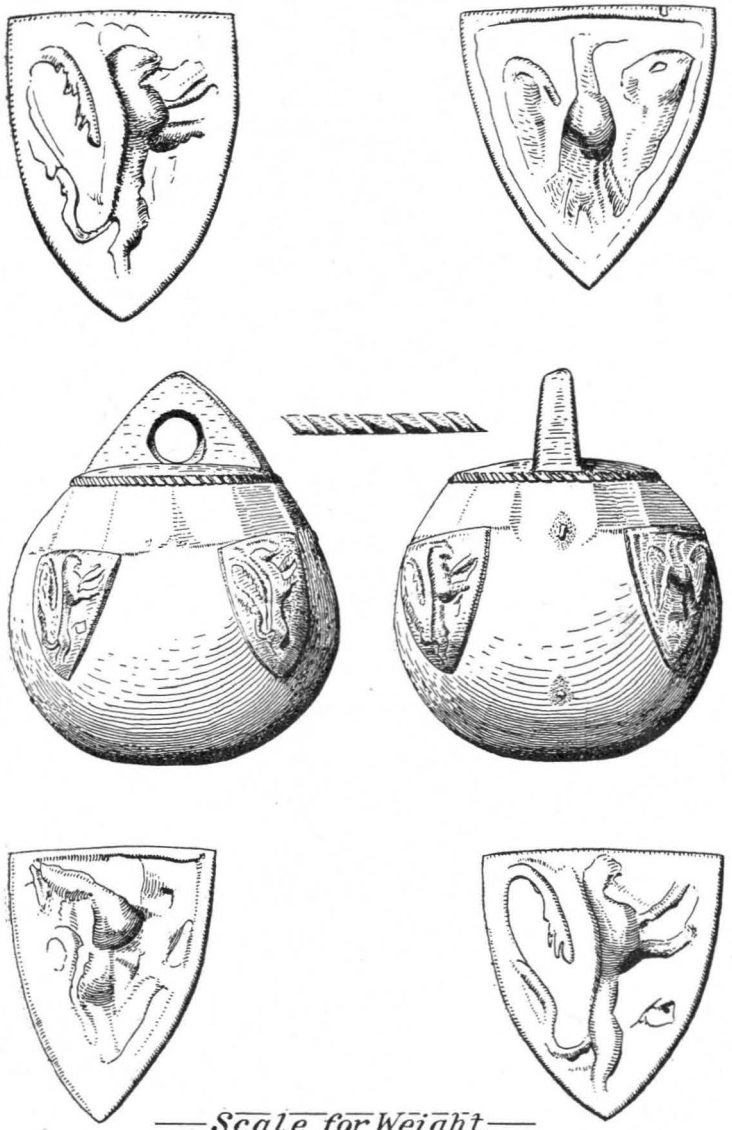
Scale for Weight.
1" ¾ ½ ¼ 0 1" 2" 3" 4"
Scale for Shields.
1" ¾ ½ ¼ 0 1"
Robert Hurd 1926

A THIRTEENTH CENTURY STEELYARD WEIGHT.

By ELIOT CURWEN, M.A., M.B., B.Ch., F.S.A.

The steelyard weight represented in the Plate was found when grubbing the roots of elms that had been cut down in Yapton, Sussex. The roots were in a meadow opposite to Bonhams Farm, and a ditch formerly existed between the trees and the highway. There is nothing to indicate how the weight reached the spot where it was found in February, 1923, or how long it had lain there, and no other object was found with it.

It consists of a thin shell of bronze, encasing lead; the lower two-thirds of the body is a slightly flattened sphere, and carries four shields; the upper third consists of eleven facets, and is separated from the flat surface of the top by a raised band ornamented to appear like a twisted cord. The whole is surmounted by a heavy triangular lug of bronze perforated for suspension. The four shields are heater in form, and are rudely executed in relief; two are charged with lion rampant, sinister, without bordure; one with a single-headed eagle, displayed in plain bordure; and the fourth is undecipherable. Between a pair of shields on each side, and in the plane of the lug, are the ends of what appear to have been iron pins which have perforated the casing; and at the very bottom of the weight is a hole in the bronze, half-an-inch in diameter, which has been stopped with a white cement. The total height of the object is 3 ins., and diameter $2\frac{1}{2}$ ins., and it weighs 2 lb. 13 oz. and 390 grains.

Thirty-four somewhat similar steelyard weights have been found in Great Britain,[1] twenty-six of which are preserved in public museums, but it is a peculiar fact that no two of them are exactly alike in size, weight or shields. They have been widely distributed, having been found in fourteen counties in the south and east of England, namely: Suffolk (4), Sussex (3), Hants (3), Essex (3), Norfolk (2), Cambridge (2), Berks (2), Dorset (2), Middlesex, Lincoln, Northants Warwick, Gloucester and Bedford (one each), while the provenance of seven is unknown.

