This paper draws attention to a category of official English seals used in connection with quality control and taxation in the textile industry from the late fourteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. Some dies and a large number of the leaden seals that were once attached to cloths have survived. The alnager, the inspector of newly woven cloths, was an officer of the Crown, and it is clear from documentary sources from at least the sixteenth century onwards that many of the dies he used in sealing the cloths examined were cut under the same arrangements, and possibly by the same craftsmen, as dies for the national coinage.\(^1\) There are several instances of closely parallel designs, though at most periods the majority are different.

The importance of alnage seals to contemporaries can be appreciated if they are seen, not only as official seals of approval of the quality of a commodity that became England’s single most significant category of traded goods, but also as a form of tax receipt, since the alnage system included the levying of a subsidy for the Crown of a few pence per cloth when it was sealed. The seals, which may be compared with hallmarks on precious metals, were put on each individual saleable cloth (not normally on the outside of a bale, though if a traded textile was used as a wrapper one might appear in this position by chance – the term ‘bale seal’ is misleading, and should be avoided in the present context). Without this seal of approval no cloth could legally be sold at the market.

Cloth seals were attached to the textile and struck with dies in a single operation, similar to that for producing hammered coins. The precise period of use of many of the varieties of seals has not yet been established and there are many points of detail relating to their use that are imperfectly understood. For the subject of this present paper it would be useful to know how many dies were cut and in use at any one time, and how long it was likely to have been before they needed to be replaced. Several aspects of the complicated history of the developing system of cloth sealing in England and other manufacturing countries on the Continent have been discussed elsewhere.\(^2\)

---

\(^1\) C. Challis, *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester, 1978), pp. 42-3, citing a late-Tudor document (there are many unpublished references to cutting dies etc. for alnage seals for different counties, particularly in the Exchequer, King’s Remembrancer series – C. Challis, pers. comm.; see note 8 below). A recommendation in 1640 that ‘a fair and large seal, well cut by your Majesty’s engraver that graves to the Mint’ should be used for the alnage merely reiterates the longstanding practice – I.J. Thirsk and J.P. Cooper (eds), *Seventeenth Century Economic Documents* (Oxford, 1972), p. 249. The complexities of subcontracting the cutting of coin dies presumably have their counterparts for cloth-seal dies, but this aspect is beyond the scope of the present paper.

The tradition of sealing cloths with lead seems most likely to have begun in the Low Countries in the thirteenth century, and to have been adopted in England in the late fourteenth century. \(^3\) Probably the earliest surviving related items in this country are a copper-alloy matrix (pl. 4, 1) and imprints from two others. These all have the facing head of a king in a style closely similar to that on late-medieval pennies, and the surrounding legend S' SVBSIDII PANNORVM ('seal of subsidy of cloths'). The matrix has an initial mark at the start of the legend of a star or sun with curved rays, a recent impression from a lost matrix has a raspberry or cluster of grapes here, and a wax seal on a property-transfer document dated 1380 from Monmouth has an illegible, but different mark in this portion. \(^4\) These initial marks were presumably to help those involved in the administration of the alnage to identify the place and/or period of use of a particular die. They may, perhaps, be compared with the privy marks on English coins of the later medieval period (e.g. sterlings from the reign of Edward III onwards, or even the initial crosses in the legend mainly of Durham pennies, of Edward I). Another matrix of this early series, specifically for Southampton, has a much cruder head with plumes to each side (pl. 4, 2). It is so far removed from coin designs that it is impossible to assign it to any particular reign. \(^5\) The earliest English leaden cloth seal so far identified is a London issue (pl. 4, 3), which can be dated to the reign of Richard II by the striking similarity of the king's head and a cross on the breast to some of Richard's pennies. \(^6\) The other side of the seal has an unusual three-quarter facing portrait of St Paul, the patron of London, together with a sword, extending the known repertoire of at least one engraver who can be associated with highly stylised royal portraiture in the tradition of coin design.

