

# *The seals of Reading Abbey*

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# The Seals of Reading Abbey

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The splendid fourteenth-century common seal of Reading Abbey is justifiably well known, but it is only one among several seals of various kinds to have survived from the abbey. The others include the first common seal, dating from the twelfth century, a series of personal seals of individual abbots beginning in the later twelfth century, at least two counterseals from the thirteenth century and a small seal used by the abbot and convent when acting as clerical tax collectors in the fourteenth century. All these seals had, of course, a primarily legal function. They were used to authenticate and enhance the legal force of the documents to which they were affixed. Equally, however, they can be regarded as miniature works of art which not only exemplify the stylistic fashions of their times, but also throw light on other matters not directly connected with their legal function. In particular, the evolving iconography of the Reading seals between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries provides an interesting commentary on the growth of the cult of St James the Great in the abbey, based on its principal relic, a hand of the apostle. Though not present on the earliest seals, depictions of the hand and other references to St James begin to occur in the first half of the thirteenth century and become quite prominent by the end of it. This paper is concerned with examining these developments, but it must be admitted at the outset that there are some important gaps in the account, since no Reading seals have been found for certain key periods. On the other hand, while no claim is made to have identified every surviving abbey seal between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, sufficient material has been assembled to enable the main lines of the story to be drawn.

The earliest Reading seal of which impressions survive is the first common seal, made in the twelfth century, presumably not long after the founding of the house in 1121, and remaining in use until 1328

[plate 1a]. Of pointed oval shape and some 70-75 mm long when complete, it has an obverse side only, depicting the Virgin and Child. St Mary, seated frontally and wearing a crown, holds in her right hand a flowering rod, on which a bird has perched, and in her left the 'model' of a church. On her lap sits the Christ Child, also frontal, his right hand raised in blessing, his left holding an orb.<sup>1</sup> Very few examples of this seal exist, all are in varying degrees imperfect and none preserves the marginal inscription. The two most complete specimens are also the earliest. They are attached to indented agreements: the first, between Abbot Hugh II and the convent, on one side, and Bartholomew chaplain of Bucklebury (Berks.), on the other, concerning the church of Bucklebury, dates from 1189 x 93, possibly 1191 x 93;<sup>2</sup> the second, between Abbot Elias and the convent and Eva, daughter of Gilbert de Felda, over land in Reading, belongs to the years 1200-13.<sup>3</sup> In addition, three fragmentary impressions survive from later in the thirteenth century, on a document recording the settlement of a dispute concerning Englefield church (Berks.) in 1239, on an agreement over land in East Hendred (Berks.) in 1265-66 [plate 1b], and on a letter of indemnity to the bishop of Salisbury in 1291.<sup>4</sup>

This seal is amongst the earliest Marian seals to be produced in England. Its depiction of the Virgin and Child is a version of a standard Romanesque type which established itself in the first and second quarters of the twelfth century and is familiar from contemporary illuminated manuscripts and other ecclesiastical and monastic seals of the period.<sup>5</sup> Its appearance on the Reading seal reflects the special devotion to the Virgin as one of its tutelary saints, which was particularly fervent in the abbey's early history. The monastery was first established by Henry I in 1121 and received its first abbot in 1123.<sup>6</sup> According to the foundation charter of 1125, it was founded 'in the honour and name of the Mother of God and ever Virgin, Mary, and of St John the Evangelist',<sup>7</sup> but, although both saints continued officially to be patrons of the house, the abbey was commonly referred to simply as 'the church of St Mary of Reading' and charters of gift were typically made 'to God and St Mary and the monks (or church) of Reading' or some variant on this formula. In other words, the abbey seems generally to have been regarded as being under the special patronage of the Virgin, and it is, of course, a 'model' of the abbey church which she holds on this seal. Other evidence corroborates these indications of devotion to the Virgin at

Reading in the twelfth century. A carved Romanesque capital from the abbey, dating c.1125 x 30, displays the earliest known depiction of the Coronation of the Virgin,<sup>8</sup> while, according to Osbert of Clare, Hugh of Amiens, the first abbot (1123-30), introduced the novel feast of the Immaculate Conception at Reading.<sup>9</sup> Again, the abbey's late twelfth-century relic list includes six relics relating to Our Lady, among them a hair (*ut putatur*) and parts of her robe, girdle and sepulchre.<sup>10</sup> Later sigillographic evidence shows that veneration of St Mary remained strong at Reading throughout the abbey's history. The personal seal of a prior of Reading in 1242, for example, depicts the Annunciation of the Virgin<sup>11</sup> and, as we shall see, St Mary was given pride of place on the abbey's second common seal of 1328.