In the Society's Museum at Lewes, is the lower two-thirds of one of these weights; it was discovered in 1835 together with some human bones near the entrance gateway of the Castle of Lewes, and about a foot below the surface. It carries three raised shields, two lion rampant dexter, and one double-headed eagle displayed, all within plain borders. The metal case which is 2 ins. in diameter varies from 1 to 3 mm. in thickness, and is completely occupied by a firm filling of lead. There are no signs of iron rivets, but there is a small cement-filled hole at the base as in the Yapton case. The upper surface of the fragment is quite level all round, and may have been rubbed smooth after fracture.

The third specimen from Sussex, presented to the British Museum by the late Mr. Henry Willett in 1880, is 2·4 ins. high, 2·5 ins. in breadth, and weighs 2 lb. 11 oz., and 367 grains. Its three shields are each charged in relief with a double-headed eagle displayed. There is no note of the details of its finding.

The arms are those of Richard, the second son of King John, who in 1225 was created Earl of Cornwall and Poitou (arms, lion rampant crowned within a

[1] After material had been collected for this paper, Dr. G. Dru Drury, of Corfe Castle, very kindly put into our hands a paper on "Thirteenth Century Steelyard Weights," which he read before the Dorset Field Club at Dorchester, on 8th December, 1925. Dr. Drury's material was fuller than ours, and we have ventured to draw upon it. His very full and thorough paper, which appears in this year's volume (XLVII) of the *Proceedings of the Dorset Field Club* should be consulted by all who are interested in the subject.

bordure sable besanty, i.e. Poitou within a bordure Cornwall), and in 1257 was elected King of the Romans, i.e. of the German Empire (arms, a double-headed eagle displayed). Richard appears to have been a good man of business, and to have obtained possession of great estates in various parts of England, and to have had a grant of the stanneries and mines of Cornwall and Devon. He came to his royal brother's assistance with large sums of money on several occasions,[2] and in 1244, it is stated, King Henry III. gave him the farming of the new coinage for twelve years, presumably that he might reimburse himself. The discovery of so many weights bearing his arms in so many counties in the south and east of England and in the midlands, calls for some explanation. It has been suggested that they indicate that Richard probably exercised some authoritative oversight over their manufacture, and that his arms were indeed a certificate that they had been issued by a proper authority,[3] and it has been thought likely that such oversight carried with it the duty and privilege of stamping the official weights with his own arms, and also such pecuniary advantages as attached thereto. Of this, however, there is no sure evidence. On the contrary, the evidence tells in the opposite direction, for unless the period for which he was granted the farming of the mint was extended, it must have terminated in 1256, a year before he was elected King of the Romans, and consequently a year before he could use the eagle on his shield. The fact that the eagle, single-headed or double, appears as we learn from Dr. Drury on four-fifths of those weights which bear well-marked shields, indicates that such cannot have been cast prior to 1257.

[2] An item of pathetic interest to the archæologist, and one that reveals Henry III's need of money, is found in the Calendar of the Close Rolls, April 22, 1237 (p. 433), which may be translated "The King commanded the Earl of Cornwall and Poitou that he should have excavations made in the barrows of the Earldom of Cornwall in order to discover treasure therein, even as he commanded excavations to be made in the Isle of Wight."

[3] In the British Museum is a Roman weight of A.D. 167 with an inscription meaning "On the Authority of Q. Junius Rusticus, City-Prefect."

That some Government official was responsible for the correct weights and measures in use seems likely, for at the Exchequer were two hereditary officials, one the Pesour, Ponderator or Weigher, and the other the Fusor (probably the Melter).[4] Richard, Earl of Cornwall, had a seat in the Court of the Exchequer[5] with the members of the King's Council and the Barons of the Exchequer, but he held neither of these hereditary offices, and had the weights been issued from the Exchequer, one would have expected them to bear the arms of England,[6] rather than those of an official, however highly placed.

It is possible that Richard had steelyards and weights made for use in his own extensive domains, and stamped them with the sign of his authority. His estates were numerous and large. From the *Dictionary of National Biography* we learn they were in Kent, Berks, Suffolk, Cornwall, Devon, Wales, Yorkshire, Gloucester, Norfolk and Middlesex, and Madox refers to him as Sheriff of Staffordshire; this list is no doubt incomplete, and his influence and interests probably extended beyond the areas of these possessions during parts of his busy and active life. If these weights were intended for use on Richard's own estates one would naturally expect that most of those found would have come from the neighbourhood of these estates, or at least from the counties in which they were situated; on the contrary, only five of the above eleven counties have produced specimens, while they have been found in nine counties in which, as far as we know, Richard had no estates.[7] More

[4] Madox, *History and Antiquities of the Exchequer* (1769), II., 307–309.

[5] *Ibid.*, II., 27.

[6] The arms of England are found on only eight of the thirty-four weights Dr. Drury has been able to trace.

