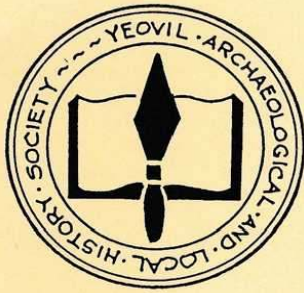


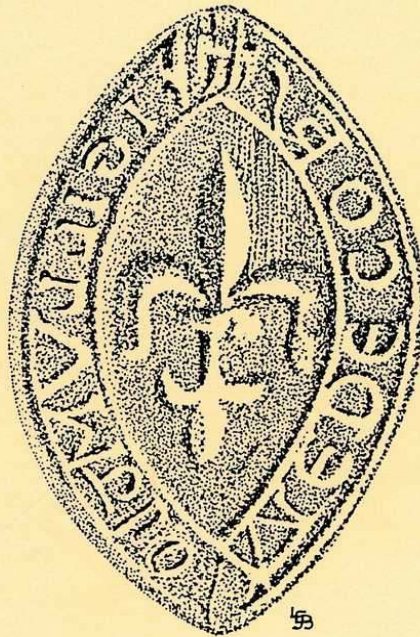
ISSN 0268652



Chronicle

Volume 4, No.1

October 1987



Journal of Yeovil Archaeological and Local History Society

AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF 13th CENTURY LEAD

One of the more constructive aspects of the work carried out in the Museum (see page 21) was that it gave the opportunity to examine that portion of the Museum's collection in detail. Many things of interest came to light including a fire hook, another 42 items from the Pinney collection of early glass and the Common Seal of the Borough of Yeovil. However, the most remarkable was probably a small, flat piece of lead no more than 1" by 1½". In shape it is a vesica - an oval with pointed ends. One surface is plain but for a marking "ac". The other side (see front cover and illustration above) bears, cut into the face, an elaborate fleur-de-lys and a reversed inscription. The object is a lead seal matrix. On taking an impression, the inscription may be read as "+ SIGILLVM THOME DE COK" [The seal of Thomas de Cok (er)].



Expert opinion¹ has been taken on the piece and is agreed that it is probably 13th century in date. The proportions, size and shape are identical with those of the seal of Dunkeswell Abbey, Devon, which is also 13th century. The lack of a handle on the reverse is unusual and Mr. J. Cherry has suggested that a handle may have been attached to one end, where scarring of the surface is visible. It is possible that the mark on the reverse, may be the initials of the maker.

A charter of perhaps 13th century date² bears a de Coker seal with a fleur-de-lys design but this is of William, not Thomas de Coker. A Thomas de Coker was witness to a charter of 1280 but the name does not appear again for 20 years when 10 shillings yearly was granted to Montacute Priory. In 1307 he exchanged lands in East Coker with John de Coker, son of William de Coker. In 1317 he was granting lands to his son John and the following year was involved in a law suit³. However it seems unlikely that the Thomas of 1280 was the same man who was active between 1307 and 1318. It seems likely that these are two different Thomas's.

Nothing is known of the history of the seal, it was found in a box with a collection of miscellaneous small items in the Museum's store. It is not recorded in the catalogue. It looks to have been buried at some time, and it is possible that it was found, perhaps in a garden, and brought to the Museum for identification. If anyone does have information about the history of the seal, the Museum Working Party would be most interested to hear of it. Knowledge of its provenance would significantly add to the historical value of this important find.

- References :
1. Private communication from Dr. W. J. Blair, Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford; Mr. C. Clair formerly Keeper of Metalwork, Victoria and Albert Museum and Mr. J. Cherry, Deputy Keeper of Medieval and Later Antiquities, British Museum.
 2. Batten J. Historical Notes on Parts of South Somerset p.139.
 3. Ibid p.140.

BRIAN AND MOIRA GITTOS