has long been felt by the collector.

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1. Common seal of the Benedictine Priory of St. Mary of Hurley, Berks, founded in the reign of the Conqueror by Geoffrey de Magna-villa. The conventual church, of which a portion, the western door, with chevrons mouldings, still exists, is said to have been dedicated by Osmond, Bishop of Salisbury, A.D. 1086. The Priory was a cell to the Abbey of Westminster.

The impression, from which the accompanying illustration has been taken, is appended to a deed whereby Prior Alexander and the convent granted their manor in Harefield, Middlesex, to Richard Weltekart of Louth (de Luda), Thomas his son, and Florence the wife of the same Thomas, to hold to them and the heirs of Thomas, of the chief lords of the fee, by the accustomed services, for ever. It was found by Mr. William F. Vernon amongst the evidences pertaining to his estate at Harefield, and communicated, by his kind permission, to the Institute. The deed is without date, but it may be assigned to the reign of the first or second Edward. The principal device is the Annunciation; between the angel Gabriel and the Virgin there is a vase with a lily, placed upon the apex of a pointed arch, which forms a compartment in the lower part of the seal; within this is a kneeling