By the second quarter of the thirteenth century, however, another Reading seal had begun to show signs of a more recently developed cult of St James. The seal in question was a counterseal, which, though also employed by the convent as a whole, first occurs on the back of the personal seal of an abbot. In order to set the use of this counterseal into its historical context, it will be helpful to examine such earlier personal seals of abbots of Reading as survive. Which abbot was the first to have a personal seal is not known.<sup>12</sup> The earliest abbatial seal discovered by the present writer is that of Joseph (1173-86), appended to a document of 1183 x 84 relating to Englefield church.<sup>13</sup> It is of the standard pointed-oval shape of ecclesiastical seals and, though mutilated at the top and round the edges, clearly depicts the frontal standing figure of the abbot, his right hand holding an abbatial staff and his left arm raised; the damage to the top of the seal has truncated the left hand so that one cannot tell what it once held, but, to judge from all later personal seals of Reading abbots, it held a book against the figure's chest. The next known abbot's seal, that of Joseph's successor, Hugh II (1186-99), is virtually intact and very similar to the surviving portion of Joseph's seal, but with the complete figure of the abbot, bare-headed, and preserving also the inscription, which reads: + SIGILLVM HVGONIS RADINGENSIS ABBATIS [plate 1c].<sup>14</sup> It measures 70 mm in length. Neither of these seals has a counterseal, but the seal of the next abbot, Elias, does. The only example known is a rather worn and damaged impression appended to the same agreement with Eva, daughter of Gilbert de Felda, that was noted above as bearing the common seal of the abbey.<sup>15</sup> In fact, this deed is the earliest so far discovered with both the common seal and an abbot's seal,<sup>16</sup> a

characteristic that was to become more frequent as the thirteenth century unfolded. Elias's seal portrays the abbot as before, although both his head and the marginal inscription are lost [plate 2a]. The counterseal, however, is complete, if worn and indistinct [plate 2b]. Pointed oval in shape and measuring c.32 mm in length, it depicts the frontal demi-figure of a monk (or possibly the abbot himself) holding a book between his hands; the legend reads + INITIVM SAPIENTIE TIMOR DOMINI.

No signs of St James have yet appeared, but they are very prominent on the back of the next surviving abbot's seal, that of Adam of Lathbury (1226-38). The early decades of the thirteenth century appear to have been the turning-point in the adoption of symbols of St James on the abbey's seals, and it is particularly unfortunate in this context that no seal of Abbot Simon (1213-26) seems to exist and that therefore the form of his counterseal is unknown. Abbot Adam's seal, appended to a grant of toll exemption made to the bishop and chapter of Salisbury,<sup>17</sup> portrays the abbot in the same manner as previously, the only major difference being that he now appears against a diapered lozengy background [plate 3a], but it has a counterseal which is quite different in design from that on Elias's seal. Of pointed-oval shape and c.32 mm in length, it depicts a hand with two fingers raised in blessing, accompanied by two scallop-shells, all within a border bearing the legend: + ORA PRO NOB[IS] SANCTE IACOBE [plate 3b]. The hand undoubtedly represents the abbey's renowned relic of St James, while the scallop, having been associated with the major shrine of St James at Compostella in N.W. Spain since at least 1130, had been increasingly adopted as an emblem of the saint himself since the later twelfth century.<sup>18</sup> The same counterseal appears on the seal of Abbot Richard I (1238-62) and on the common seal of the abbey, both appended to the Englefield settlement mentioned earlier, and again on the common seal attached to the East Hendred agreement of 1265-66, also noticed above.<sup>19</sup>

The unequivocal references to St James on this counterseal clearly imply the full establishment of the cult of the hand at Reading by the early thirteenth century. The abbey acquired the hand of St James in the twelfth century some time after it had been removed from the German imperial treasury and brought to England by Henry I's daughter, Matilda, following the death in 1125 of her first husband, the Emperor Henry V.<sup>20</sup> Despite much learned debate, however, the exact date and circumstances of its arrival in the abbey remain the

subject of controversy. This is not the place in which to rehearse all the arguments that have been advanced in support of a date either late in Henry I's reign or early in Henry II's reign, the two main alternatives.<sup>21</sup> Suffice it to say that the majority opinion favours the reign of Henry I, and that the present writer is inclined to accept the date, 1126, which the fabricated text of a supposed charter of gift by Henry I appears to suggest.<sup>22</sup> No cult of St James developed at Reading at this time, however, chiefly because within a few years the relic left the abbey. According to Matthew Paris, who was most probably relying on a now lost Reading source, the hand was removed in 1136 by Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester.<sup>23</sup> If the year 1136 is correct, the most likely occasion for this removal was the funeral of Henry I in the abbey on 5th January, when the bishop's brother, the new king, Stephen, was present and the abbacy of Reading was vacant.<sup>24</sup> Matthew Paris further reports, no doubt from the same source, that the hand was restored to the monks in 1155;<sup>25</sup> this was almost certainly done at the insistence of Henry II, who, most particularly in the early part of his reign, was keen to foster the interests of the house which had been founded by his grandfather and contained his tomb. A good deal of evidence exists not only for Henry II's active patronage of the abbey in general, but also for his devotion to the hand of St James and determination that it should remain at Reading. More especially, he politely refused a request from the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1157 that the relic should be returned to the imperial treasury.<sup>26</sup>

