especially red, dark green and dark brown, and even black, are found in medieval seals. Any attempt to classify examples by their colours fails, for, while at some periods the particular tints employed in certain chanceries may have been selected with a view to marking the character of the documents so sealed, such practice was not con

sistently followed.

For the protection of the

impression, in the 12th and 13th centuries, when it was an ordinary custom to im­press the seals on thick cakes of wax, the surrounding margin rising well above the field usually formed a suitable fender; at other times, as in the 14th and 15th centuries, a so-called wreath,! or twisted shred of parchment, or plaited grass or reed, was imbedded in the wax round the im- pression. But the most common process was to sew up the seal in a bag or piece of cloth or canvas, with the mistaken notion that this would ensure the seal's integrity; the ordinary result being that, on the assumption that seals thus protected needed no further care, they have been in most instances either broken or crushed to powder. In later times, seals, especially great seals, have been frequently fitted in metal

or wooden boxes.

The medieval seal may be said, in general, to be composed of two essential parts: the device, or type as it is sometimes called, and the inscription or legend. It is the existence of the legend, surrounding the device as with a border, that distinguishes it from the antique engraved gem, which rarely bore an inscription and then only its field. Such antique gems as were adopted for matrices in the middle ages were usually set in metal mounts, on which the legends were engraved. The first and obvious reason for an inscription on a seal was to ensure identification of the owner; and therefore the names of such owners appear in the earliest examples. Afterwards, when the use of seals became common, and when they were as often toys as signets, fanciful legends or mottoes appropriate to the devices naturally came into vogue.

Examples of such mottoes will be given below.

A few words may be said regarding the different kinds of types or devices appropriate to particular classes or groups of medieval seals ; and, although these remarks have special reference to English seals, it may be noted that there is a common affinity between the several classes of seals of all countries of western Europe, and that what is said of the seal-devices of one country may be applied in general terms to those of the rest. The types of the great seals of sovereigns have already been mentioned: a seal of majesty on the obverse, an equestrian seal on the reverse. Other royal official seals usually bear on the obverse the king enthroned or mounted, and the royal arms on the reverse. Among other official seals a very interesting type is that of the Lord High Admiral in the 15th century, several matrices of the seals of holders of the dignity having survived and being exhibited in the British Museum. That of John Holland, earl of Huntingdon, Admiral of England, Ireland and Aquitaine, 1435- 1442, is here given (fig. 5), having the usual device of a ship, on the mainsail of which are the earl’s ar- morial bearings. In ecclesiastical seals generally, in the seals of religious foun- dations, cathedrals, monas- teries, colleges and the like,

sacred subjects naturally find a place among other designs. Such subjects as the Deity, the Trinity, the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Cor­onation of the Virgin, are not uncommon. Episcopal seals more generally show the prelate prominently as a standing figure, or, less conspicuously, as kneeling in prayer before the Deity or patron saint; the counter- seal also frequently represents him in the same posture of adoration. Chapter seals may bear the patron saint, or a representation, more or less conventional, of the cathedral; monastic seals may have figures of the Virgin Mary, or other patron saint, or of the founder, or of abbot or abbess; or the conventual building. If there be a counterseal, the figure of patron saint or founder may stand there,

while the building occupies the obverse. Each abbot, too, would have his own seal of dignity, generally showing him standing. Local seals of town or borough may have the image of a patron saint, or armorial device, or castle or bridge or other building (see fig. a), or the town itself. A seaport will be indicated by a ship on the waves. The baronial seal bears the armed and mounted knight. On ladies’ seals the owner is often gracefully depicted standing and holding flower or bird, or with shields of arms. After the 14th century, the figures of ladies, other than queens, vanish from seals. Armorial devices of the gentry first appear on seals at the close of the 12th century; and from that time there is a gradual development of the heraldic seal, which in the 14th century was often a work of fine decorative sculpture. And, lastly, the devices on fancy seals are without end in their variety.

As in all other departments of medieval art, the engraving of seals in the middle ages passed through certain well-marked developments and changes characteristic of different periods. Fine seal engraving is to be found in the productions of many of the continental nations; but in the best periods nothing can excel the work of English cutters. Beginning with the examples of the

11th and 12th centuries,

we find the subjects gener­

ally of an archaic style,

which is evidence of an

early stage of the art. In

the r3th century this un­

developed stage has passed,

and a fine, but still re­

strained, quality of en-

graving ensues, which, like

all the allied arts of that

century, charms with its

simple and unpretending

precision. For example, in

the great seals of Henry

III., something of the

antique stiffness remains,

but the general effect and

the finish of the details

are admirable. We may

refer also again to the

Boxgrave seal (fig. 3) as a

fine specimen of 13th century architectural carving.

But the most beautiful

seal of this period, and in

many respects the most beautiful medieval seal in existence, is the monastic seal of Merton Priory, in Surrey, of the year 1241. An engraving of the obverse, the Virgin and Child, is here given (fig. 6). The Merton seal is the work of a master hand treating his subject with wonderful breadth and freedom. As the century advances, a more

graceful movement in the

figures is discernible. For

instance, the great seal of

Edward I. shows a departure from the severe

simplicity of his predecessor in the addition

of decorative architectural details, and in the

easier action of the

equestrian figure, which

in this instance is of a

strikingly fine type. Comparable with it is the

remarkable baronial

equestrian seal of Robert

Fitz-Walter (fig. 7), 1298-1304, the silver matrix of which is in the British Museum collections.

The work of the 14th century is marked by a great development in decoration. Where the artist of the former century would have secured his effect by simpIe, firm Unes, the new school trusted to a more superficial style, in which ornament rather than