The various cloth seals attributable to the fifteenth century seem all to have very different designs from coins (pl. 4, 4). The next instance of close correspondence occurs in the reign of Henry VIII. A series of seals for Kent, with a crowned rose and an initial to each side (at least seven sets of initials have been recorded) may be closely compared with the gold halfcrowsns of the double rose issued from 1526 onwards (pl. 4, 5). \(^7\) The rose occupies slightly more of the centre of the design for the coins than it does for that on the seals. An Exchequer Roll of 1517 records an order for the engraving of twenty-two dies of sufficiently hard metal (de duro et competenti metallo) and with marks and differentiations (cum signis ac differentiis) for sealing cloths in the county of Kent, to be delivered to Sir William Stafford, the custodian of the mint at the Tower of London. \(^8\) From the slight

\(^2\) The earliest English reference traced to the use of lead in this connection is from 1380, for London cloths. Unspecified 'marking' had been in operation from c. 1328, but the whole system may well have been re-formulated with the apparent introduction of the cloth subsidy in 1353 (Statute 27 Ed.III c4). For a thirteenth-century Leiden seal, see J.M. Baart 'De Materiele Stadskultuur', in De Hollandse Stad in de Dertiende Eeuw, Muidberg-Symposium IV. Stichtun Comite oud Muidberg (Muidberg, 1968), p. 100 fig. 1.

\(^3\) Several fourteenth-century seals, presumably from Flemish looms, have been found in Britain.

\(^4\) A.B. Tonnochy, Catalogue of British Seal-Dies in the British Museum (London, 1952), p. 11 and pl. IV, no. 29 - the former location of this matrix in the Pyx Chapel at Westminster suggests that it was regarded as a very important official item; J. Lewis, A Dissertation on the Antiquity and Use of Seals in England (London, 1740), p. 6 and frontispiece no. 5. The Monmouth document (British Library, Dept. of Manuscripts, add. ms. Ch.52247) has the subsidy seal used personally in a private connection, so this die's official usage may already have ceased.

\(^5\) These have been published as dating from the reign of Edward I, presumably by comparison of the king's head with that on Edward's pennies. Despite the close similarity, the mention of the subsidy in the legends on the seals seems irreconcilable with a date earlier than 1353 (see previous note).

\(^6\) Tonnochy, p. 12 and pl. IV, no. 32. Tonnochy attributes this die to the reign of Edward III, presumably because part of the king's breast is included - in contrast with the versions he attributes to Edward I.

\(^7\) The rose design has been published as dating from the reign of Henry VIII, 8 Henry VIII, Mich., m.24 (P.R.O. E159 295). The engraving for the 22 matrices may have been contracted out to London's goldsmiths - see Challis, Tudor Coinage, p. 42, note 143.
evidence so far traced, this seems to be a high number of dies for a single county, given that the known early sixteenth century Kent seals of this series are, in contrast to many contemporary issues, struck only on one side, and that there appears to be no reason to believe that Kent’s production of cloth was on an exceptionally large scale at this time. The different initials on the seals could be described as ‘differentiations’. A connection between the designs seems clear enough, but more work is needed on the documentary evidence before it can be established whether the 1517 order relates to these crowned-rose seals or to some other variety that has yet to be recognised. (These are the only early sixteenth century seals so far known from Kent.) Were a connection to be established, the design for the seals would anticipate its adoption for coins by almost a decade.

The Great Statute of Clothing, as it has become known, was enacted in 1551–2 and brought some thirty kinds of textile under the alnage system, laying down specifications, and including some recently devised varieties of fabric. A series of seals all with the same basic design, but with the county name differing, and all with ER and dated 1553 in arabic numerals (pl. 4, 6), was probably issued as part of the new arrangements associated with this legislation. These seem to be the earliest English seals to use roman lettering and arabic numerals. Many later sixteenth century seals use Lombardic lettering, so (as with coins) there was not a single transfer from one style of letters to the other. A few English coins had had dates from the late 1540s, but the earliest examples (on some of Edward VI’s gold, shillings of 1548–50, Mary’s sovereigns, and ryals of 1553 and 1554) were in roman numerals. The halfcrowns and crowns of 1551–3, and other coins of Philip and Mary from 1554–7, on which the first arabic-numeral dates for the English coinage appear, have the numbers in a sinuous style (almost akin in form to manuscript writing by pen), that is completely different from the confident, fully rounded curves and angled top bar of the 5s in both the 1553 seals and the first use in the coinage of similar numerals, on sixpences etc. of Elizabeth I from 1561 onwards. Thus the style of numerals in this series of seals definitely anticipates its appearance on English coins by some eight years.\(^{10}\)