With the hand now securely housed in the abbey, a cult of St James quickly developed under the active promotion of the monks and with royal, episcopal and papal support. Everything necessary was done to enable the monks to promote their relic and encourage pilgrims to visit the abbey. The king granted an annual fair for the feast of St James (25th July),<sup>27</sup> a clutch of indulgences for the same feast and its octave was obtained from English and Welsh archbishops and bishops,<sup>28</sup> and the pilgrimage to St James at Reading was officially sanctioned by Pope Alexander III.<sup>29</sup> As pilgrims resorted in increasing numbers to the abbey, miracles worked by the hand began to occur, whether at Reading or elsewhere. In order further to advertise the power of St James's hand at Reading, the monks, like the owners of other shrines, compiled a collection of 'miracle stories', or accounts of miraculous cures and other wonders performed by their relic.<sup>30</sup>

As a consequence of the growth of this cult in the second half of the twelfth century, St James began to be regarded as a patron saint of the abbey in addition to those named in the foundation charter. In an indulgence of c.1164, for instance, Bishop Jocelin of Salisbury described the abbey as 'built in the honour of God and the blessed Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, and the blessed apostles John and James',<sup>31</sup> while in the early thirteenth century a donor of land to the abbey made his gift 'to God and St Mary and the blessed apostles John and James and the abbot and convent of Reading'.<sup>32</sup> Most remarkably, a charter by John, count of Mortain, dated 1192, calls the abbey 'the church of St James at Reading',<sup>33</sup> without reference to St Mary or St John.

John's interest in the hand of St James and his close relationship with the Reading monks, both before and after he became king, are very well attested. Among their many manifestations was his grant in 1192 of one mark of gold annually to enable a new reliquary to be provided for the hand, replacing that which his brother, Richard I, had removed in 1189 in his fund-raising preparations for the Third Crusade.<sup>34</sup> This gift, which John renewed as king in 1200,<sup>35</sup> no doubt gave fresh impetus to the cult, and we know of five more indulgences for the feast of St James granted to Reading in the first half of the thirteenth century, including two which may have been largely inspired by John's connections with the abbey, namely, those from Nicholas, cardinal bishop of Tusculum and papal legate, and Henry, archbishop of Dublin.<sup>36</sup> It is true, on the other hand, that no evidence survives for the continuing vitality of the relic's wonder-working powers after the twelfth century, but this does not in itself mean that these had failed or that devotion to the hand and its appeal to pilgrims had declined. As Sister Benedicta Ward has pointed out, once a relic's reputation had been established, there was much less need to keep an on-going record of all its cures and miracles.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, such meagre clues as we have suggest that the relic's popularity, though not its fame, began somewhat to fade after the early decades of the thirteenth century.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting, therefore, that it was not until about this time that specific references to St James and his hand first appeared on any of the abbey's seals. They had not been included in the period when the cult was being built up, nor when it was apparently at its peak in the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but only after it had been fully established and when its appeal may already have been declining in the face of competition

from more recently founded shrines and pilgrimages.<sup>39</sup> Be that as it may, the many hundreds of impressions of the various Reading seals produced thereafter, of which none but the minutest portion has come down to us, served as a continual reminder of the monks' wonder-working relic. One hesitates to call this propaganda, but in a largely illiterate age such visual references certainly had something of that character.

It is time to resume our investigation of the abbey's seals. As described above, depictions of the hand and the scallop emblem of St James first appeared on the thirteenth-century counterseal, which was used both by the convent and by individual abbots. Although the evidence is too incomplete for certainty, such references appear to have been confined to this counterseal until, at the end of the century, they began also to be incorporated into the designs of the abbots' personal seals themselves. Following the seal of Abbot Adam (1226-38), which, as we have seen, contains no allusion to St James other than that on its counterseal, the next surviving abbatial seals are those of Abbots Richard I (1238-62) and Robert (1269-90), of which single specimens have been found.<sup>40</sup> Each seems in all respects similar to Adam's, although neither survives complete and Robert's seal is particularly fragmentary, preserving only the lower third of the abbot's figure and a featureless lump for his head.<sup>41</sup> With the next abbot's seal, however, a spectacular increase in decorative elaboration, including allusions to St James, is apparent. The beautiful and finely detailed seal of Abbot William II (1290/1-1305) [plate 4a] marks a new departure in abbatial seals, perhaps designed in part to re-assert the abbey's dignity after its recent rescue from dire insolvency under his predecessor. Approximately 70 mm in length, its portrayal of the abbot is still fundamentally in the traditional form - i.e., standing frontally with a book in his left hand and a pastoral staff in his right - but with the significant differences that he is now mitred and stands in an ornately carved niche, with two small wyverns beneath his feet. The whole is set against a richly diapered background, upon which, to the left of the niche, appear the hand of St James, in the form familiar from the earlier counterseal, and a scallop; whether the same features were also displayed to the right of the niche is impossible to say, since the only specimen of this seal so far discovered, appended to a document of 1291,<sup>42</sup> is largely broken away in this area. Despite its damaged condition, however, it is a very fine example of the seal-maker's art at the end of the thirteenth



century. Moreover, it inaugurated a succession of personal seals of abbots of Reading which not merely followed but extended the precedent it had set in including references to the abbey's most important relic.