[7] Richard had the City of Chichester in his hands "from the 20th of August of the eleventh year of Henry III. till the festival of Michaelmas in the sixteenth year" (1227–1232), (Madox, I. 334), but this was long before the date of the steelyard weight. For some time he had the Custody of most of the honour of Bramber also, but Chichester, Lewes and Yapton are all outside the boundaries of this honour. His only connection with Lewes seems to have been in 1264.

exact knowledge is needed as to which of his vast estates fortune had left in his hands during the period from 1257 to the time of his death in 1272, before any safe deductions can be drawn as to the relation of the provenance of the weights and Richard's domains.[8]

There is a fourth possibility[9] that may account for the presence of Richard's shields on the weights—a simpler and perhaps more satisfactory one. The German merchants of the Hanse seem to have had a footing in England as early as the reign of Ethelred, but they had no charter till the year 1260 when Henry III. granted them one "at the instance of the most serene Prince of the Roman Empire, our Brother,"[10] and it is not unlikely that the merchants of the German Steelyard put his arms on the weights that belonged to, or were issued by, them out of compliment to Richard, their King, for his share in obtaining for them so valuable a concession.

The fact that no two of the weights hitherto found are exactly alike in size and detail, indicates that they were not made in a common mould. Dr. Drury suggests that a core of some plastic material was prepared of a given size, and transfixed with projecting iron pins; that this was covered by a layer of wax which was modelled to the required design, and the whole covered with clay, except for a vent hole or two to permit of the exit of the wax on heating, and the entrance of the molten bronze to take its place. This suggestion accounts for the rudeness of the casting of the shields, the presence of the ends of the iron pins which would be needed to keep the core in position within the clay mould after the wax had been melted out, and also for the hole at the base of the weight for the extraction of the core, and for infilling with the needed amount of lead.

[8] Dr. Drury gives evidence that suggests that a few of these weights were made after Richard's death, between 1272 and 1300.

[9] Suggested to us by Mr. L. F. Salzman, our Editor.

[10] *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, Höhlbaum I, 193, and *London Past and Present*, III, 308.

The weighing machine we know as a "steelyard" is of some antiquity as it was widely used in the Greek and Roman World. The name *steelyard* has been variously derived, but it seems to be agreed that it was originally the name of a place rather than of a thing. In mediæval times there were commercial centres bearing this name in Boston, Coventry, Hull, York, Newcastle and Lynn,[11] as well as in London, and the most likely derivations would appear to be either that quoted by Herbert[12] who says "Lambecius explains the name *steelyard* (*stealhof*) as a contraction of *stapelhof*, softened into *stafelhof* and synonymous with the English word *staple*, which is in the Civil Law Latin style of Edward III. termed *stabile emporium*, a fixed port depot," or, more likely, that of the New English Dictionary which reads "Steelyard, a mistranslation of M L G *stâlhof* from *stâl*, sample, pattern + *hof*, courtyard. The word *stâl*, pattern, being homophonous with the word for *steel*, the meaning of the compound was misunderstood."

The steelyard in London was situated on the banks of the River in what is now Upper Thames Street, the actual site being occupied by Cannon Street station. The first mention of the Guildhall of the German merchants is in the Charter granted to them on the 15th of June of the forty-fourth year of the reign of Henry III. (1260).[13] Mr. M. L. Mayhew tells us in his interesting note that the German Merchants were on the Thames years before the messuage called "the steelyard" came into their possession, and that later on "the steelyard"—*der Stalhof*—was the name given to the whole property of which the "Gildhalla Teutonicorum" formed but a small part. In the fifteenth century, the word is spelt "stileyerd," or "stilehof," and in the sixteenth and seventeenth century we find "steelyard," "stillyard" and "stilliard."

[11] *New English Dictionary.*

[12] *Twelve Livery Companies*, p. 12, n, quoted by Messrs. Wheatley and Cunningham in *London Past and Present* III, 308.

[13] *Notes and Queries*, 10th, S. VI, 413.

Just as the men employed in this trade centre were known as "the steelyard men," so the public weighing machine kept in the steelyard was known as the *steelyard beam*, a name that became attached to the same type of machine wherever used, and which in course of time became simply "the steelyard."

The Yapton weight has been presented to the Society's Museum by W. A. Hounsom, Esq., on whose property it was found.

References to published accounts of thirteenth century steelyard weights:—

1. *Archæologia*, XXV., 589, and Plate LXIV.
2. *Proc. Soc. Antiquaries*, 2nd S., II, 143.
3. *Ibid.*, III. 286.
4. *Ibid.*, VII., 393.
5. *Ibid.*, XV., 247.
6. *Journ. British Archæological Assoc.*, LI. (1895), 92.
7. *Archæological Journ.*, I, 274.
8. *Ibid.*, II., 203.
9. *Ibid.*, VIII., 426.
10. M. A. Lower, *Curiosities of Heraldry*, pp. 39 and 317—319.
11. Dr. G. Dru Drury, *Proc. Dorset Field Club*, XLVII. (1926).