The standard county alnage-seal design for the reign of Elizabeth I is a crowned portcullis, again with a standard legend (both Lombardic- and roman-letter versions are known) in which only the county name changes. The design is mentioned in legislation from 1566,\(^{11}\) but the precise period of use is still to be established. In several stamps a fleur de lis begins the legend (pl. 4, 7, left), and one seal with a martlet here has been recorded.\(^{12}\) These motifs may be the equivalent of initial marks (mint marks) on coins.\(^{13}\) By no means all of the known portcullis seals have these marks. Only these two initial motifs have so far been recorded, and this is far too restricted a range to represent a continuing indication of date or place of origin of dies through a reign of over forty years, like the mintmarks on coins issued under Elizabeth. It seems most likely, dating the motifs

---

\(^{9}\) Sixteen (perhaps eight pairs) were in use for cloth seals in Devon in 1399 and there were six pairs there in the mid-fifteenth century, R.P. Chope, The Alnager in Devon, in Report and Trans., of the Devonshire Assoc. IV (3rd series) XLIV (1912), 583-4. Few other figures have been published for any period (though see note 8). Dies for coins in the late fifteenth century were to be engraved at the mint by a Mr Shaw at the rate of one per month – H.W.A. Linecar, British Coin Designs and Designers (London, 1977), p. 16.

Cloth-seal dies in the late seventeenth century were sometimes changed annually, as dated examples show (pl. 4, 10). This may have been more to keep a check on the seals and the wider regulation of the textile trade than because the dies became worn out.

\(^{10}\) Roman lettering had been used on English coins from some of the first issues of Edward VI. This change thus seems to begin during the same short reign both on alnage seals and on coins, though (in contrast with the new style of numerals) it appears first on the latter.

\(^{11}\) Statute 8 Eliz. I c2 (‘the Queenes Highnes seale of leade having the porctullies crowned’).

\(^{12}\) Private collection.

\(^{13}\) North, p. 108, note 6. The fleur mark appears on coins of every Tudor monarch, and the martlet is on issues of Edward VI from 1550–51 (North, p. 98) in addition to those from Elizabeth’s reign. In view of the 1553 seals with quite different designs from the portcullis series, it is simplest to take the latter to be subsequent issues, with their initial marks having the same chronological significance as the ones on coins of Elizabeth. Close dating for these, as for virtually all other cloth seals, requires further confirmation. The reason for the presence of such marks on only a small number of the portcullis seals recreated, whether or not this was restricted to the first part of Elizabeth’s reign, is unknown.

by comparison with the coins, that they were restricted to the early years of Elizabeth's reign, in the case of the former mark to 1558-60, and of the latter to 1560-61. A few portcullis seals found in London have very crude stamps with no legends (pl. 4, 7, right). These may well be contemporary counterfeits, mass-produced to avoid both quality control and subsidy payment.

The farthings issued under patent during the 1610s and 1620s by the duke of Lennox mean that his name is already familiar to numismatists. Several alnage seals from the Stuart period have LENOX (pl. 4, 8), or R and L, sometimes ligatured, for the duke of Richmond and Lennox and his heirs, who from 1605 held a patent from the king to the farm of alnage.

Under the Stuarts, a variety of four-part seals were widely used for the alnage. Sometimes each county had a different stamp, or series of stamps, which for some areas changed annually (pl. 4, 10). There is no clear connection between the very diverse designs for these seals and those for contemporary coinage (apart from the use of the royal arms) until the Commonwealth. Simple descriptions of the designs on seals and on coins of that period in two cases are identical: in the first instances a shield has a doubly engrailed top, and the cross of St George (for England), within a palm and branch wreath (pl. 4, 9, left), and in the second these same arms appear together with a second similar shield with a harp (for Ireland) and with II above (pl. 4, 9, right). The first shield appears alone on pennes, and the pair on half-groats of the Commonwealth. The II indicates two pence on the seals (this is the amount of cloth tax paid to the authorities) as well as on the coins. The dies were not quite identical (those for the stamps in pl. 4, 9 left are more closely comparable than those on the right), but the similarities are surely once again far more than coincidental.