Abbot William was succeeded by Nicholas of Whaplode (1305-28). An impression of his seal [plate 4b] survives on a charter dated 1st January, 1328, shortly before his death on 11th January, recording his gifts of money and materials to the scholars of Balliol College, Oxford, towards the building of their chapel.<sup>43</sup> Though of less consummate workmanship, and lacking a small portion at the bottom, it is similar in size to the preceding seal and depicts the abbot mitred and standing in a canopied niche in exactly the same manner, but now he is accompanied by a rather richer array of allusions to St James. To the left of the niche appear the hand of St James and a scallop, separated by a cross crosslet within a quatrefoil, while to the right are another scallop and what appears to be the head of a man (perhaps St James) wearing a pilgrim's hat, also separated by a cross crosslet in a quatrefoil.

No seal of the next abbot, John I (1328-42), has been found, a matter of some regret since it was at the outset of his rule that the second common seal of the abbey was made. Nevertheless, that it maintained the line of development from William II's seal can be safely assumed, since that of John's successor, Abbot Henry (1342-61), is of the same type, though of an even richer elaboration which includes for the first time allusions to St John the Evangelist [plate 5a]. Once again, a single impression has been found, this time on a deed in the Public Record Office, London, dated 1350, to which is also appended the abbey's second common seal.<sup>44</sup> The top of the abbot's seal is missing, depriving the abbot of his head, and its left side is partially damaged, but otherwise the impression is a good one. The abbot appears, like William II and Nicholas, standing in a canopied niche, but now he is flanked, on the left, by a chalice (for St John, though the emerging serpent is now missing), the hand of St James and two groups of scallops and, on the right, by a pilgrim's scrip adorned with the scallop emblem of St James, an eagle (also for St John) and two further groups of scallops.<sup>45</sup> Despite the novel appearance of references to St John the Evangelist, one of the abbey's tutelary saints, the emblems of St James nevertheless remain the most prominent features of the design. This is the latest full-size seal of an abbot of Reading in the fourteenth century that has come to

light, but in any case the mid-fourteenth century is a not inappropriate point at which to halt, since sigillographic reference to St James had clearly reached impressive proportions and by that time, as we have seen, the abbey's second and final common seal was in use. Before examining what effect the cult of St James had on the design of the latter, however, there is another small Reading seal which must engage our attention.

In the later Middle Ages the abbot and convent of Reading, or the abbot alone, were frequently appointed as sub-collectors of clerical taxation within the diocese of Salisbury, either for the whole diocese or for the archdeaconries of Berkshire and Wiltshire or for the archdeaconry of Berkshire alone. In this capacity they used a small circular seal, approximately 23 mm in diameter, which incorporated a very clear reference to St James in the form of the abbey's heraldic arms. This seal was most commonly applied to receipts issued by the sub-collectors to ecclesiastics and religious houses for the payment of their contributions to the tax. Since the same seal was used for successive levies of taxation, clearly hundreds of impressions must have been produced, but, probably because the documents to which they were appended were mostly small strips of parchment and had no permanent value, the vast majority have not survived. Only seven examples of the seal have been found, four at Westminster Abbey and three at Salisbury Cathedral, where there is another receipt now lacking its seal. It may well be, however, that further research will unearth other specimens lying unnoticed in archive rooms or among private papers. The earliest examples are those at Salisbury. They are appended to three receipts issued to the cathedral chapter in 1319 and 1320 in connection with the tenth granted by the pope to Edward II for the defence of the realm against the Scots.<sup>46</sup> The four examples at Westminster relate to clerical tenths and subsidies granted to Edward III by the English clergy later in the century. They are attached to receipts issued to the abbot of Westminster (and in one case also to the prior of Hurley, a dependency of Westminster) in 1347 and 1371-2.<sup>47</sup> The two last receipts, dated December 1371 and February 1372, expressly describe the seal as *sigillum ad dictum subsidium assignatum*, thereby indicating that it was not an all-purpose business seal of the abbey, but one made specifically for use on documents concerning the collection of clerical taxation. Each of these impressions is in red wax, except for one of the last pair, which is in green wax. None is perfect and some are very fragmentary, but, by

putting the remaining pieces together, as it were, the design of the complete seal can be recovered [plate 5b and c]. It consists simply of a shield bearing the abbey's arms of three scallops, suspended by a tie from the top of the seal and flanked by foliage trails to left and right, the whole being set within a circular border carrying an inscription, of which unfortunately only a few letters remain.<sup>48</sup> The scallops which appear on the abbey's arms were, and are, instantly recognizable as emblems of St James, and were clearly adopted by the monks because they possessed his hand and because his name was so closely associated with the house. Precisely when Reading Abbey assumed these arms is not known, but their occurrence on this small seal must be among the earliest surviving examples of their use.

