

A GROUP OF SEALS FOUND AT BANKSIDE FROM ST. GALLEN LINENS OR FUSTIANS

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A few of the late medieval and early post-medieval artefacts salvaged during the redevelopment of a site at Bankside in 1977 have already been brought to the attention of readers of the Society's publications.¹ The five leaden cloth seals discussed here were among two groups of objects found on the site which were submitted recently to the Museum of London for recording.²

All five seals are of the two disc form. Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (Pl. 1; Fig. 1 A and B) have been stamped on one side with a bear advancing to the right between the letters S and G in a rounded medieval style of script, and on the other side with an eagle displayed. Seals 4 and 5 (Pl. 2, *c.f.* C and D in Fig. 1) also have an S and a G in the same script, one letter being the complete device on each disc. The 'S' is reversed on these latter two seals.

Just visible above the eagle's head on No. 1 (on the reverse surface of the disc stamped with the bear, where this back disc extends beyond its partner), is an imprint of the textile to which the seal was attached (the area is indicated by a line in Pl. 1, top right). Such impressions, normally unseen on the opposing inner surfaces of the discs, are a fortuitous result of the pressure exerted in striking the dies as seals were fixed in place.³ The fabric indicated here (which has not survived) was plainwoven with fine tightly spun threads, six of which can be counted in 3mm. in one system, while in the other, which is not so well defined, they seem to have been slightly closer together.⁴

Similarities between the devices on the seals and some of the medieval coins of the city of St. Gallen, which are stamped with a bear advancing to the *left* and with an eagle (see below), as well as the letters on the seals indicating their provenance, identify these Bankside finds as having come from imported textiles woven in the St. Gallen area⁵ of the upper Rhine (in present day Switzerland).

The official marking of textiles with leaden seals to indicate the good quality and provenance of each piece (*c.f.* hallmarks on precious metals) was a widespread practice in Europe from the 14th to the 18th centuries.⁶ The three larger seals (Nos. 1–3) probably each came from a different cloth. Whether the letters on Nos. 4 and 5 were adequate to identify the provenance to merchants and consumers, so that they could have been attached on their own to other textiles, or whether they were used in some subsidiary capacity along with the more elaborate ones, perhaps fixed at a different point on the length of cloth, is not known.

St. Gallen was the main producer of linens in late medieval Europe, and its

fabrics were widely traded.⁷ The industry continues to the present day.⁸ The coinage of the city further provides some indications of the date when the Bankside seals would have been used.⁹ The eagle, which appears on many issues, is single-headed from 1424 (the earliest dated coins from here) onwards to an undated series perhaps minted until 1529; from 1563 until well into the next century it is double-headed. In 1475 the bear on the city arms was given a collar by the Emperor Frederick III in recognition of services rendered by the St. Gallen contingent in the war against Burgundy.¹⁰ Assuming that the dies for the city's cloth seals were, like those for the coins, changed to keep up with the differences in the heraldry, the single-headed eagle together with the collarless bear on Nos. 1–3 implies a date for the group prior to the last quarter of the 15th century. Comparison with the dating ascribed to most of the assignable items recovered from the same site suggests these seals were used sometime between 1425 and 1475.¹¹

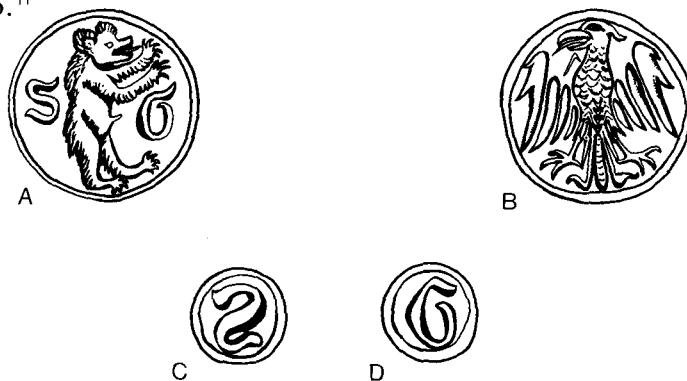


Fig. 1 St. Gallen seals: Simplified drawings of the stamps. A, bear between S and G; B, eagle; C, reversed S; D, G. (1:1).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Brian Spencer, Chris Unwin, Katharine Hayes, Trevor Hurst and John Bailey for their help in the preparation of this note.

NOTES

1. B. Spencer 'Henry of Windsor and the London Pilgrim' in J. Bird, H. Chapman and J. Clark eds. *Collectanea Londiniensia (Studies Presented to Ralph Merrifield)* London & Middx. Archaeol. Soc. Special Paper No. 2 (1978) 260–1.
2. Nos. 2, 3 & 5 are in the collection of Mr. J. Auld; Nos. 1 & 4 were generously donated to the Museum of London (Acc. Nos. 80.82/5 and /52) by the finder, Mr. J. Haywood. I am grateful to Mr. Auld for making those he recovered available for publication, and to Mr. Haywood for his gift to the Museum.
3. For details of the method of attachment of this two disc type of seal to the textile, see G. Egan 'Cloth Seals' *London Archaeologist* 3 No. 7 (Summer 1978) 177–9.
4. I am grateful to my colleague Frances Pritchard for examining the imprint and providing this information.
5. There are some seals for St. Gallen textiles, thought to date from the 18th century, in the St. Gallen Historisches Museum. I am grateful to Dr. R. Labhart of the Historisches Museum for this information.
6. See G. Egan and W. Endrei 'The Sealing of Cloth in Europe with Special Reference to the English Evidence' *Textile History* (forthcoming).
7. Careful quality regulation of textiles was in operation here from at least the 14th century. F. Lerner 'Quality Controls in Pre-industrial Times' *CJBA Review* No. 4 (1968) 10, refers to 'strictly enforced specifications', but does not mention sealing.
8. J. Horner *The Linen Trade of Europe During the*

- Spinning Wheel Period* (Belfast 1920) 575 refers to the manufacture here of linens called 'Sangelletans' in the 18th or 19th century.
9. R. S. Poole *Descriptive Catalogue of the Swiss Coins in the South Kensington Museum* (London 1878) 149–179. These coins are now in the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. I am grateful to the staff of this department for making them available for comparison with the seals.
 10. Poole *ibid.* 149. The bear on coins issued after this date has a collar.
 11. Mid 15th-century London Customs Accounts refer to the import of fustians (linens manufactured in the environs of Lake Constance were brought to this country by the Hanse via the fairs of Brabant); the imports mentioned may include St. Gallen linens. M. Thielmans *Bourgogne et Angleterre 1435–1467* (Brussels 1966) 231–2, citing PRO Customs Accounts E122/73/23 and 25 (1448–50) and E122/73/10 (1438–9). I am grateful to Mr. H. S. Cobb, Deputy Clerk of the Records at the House of Lords Records Office for these references. Compare the import to England during this period of stoneware vessels as another branch of Rhine trade much more frequently represented in the archaeological record, v. J. G. Hurst 'Langerwehe Stoneware of the 14th and 15th centuries' in M. R. APTED *et al.* eds. *Ancient Monuments and Their Interpretation* (London 1977) 219–222.