After the Restoration, the alnage reverted to its connection with the Crown, designs used on the seals again proliferated and their engraving became markedly more accomplished. Many of the designs took elements of the national arms or other simple heraldic motifs (pl. 5, 11). The head of the monarch appears on a number of these late-Stuart seals. A king's head with short hair is known in several slightly differing versions (pl. 5, 12). Although there are no comparable portraits on contemporary coins, some of the heads can be identified as Charles II (pl. 5, 12A) from the prominent line between the nose and the side of the mouth. This is confirmed by a very similar head on a 1660 Restoration medal with the hair in the same style and the same facial line (pl. 5, 13, left). A number of seals have almost the same head, but without the facial line, and a few of these are dated (16)88

14 Brooke, note 7.
15 The Duke is called the 'alnager general for the realm of England and the dominion of Wales' in a pamphlet from 1613 (J. May's A Declaration of the Estate of Clothing, (New York, 1971 reprint)). For the 1605 patent, where the Duke is called the 'King's Alnager', see Calendar of State Papers Domestic, James I vol. XV, for 16 Sept. 1605.
16 The earliest attributable example of this form has ER, presumably for Elizabeth I (private collection, found in Amsterdam: information from Amsterdam's Archaeologische Dienst).

Four-disc seals are described in 1640 as 'double, having two rounds [each of these] for two seals to be stamped thereon, the one whereof to be stamped with the... Crown seal [ie alnage stamp], which is to be choicely kept by some person of trust, which shall duly keep an exact account of the number of seals which shall be from time to time delivered out for the use of each corporation... and the said corporation seal shall be stamped on the other part thereof' (Thirsk and Cooper, pp. 249 & 251 note 1). The official alnage stamps put by central authority on one pair of discs of the seal are here distinguished from the stamps put subsequently by local functionaries on the second pair of discs. Many four-part seals, especially those datable to the late seventeenth, or early eighteenth century, omit the second pair of stamps.

17 The use of various elements of the national arms in isolation may potentially cause confusion - thus three fleurs (or a single one alone) could be taken to indicate a French seal (see pl. 5, 11), a harp might suggest an Irish origin, etc. - though in fact these appear as the principal device on seals respectively of Gloucestershire and Devon, for example. There may have been some kind of coding involved in the diversity of designs - a different device might refer to a particular sealing centre, or to different subsidy rates for different grades of textile, etc. No contemporary reference to illuminate this point has been located.

on the other main stamp (pl. 5, 12B). These seals, or at least some of them, are presumably for James II. A medal of 1662 commemorating the Battle of Lowestoft\(^{19}\) has James as Duke of York depicted in almost exactly this way (pl. 5, 13, right). A close facial resemblance between the two brothers is not unduly remarkable, but the retention of an otherwise little-used style of portrait for almost thirty years is unexpected.

A few seals with the heads of William and Mary together are known,\(^{20}\) but there is no very close comparison with other representations on coins or elsewhere. After Mary's death, the head used for William, clearly identifiable on a large number of alnage seals from his hooked nose (pl. 5, 12C), continues the style used for the heads of Charles and James, with a depiction just about as close to the representations of these earlier monarchs as it was possible to get. There are two engraved lines at the nose on the head in pl. 5, 12D (very faint), and it is tempting to think that the administrators of the alnage, which around this time was coming under increasing criticism for its ineffectiveness as a means of quality control,\(^{21}\) sought to save money by having a matrix for Charles or James slightly altered, rather than commissioning the cutting of an entirely new one.\(^{22}\) There is no hint of alteration on the great majority of seals attributable because of the hooked nose to William, so some new matrices must have been cut during his reign. The continued use of what was, in origin, an early-Restoration portrait of Charles II, through many developments in style on coins, is symptomatic of the inertia in an organisation that had outlived its usefulness to all but the tiny number of beneficiaries from the subsidy, who treated the entire business as a source of personal revenue.

The alnage was ended in 1724.\(^{23}\) Seals issued under Anne (pl. 5, 14, left) and during the first decade of George I's reign (pl. 5, 15, right) return to the very close similarity in the style of the monarchs' heads to those on coins that was evident in the earliest known medieval designs. There are several different recorded legends accompanying the royal portraits (some stamps have no legend), among which ANNA D G and (for George) FIDEI DEFEN come closest to the standard formulae on coins. Stamps with Britannia (pl. 5, 15, left), used in both reigns, once more reinforce the connection.\(^{24}\)

One George I seal\(^{25}\) is exceptional in having the royal portrait executed in a very crude fashion, so that it is almost a caricature (pl. 5, 16). The matrix for this cannot have been cut by anyone associated with engraving for coins; rather, it recalls the style of some coin weights.\(^{26}\) This seal may be a contemporary counterfeit, made to avoid payment of the cloth tax.