We come finally to the abbey's second common seal [plate 6a and b], which was made in 1328<sup>49</sup> and remained in use until the dissolution of the house in 1539. It is a large and splendid product of the Decorated style, different in every respect from the Romanesque first common seal, which it replaced. That, as we have seen, was a single-sided seal of pointed oval shape and depicted only the Virgin and Child. The new seal is two-sided and circular (unlike all other major Reading seals hitherto), and portrays on its two faces no fewer than six figures in elaborately canopied niches, with a long border inscription and a subsidiary inner inscription on each side. All otherwise unoccupied areas on both sides are filled with foliage trails of a type similar to that on the taxation seal. The seal has been described and illustrated a number of times,<sup>50</sup> and no detailed description is necessary here, but two key features relevant to the main theme of this paper deserve highlighting. Firstly, the inscription states that the 'conventual church of Reading' was 'founded in honour of St Mary and the apostles John and James'. This we know from the abbey's foundation charter to be untrue as regards St James, and yet the tendency to treat him as such was, as we have seen, already apparent in the 1160s.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, it was clearly the prestige of the saint's relic, together with the increasing prominence given to the hand and symbols of St James on the abbey's seals and arms since the twelfth century, that had led inexorably to this official recognition of him as one of its tutelary saints. Secondly, this development is reflected in the choice of figures represented on the seal. The obverse shows all three tutelary saints, St Mary crowned and seated with the Christ Child on her knee, flanked by St James and St John standing to her right and left, respectively. If these placings

can be taken as deliberate, St James, on the Virgin's right, has evidently been given a place of greater honour than St John. The reverse has the founder, Henry I, crowned and seated with a sceptre in his right hand and a 'model' of the abbey church in his left, flanked by standing figures of St Peter and St Paul. The last pair were probably selected for inclusion on the seal as the patron saints of Leominster Priory, Reading's dependency in Herefordshire, whose monks were regarded as full but separated members of the Reading community.<sup>52</sup>

At least eight impressions of this seal are known, all except one being complete or substantially so. The finest, at Hereford Cathedral, is also among the earliest. It is appended to an agreement, dated 20th January 1350, between Reading Abbey and the dean and chapter of Hereford over the establishment of a chantry in Leominster Priory, and, rather remarkably, it still retains the wax lugs created during the sealing process.<sup>53</sup> A second impression at Hereford, on a bond for £100 to the dean and chapter, dated 21st December 1349, is actually the earliest known, but unfortunately a small portion at the top of the seal and a considerable part of the inscription are missing.<sup>54</sup> Five impressions, including one particularly fine example, are in the Public Record Office; they comprise two of 1350-51 and three from the 1530s shortly before the abbey's dissolution.<sup>55</sup> Another late specimen is preserved in Reading Museum and Art Gallery, appended to the abbey's appointment in 1536 of Thomas Cromwell and his son as stewards of the monastery and its lands in Oxfordshire and Berkshire at an annuity of £23 6s 8d for their services.<sup>56</sup> This last document can hardly be read without some sense of poignancy, for if, as seems likely, the abbot and convent were seeking in this deed to avoid peril to the house by securing the good will of Cromwell, the manoeuvre did not in the end succeed.

Despite the significant honour accorded to St James on this second common seal, the Virgin Mary continues to occupy the most important position, in the centre of the obverse of the seal and in a niche which is wider than those of St James and St John. The same cannot be said of the personal seals of abbots examined in this survey, for one of the most striking points to emerge is that the abbots chose to emphasise St James and, as far as we can tell, made no reference to the principal tutelary saint of their house, the Virgin Mary. This is equally true of those who devised the counterseal and the taxation seal discussed above. It is to be hoped that further research will bring to light other Reading seals in use between the

twelfth and fourteenth centuries, especially those of Abbot Simon (1213-26) and Abbot John I (1328-42), and perhaps also those of individual priors and other obedientiaries. However, while any such discoveries will undoubtedly give greater precision to the dating of sigillographic developments outlined in this paper, it is unlikely that they will require a radical change to the account given here. It is fundamentally a story of how the arrival of a major apostolic relic in a monastery some time after its foundation could lead in due course to a positive flowering of visual and inscribed allusions to the saint on its seals and ultimately to his official recognition as one of its patron saints.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Plate 1a illustrates the most complete surviving impression, although some of its details are now lost. For a photograph of a cast of the same example in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London, made when the seal's details were more distinct, see T.A. Heslop, 'The Virgin Mary's Regalia and 12th-century English seals', in *The Vanishing Past*, ed. A. Borg and A. Martindale, Oxford 1981, plate 5.5.

<sup>2</sup> B(ritish) L(ibrary), Add(itional) Ch(arter) 19610; printed, *Reading Abbey Cartularies*, ed. B.R. Kemp, 2 vols, Royal Historical Society, Camden 4th series, xxxi, xxxiii, 1986-87 [hereafter *Reading Cartularies*], ii, pp.363-64, Appendix B, no.1.

<sup>3</sup> P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice), London, C109/68, part 2, un-numbered item; see also *Reading Cartularies*, ii, p.126, no.849a.

<sup>4</sup> Respectively, (i) PRO, E210/81, printed, *Reading Cartularies*, ii, pp.93-95, no.800; (ii) Westminster Abbey Muniments, no.3854; (iii) Salisbury Chapter Muniments, press II, Box 1/6.

