Naturally, the introduction of the pendant seal invited an impression on the back as well as on the face of the disk of wax or other material employed. Hence arose the use of the counter- seal, which might be an impression from a matrix actually so called (*contrasigillum),* or that of a signet or private seal (*secretum),* such countersealing implying a personal corroboration of the sealing. The earliest seal of a sovereign of France to which a counterseal was added was that of Louis VII. (a.p. 1141), an equestrian effigy of the king as duke of Aquitaine being impressed on the reverse. When, in 1154, Aquitaine passed to the English crown, this counterseal disappeared, and eventually in subsequent reigns a fleur-de-lis or the shield of arms of France took its place. In the German royal seals the imperial eagle or the imperial shield of arms was the ordinary counterseal.

To turn to England: it appears that the kings of the Anglo- Saxon race, or at least some of them, imitated their Frankish neighbours in using signets or other seals. There are still extant an impression of the seal of Offa of Mercia (a.p. 790) bearing a portrait head; and one of the seal of Edgar (A.D.960), an intaglio gem. The first royal seal of England which ranks as a “ great seal ” is that of Edward the Confessor, impressions of which are extant. This seal was furnished with a counterseal, the design being nearly identical with that of the obverse (fig. 1). William the Conqueror, as duke of Normandy, used an equestrian seal, representing him mounted and armed for battle. After the conquest of England, he added a seal of majesty, copied from the seal of Henry I. of France, as a counterseal. In subsequent reigns the order of the two seals was reversed, the seal of majesty becoming the obverse, and the reverse being the equestrian seal: a pattern which has been followed, almost uniformly,

down to the present day. Besides the two royal

seals of Anglo-Saxon kings noticed above there are extant a few other seals, and there is documentary evidence of yet others, which were used in England before the Norman Conquest; but the rarity of such examples is an indication that the employment of seals could not have been very common among our Anglo-Saxon forefathers. Berhtwald the thane, in 788, and Æthelwulf of Mercia, in 857, affixed their seals to certain documents. In the British Museum are the bronze matrices of seals of Æthilwald, bishop of Dunwich, about 800; of Ælfric, alderman of Hampshire, about 985; and the finely carved ivory double matrix of Godwin the thane (on the obverse) and of the nun Godcythe (on the reverse), of the beginning of the 11th century. In the Chapter Library of Durham there is the matrix of the monastic: seal of about the year 970; and in the British Museum, appended to a later charter (Harl. 45 A. 36), is the

impression of the seal of Wilton Abbey of about 974.

The official practice of the Frankish kings, which, as we have

seen, was the means of handing down the Roman tradition of the use of the signet, was gradually imitated by high officers of state. In the 8th century the mayors of the palace are found affixing their personal seals to royal diplomas; and, once the idea was started, the multiplication of seals naturally followed. From the end of the 10th century there was a growing tendency to their general use. From the 12th to the 15th century inclusive, sealing was the ordinary process of authenticating legal documents; and during that period an infinite variety of seals was in existence. The royal seals of dignity or great seals we have already noticed. The sovereign also had his personal seals: his privy seal, his signet. The

provinces, the public departments, the royal and public officers, the courts of law: all had their special seals. The numerous class of ecclesiastical seals comprised episcopal seals of all kinds, official and personal; seals of cathedrals and chapters; of courts and officials, &c. The monastic series is one of the largest, and, from an artistic point of view, one of the most important. The topographical or local series comprises the seals of cities, of towns and boroughs and of corporate bodies. Then come the vast collections of personal seals. Equestrian seals of barons and knights; the seals of ladies of rank; the armorial seals of the gentry; and the endless examples, chiefly of private seals, with devices of all kinds, sacred and profane, ranging from the finely engraved work of art down to the roughly cut merchant’s mark of the trader and the simple initial letter of the yeoman, typical of the time when everybody had his seal.

The ordinary shape of the medieval seal is round; but there are certain exceptions. Ladies’ seals and some classes of ecclesiastical and monastic seals are of pointed oval form, which is best adapted to receive the standing figure of lady, bishop, abbot or saint: the common types in such classes. Fancifully shaped seals also occur, but they are comparatively rare.

In the middle ages the metal chiefly employed in the manufacture of matrices was bronze. Among the wealthy, silver was not uncommon; among the poor, lead was in general use.

Matrices of steel and iron were made at a later time in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the 11th century a fairly large number of matrices were cut in ivory. The use of engraved gems in the early middle ages has already been

noticed; but the taste for antique intaglios was

not confined to any one period. In the later

centuries also, particularly in the 14th century,

they were set in seal matrices and finger rings.

A fine Graeco-Roman gem, bearing a female

head, full face and set in a medieval setting,

does duty for the head of Mary Magdalen, as

seen in the accompanying cut (fig. 2).

The ordinary matrix of the middle ages was pro-

vided with a ridge on the back (or, in some in­

stances, with a vertical handle), by which it could

be held while being used for sealing, and which

might be pierced for suspension. Sockets for the insertion of handles are of comparatively late make. The matrix was in most instances simple, the design giving a direct impression once and for all. But there are examples of elaborate matrices composed of several pieces, from the impressions of which the seal was built up in an ingenious fashion, both obverse and reverse being carved in hollow work, through which figures and subjects impressed on an inner layer of wax are to be seen. Such examples are the seal matrix of the Benedictine priory of St Mary and St Blaise of Boxgrave in Sussex, of the 13th century, now in the British Museum (fig. 3); and the matrix of Southwick Priory in

Hampshire, of the same period

*(Archaeologia,* xxiii. 374). The

matrix of one of the seals of

Canterbury Cathedral was also

constructed in the same manner. It has usually been the custom

to break up or deface the matrices

of official seals when they have

ceased to be valid, as, for example,

at the commencement of a new

reign. The seals of deceased

bishops or abbots were solemnly

broken in presence of the chapter

or before the altar. But the legal

maxim that corporations never die

is well illustrated by the survival

of the fine series, not complete,

indeed, but very full, of the

matrices of English corporations,

beginning with the close of the

12th century. A fine example is

the corporate seal of Rochester, of

the 13th century, showing the keep

and battlements of the castle (fig.

4) in high relief.

The common material for re- ceiving the impressions from the matrices was beeswax, generally strengthened and hardened by admixture with other substances, such as resin, pitch and even hemp and hair. The employment of chalk as an ingredient in many seals of the 12th century has caused them to become extremely friable. It was a common practice to apply to such seals a coating of brown varnish. Besides the transparent yellowish- brown of the wax when used in its natural state, as it very frequently was used in the earlier middle ages, many other colours,