The whole subject of alnage seals has up to now been neglected by numismatists, despite the extent and variety of surviving examples having clear, close parallels with coins of the realm. Some of these intermittent connections in major and minor elements of the designs have been described here.\(^{27}\) It is to be hoped that there will now be more detailed research, particularly on documentary sources, in this numismatic by-way.

19 Medallic Illustrations, pl. XLIX, no. 2.
20 E.g. Endrej and Egan, p. 62, fig. 10d.
21 Endrej and Egan, p. 58.
22 The re-engraving of an important official die may seem an unlikely expedient, but this appears to be precisely how a Great Seal for William and Mary was created from one for James II, producing an extremely awkward design: see H. Jenkinson, 'What happened to the Great Seal of James II?', AntJ 23 (1943), 1-13 (see especially pl. 12). Jenkinson's explanation has been challenged, but it fits the observable evidence better than any alternative proposed.
24 Stamps from this period with St George and the dragon are in a style similar to that adopted in the early nineteenth century into the repertoire of British coin designs (see pl. 5, 15, right).
25 Private collection.
26 No coin weights seem to have been identified for the reign of George I, nevertheless, the standard of portraiture on the seal is comparable with that on earlier and later examples, see T. Sheppard and J.F. Musham (eds.), Money Scales and Weights (London, 1975) (papers reprinted from NCirc), p. 184.
27 Foreign seals from imported textiles also provide scope for numismatic comparisons, see, for example, G. Egan, 'A group of seals found at Bankside from St Gallen linens or fustians', in Trans. London and Middx. Archaeol. Soc. 31 (1980), 116-18.
1. Medieval copper-alloy matrix for cloth-subsidy seals: king’s head, ‘SSVBSIDII PANNORUM with wavy star or sun initial mark (scale 1:1). (British Museum collection acc. no. 87, 11–27, 29; from the Pyx Chapel, Westminster; image reversed for legibility.)

2. Crudely engraved copper-alloy matrix for Southampton cloth seals: king’s head with plumes to sides, and legend including town name (1:1).

3. Left: both sides of a London cloth seal: king’s head with cross on breast; St Paul and sword. Right: penny of Richard II with cross on breast.

4. Copper-alloy matrix for Wiltshire cloth seals, probably fifteenth century (1:1).

5. Left: Kent alnage-seal stamp, crown over double rose, (?) initials of alnager to sides (drawing by N. Griffiths). Right: crown of the double rose with initials of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour (from Oman 1931).

6. Left: both sides of a two-disc Somerset 1553 seal with initials of Edward VI (Museum of London collection acc. no. 78.227/18). Right: drawing of complete stamp built up from several seals by N. Griffiths (1:1).

7. Left: crowned-portcullis seal for Devon with fleur de lis initial mark (Museum of London acc. no. 83.410/1). Right: cruder version of portcullis stamp lacking legend (private collection). (1:1, drawings by N. Griffiths.)

8. Four-disc seal cast with ‘Lenox’ and crown over thistle, the outer discs are stamped with ‘searched’ and the dimensions of the cloth.

9. Commonwealth seals:

   (above) Penny and both sides of half groat

10. Incomplete Wiltshire four-part cloth seal for (16)74.

11. Late seventeenth/early eighteenth-century alnage seal with three fleurs and I½ for a penny-halfpenny tax.

   B) Penny-halfpenny seal with lion, dated (16)88.
   C) Head of William III (hooked nose).
   D) Earlier head (?) adapted for William III by recutting around the nose.


14. Incomplete alnage seal with head of Queen Anne.

15. Left: Britannia on George I penny-halfpenny seal. Right: St George and dragon on penny-halfpenny seal, also with crowned WR mark (originally for William III, but continuing in use up to the reign of George I).

16. Left: seal with crude head of George I, probably a contemporary counterfeit (private collection). Right: stamp from genuine seal (British Museum collection acc. no. 71,7–14,155).

17. (1.5:1)