<sup>5</sup> See Heslop, pp.53-62 and plates 5.4-6, 5.13-15. It is there suggested that the flowering rod with the bird, which St Mary holds on the Reading seal and on some others, alludes to the Virgin as the rod of the stem of Jesse on whose flower, representing Christ, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, in fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 11,1; but that it may also have reference to Aaron's rod, whose flowering in the Tabernacle (Numbers 17,8) was taken in the middle ages as a type of the Virgin Birth. See also, T.A. Heslop, 'The Romanesque Seal of Worcester Cathedral', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Worcester Cathedral*, British Archaeological Association 1978, pp.73-75; and F. Saxl, *English Sculptures of the Twelfth*

*Century*, ed. H. Swarzenski, London 1954, p.23 and plate VIc, although Saxl's suggested date of c.1170 is too late for this seal. For another seal very similar to Reading's, see that of Wix nunnery, Essex (*Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office, Monastic Seals: vol.1*, compiled by R.H. Ellis, London 1986 [hereafter *Cat. of Seals in the PRO, Monastic*, I], plate 54, no.M954).

<sup>6</sup> *Reading Cartularies*, i, pp.13-15.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.33, no.1.

<sup>8</sup> G. Zarnecki, 'The Coronation of the Virgin on a capital at Reading Abbey', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xiii, 1950, pp.1-12, where the capital is dated c.1130; *English Romanesque Art 1066 -1200*, Exhibition Catalogue, London 1984, p.159, no.113, where it is dated c.1125. The capital is in the possession of Reading Museum and Art Gallery.

<sup>9</sup> *The letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster*, ed. E. W. Williamson, Oxford 1929, p.67.

<sup>10</sup> BL, Egerton Ms 3031, f.6v. For discussion, see D. Bethell, 'The Making of a Twelfth-Century Relic Collection', *Studies in Church History*, viii, 1971, p.67.

<sup>11</sup> BL Add Ch 20372. The British Library also has the cast of a small 13th-century pointed-oval seal depicting the Virgin and Child seated, with the legend, AVE MARIA GRACIA PLEN. (BL, Seal xlvi.669). According to the manuscript catalogue of Henry Laing of Edinburgh, whose collection of seal casts the British Museum acquired in 1877, the seal was found in the ruins of Reading Abbey (BL, Add Ms 47464, f.31v, no.480). It is accordingly classed as a Reading seal in W.de G. Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. I, London 1887 [hereafter *BM Cat*, I], no.3883, although there is no proof that this was so.

<sup>12</sup> An original deed by Abbot Roger (1158-65), without the convent, survives with the seal tag bearing traces of white wax, but what seal he used on this occasion is unknown (PRO, E40/14958(i)).

<sup>13</sup> PRO, E210/3128; see *Reading Cartularies*, ii, p.91, note to no.797. The seal is described in *Cat. of Seals in PRO, Monastic*, I, p.75, no.M716.

<sup>14</sup> The only known impression is appended to a document of July, 1191, in the name of the bishop of Bath and the abbots of Reading and Waltham, executing a sentence by Pope Celestine III against the collegiate church of Hackington - Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Charta Antiqua H.102; the text is also in *Epistolae Cantuarienses: Chronicles and Memorials of the reign of Richard I*, vol.2, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series 1865, pp.340-41, and, more accurately, in Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical Works*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series

1879-80, i, p.500; see also G. Constable, 'An unpublished letter by Abbot Hugh II of Reading concerning Archbishop Hubert Walter', in *Essays in Medieval History presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. T. A. Sandquist and M.R. Powicke, Toronto 1969, pp.24-25.

<sup>15</sup> See note 3.

<sup>16</sup> Two such seals were, however, formerly appended to a deed of 1183 x 84, but only that of the abbot remains (PRO, E210/3128 - see above note 13).

<sup>17</sup> Salisbury Chapter Muniments, Press II, Box 1/2; calendared, *Reading Cartularies*, i, pp.187-88, no.229. The text is printed, from copies in three Salisbury registers, in *Sarum Charters and Documents*, ed., W.R. Jones and W.D. Macray, Rolls Series 1891, p.205.

<sup>18</sup> See C. Hohler, 'The Badge of St James' in *The Scallop: Studies of a shell and its influences on humankind*, ed. I. Cox, London 1957, esp. pp.56-61, 63, 67. The scallop as an emblem of St James also occurs on seals of St James's Priory, Northampton, Walden Abbey (Essex) dedicated to St James, and the hospital of St James by Charing Cross in London (*Cat. of Seals in PRO, Monastic*, I, nos.M623, M738, M739, M742, M743, M914, four of them illustrated in plates 14, 27, 48).

<sup>19</sup> See note 4, (i) and (ii).

<sup>20</sup> For much of this paragraph, see B.R. Kemp, 'The Miracles of the Hand of St James', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, lxxv, 1970, 1-3; K. Leyser, 'Frederick Barbarossa, Henry II and the hand of St James', *English Historical Review*, xc, 1975, 491-94.

<sup>21</sup> See note 20 and H.E. Mayer, 'Staufische Weltherrschaft? Zum Brief Heinrichs II von England an Friedrich Barbarossa von 1157', in *Festschrift Karl Pivec*, ed. A. Haidacher and H.E. Mayer, Innsbruck 1966, esp. pp.270-78.

<sup>22</sup> *Reading Cartularies*, i, pp.39-40, no.5.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H.R. Luard, 7 vols, Rolls Series 1872-83, ii, p.164.

<sup>24</sup> After the death of Abbot Anscher on 27th January, 1135, a vacancy ensued until after Henry I's funeral - see 'Annales Radingenses' in *Ungedruckte anglo-normannische Geschichtsquellen*, ed. F. Liebermann, Strassburg 1879, p.11. For the presence of the bishop of Winchester with King Stephen at Henry I's funeral, see *Regesta Regum Anglo-Nomannorum*, iii, ed. H.A.Cronne and R.H.C. Davis, Oxford 1968, p.148, no.386.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Paris, p.210.

<sup>26</sup> K. Leyser, 482-83, 499.

- <sup>27</sup> *Reading Cartularies*, i, pp. 56-57, no.28.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, pp.148-55, nos.184-200.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.133, no.152.
- <sup>30</sup> Gloucester, Dean and Chapter, Ms 1, ff. 171v-175v; translated, with introduction, by B.R.Kemp, 'The Miracles of the Hand of St James' (see above, note 20).
- <sup>31</sup> *Reading Cartularies*, i, p.156, no.201.
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.206, no.245.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.412, no.546.
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp.68-69, nos.42-44; 'Annales Radingenses Posteriores, 1135-1264', ed C.W. Previt -Orton, *English Historical Review*, xxxvii, 1922, 401. See also following note.
- <sup>35</sup> *Reading Cartularies*, i, pp.71-72, no.46. It is here that John refers to his brother's removal of the reliquary in 1189 - *manus beati Iacobi apostoli quam Ricardus rex frater noster in itinere peregrinationis sue denudavit*.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.175. Apart from those already mentioned, indulgences came from Ralph Nevill, bishop of Chichester, Walter Mauclerc, bishop of Carlisle, and Boniface of Savoy, archbishop of Canterbury.
- <sup>37</sup> B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, London 1982, pp. 34, 125-26.
- <sup>38</sup> I hope to examine this aspect in a future article.
- <sup>39</sup> Competition from St Thomas Becket's shrine at Canterbury was already apparent in the later twelfth century - see Kemp, 'Miracles', 15.
- <sup>40</sup> Respectively, PRO, E210/81 (see above, note 4 (i)) and BL, Add Ch 19634. The latter is a deed of 1286, by which the abbot sold the wardship and marriage of John Ferlyng's son and heir to his widow.
- <sup>41</sup> More of the seal survived in the nineteenth century (*BM Cat.*, I, no.3885), but the details now missing were similar to those on Abbot Adam's seal.
- <sup>42</sup> Salisbury Chapter Muniments, Press II, Box 1/7. This is a letter from the abbot to the dean and chapter of Salisbury acknowledging that their agreement to his blessing by the bishop at Ramsbury, and not at Salisbury, shall not prejudice their rights in the future. There is no counterseal, but the back of the seal has a small circular depression.
- <sup>43</sup> Oxford, Balliol College, Archives, D.6.21; printed, *The Oxford Deeds of Balliol College*, ed. H.E. Salter, Oxford Historical Society, lxiv, 1913, pp.315-16. The seal has no counterseal.
- <sup>44</sup> PRO, C109/70, no.534. The back of the seal has three small circular depressions.



- <sup>45</sup> In *Cat. of Seals in PRO, Monastic*, I, p.75, no.M717, the chalice is not noticed and the pilgrim's scrip is misinterpreted as a bell.
- <sup>46</sup> Salisbury Chapter Muniments, Press IV, Box A1/22-24. The receipt now lacking its seal, mentioned above, is Box A1/17; it is dated 1310.
- <sup>47</sup> Westminster Abbey Muniments, nos.29762, 29768, 30052, 30057.
- <sup>48</sup> The same shield of arms, ensigned with a mitre, occurs on the small signet seal of Abbot John IV (John Thorne II), appended to a deed of 1493 (BL, Harley Charter 44 H.55). Three scallops also appear in the arms of Walden Abbey (*Cat. of Seals in PRO, Monastic*, I, nos.M742, M743, and plate 27).
- <sup>49</sup> The date is given in the subsidiary inscription on each side.
- <sup>50</sup> e.g., *BM Cat.*, I, no.3882; *Cat. of Seals in PRO, Monastic*, I, p.75 and plate 46; J.B. Hurry, *Reading Abbey*, London 1901, pp.95-97.
- <sup>51</sup> See above, p.144.
- <sup>52</sup> See B.R. Kemp, 'The Monastic Dean of Leominster', *English Historical Review*, lxxxiii; 1968, esp. 508-09, 515. The church of Leominster first appears as dedicated only to St Peter (*Reading Cartularies*, i, p.287, no.354), but the normal dedication was to St Peter and St Paul. A fourteenth-century note in a Reading manuscript (BL, Royal Ms 11 C. iii, f.1v) describes Reading Abbey as 'founded in honour of the glorious Virgin Mary and of the blessed apostles Peter, Paul, John and James (see Hurry, *Reading Abbey*, p.109), but no other evidence for this assertion has been found and it may have been inspired by the figures on the second common seal.
- <sup>53</sup> Hereford Cathedral Archives, no.3216. The seal is illustrated in plate 6a and b.
- <sup>54</sup> Hereford Cathedral Archives, no.1322.
- <sup>55</sup> PRO, C109/70, nos.7, 314, 534, 543; E40/13433.
- <sup>56</sup> Reading Museum and Art Gallery, no.45.51.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deep gratitude for the help and kindness I have received in the preparation of this paper from the staff of the British Library and the Public Record Office, and from the archivists of Canterbury, Hereford and Salisbury Cathedrals, Westminster Abbey and Balliol College, Oxford.

## KEY TO THE PLATES OF READING ABBEY SEALS

### Plate 1

- a) First common seal (? second quarter of twelfth century), from BL, Add. Ch. 19610. By permission of the Trustees of the British Library.
- b) Fragment of first common seal (enlarged), from Westminster Abbey Muniments, no.3854. By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.
- c) Seal of Abbot Hugh II (1186-99), from Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Charta Antiqua, H.102. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury.

### Plate 2

- a) and b) Seal and counterseal of Abbot Elias (1200-13), both enlarged, from PRO, C109/68, part 2, un-numbered item. Crown copyright. By permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

### Plate 3

- a) and b) Seal and counterseal of Abbot Adam of Lathbury (1226-38), both enlarged, from Salisbury Chapter Muniments, Press II, Box 1/2. By permission of the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury.

### Plate 4

- a) Seal of Abbot William II (1290/1-1305), enlarged, from Salisbury Chapter Muniments, Press II, Box 1/7. By permission of the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury.
- b) Seal of Abbot Nicholas of Whaplode (1305-28), enlarged, from Balliol College Oxford, Archives, D.6.21. By permission of the Master and Fellows of Balliol College.

### Plate 5

- a) Seal of Abbot Henry of Appleford (1342-61), enlarged, from

PRO, C109/70, no.534. Crown copyright. By permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

b) and c) 'Taxation' seal (early fourteenth century), enlarged, from Westminster Abbey Muniments, nos.29768 and 29762. By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

Plate 6

a) and b) Obverse and reverse of second common seal (1328), from Hereford Cathedral Archives, no.3216. By permission of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral.

The photographs of the seals at Salisbury Cathedral and Westminster Abbey are by Simon Eager.

Plate 1

a)



b)

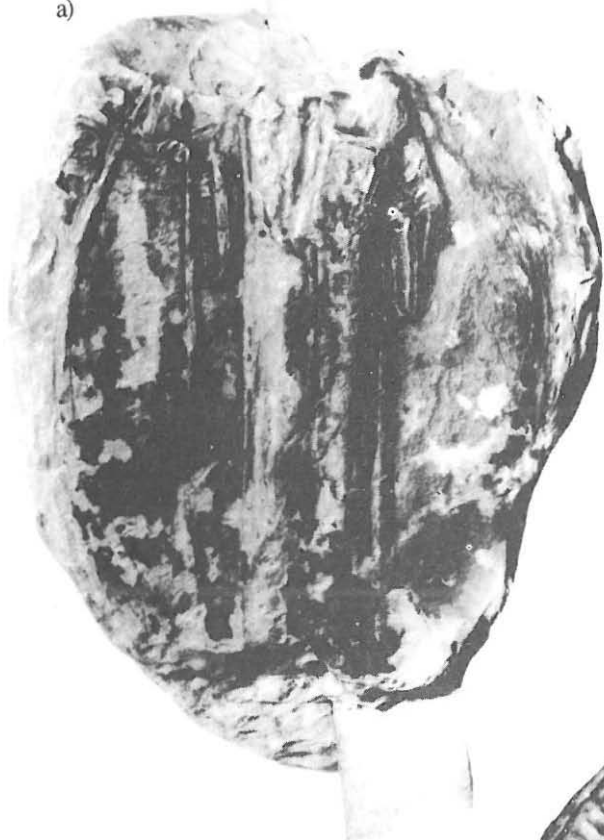


c)



Plate 2

a)



b)



Plate 3

a)



b)



Plate 4

a)



b)



Plate 5

a)



b)



c)

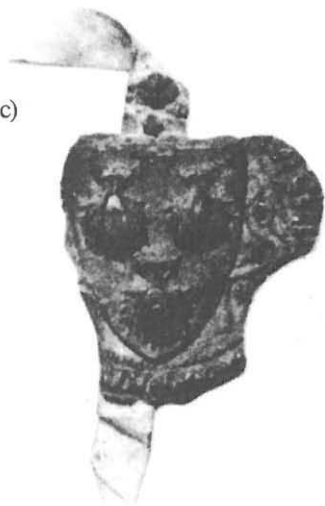




Plate 6

a)



b)

