Thirteenth-century seals – Tayside, Fife and the wider world

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In Scotland as in England, although there are a few Anglo-Saxon matrices do survive, the regular use of seals by the monarchy and then by leading ecclesiastics to authenticate documents was only introduced along with other Norman customs in the 11th century and became an established practice in the course of the 12th. Duncan II (1093–4) was the first king of Scotland whose seal is known to us (Harvey and McGuinness 1996, 5–6) and Robert of St Andrews (1127–59) the earliest bishop (Birch 1907, 10). While Scottish royal seals on the whole followed English models throughout the Middle Ages, those of the prelates exhibited more variations and some designs not found south of the border.

Two threads running through the history of 13th-century Tayside and Fife can be clearly followed by way of a study of seal matrices and impressions. The first is the power and influence of St Andrews, the premier see and religious house in Scotland, the second the close trade and political links connecting the Perth area with East Anglia and Scandinavia, through the North Sea.

The bishops of St Andrews and their influence

The standing of the bishops of St Andrews is demonstrated by the title they used, Scottorum Episcopus, and the fashions they set were frequently followed, particularly in the east of Scotland. The seal made for Roger son of the earl of Leicester when he was consecrated bishop of St Andrews in 1198 was the most copied in 13th-century Scotland. So far I have counted at least ten other versions of this profile figure made between Roger’s death in 1202 and 1246 (Appendix I).

As made for Roger, it featured a striking and lively figure full of movement and reflecting recent trends in European monumental sculpture and metalwork. From the fine sharp green wax impression in the Durham Dean and Chapter Muniments (Misc 1341) one can gauge the high-quality engraving of the matrix (Illus 1).

The tall slender bishop, wearing a mitre with long lappets, is shown with his slightly inclined head fully in profile to his left. The face, ear, hair and neck are softly, but meticulously modelled. The upper body is turned three quarters towards his left arm holding aloft a crozier with a round knop and plain spiral crook, which cuts boldly through the inscription. The right hand is raised against his chest in blessing, the fingers and thumbs are fully and carefully rendered. A strong feeling of movement is given to the whole figure by the position of the right leg which steps forward on a foot turned slightly to his right, in contrast to the straight left leg and foot in full profile. (The feet are missing from Durham Misc 1341, but are extant on the less clear Misc 1342.) Fine drapery folds looping across his body emphasise the torsion and contrast with a dramatic vertical sweep falling the full length of the figure from the bishop’s left arm. The inscription is in large very clear, evenly spaced transitional Roman-Lombardic letters.

Like Harvey and McGuinness (1996, 6) I believe this design was peculiar to Scotland. It was not adopted by any medieval English bishop represented in Laiing or in the Society of Antiquaries of London library of seal casts. On the evidence of the holdings of the Archives Nationales in Paris (Centre d’accueil et de recherche des archives nationales, cast collections and Douët D’Arcq photographic archive) it was also unknown in France. As far as seal design is concerned, it seems to have been a completely original concept. The universal norm of the frontally posed, basically symmetrical standing or seated prelate figure, his arms raised and spread in blessing, was as standard in the 12th century at St Andrews as elsewhere (Birch, 1907, 10–11, no 54). Roger’s own seal as bishop elect in 1189 shows him enthroned facing forward and holding a staff with fleur-de-lis finial in his right hand indicating he was not yet invested with the bishop’s crozier (Birch, 1907, 15, no 55).

The inspiration for the seal maker, therefore, presumably came from some other medium. Heslop (1984, 300) remarks on the influence of the metalwork of the Meuse and Rhine valleys on late 12th-century English seals. In the case of Roger’s

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Illus 1. Impression (AD 1199) of the seal of Roger, bishop of St Andrews (1198–1202). Photograph Durham Cathedral Chapter Archives (MS misc 1341; Hunter Blair 3618). 86 mm x 54 mm.
1198 seal, there are certainly general similarities with the drapery styles and vigorous poses of Nicholas of Verdun and his followers. There are also affinities with the fine folds on the obverse of the great seal of King John, on the angels of the Waltham Abbey seal and some resemblances in the epigraphy of all three (Heslop 1986, 57–8, pls XXIIIb, XXIVa). However, standing figures looking and gesticulating towards a focal point to one side occur most frequently in monumental sculpture, notably the vousoirs of the great carved stone portals of late 12th- and 13th-century French cathedrals.

Roger’s is unlike most figures on vesica shaped seals in that it is asymmetrical and not designed to fit into the pointed oval or reflect its shape. Instead it cuts dramatically through it, puncturing the border inscription with head, feet and crozier. The bishop is imposed upon the seal and his right hand and foot reach out towards the viewer. Very comparable poses can be seen in Sauerländer’s illustrations of the archivolts of the west portal of Sens cathedral which he dates to after 1184 (1972, 416, pls 59, 60). The narrow clinging drapery with decided vertical emphases is common to both, particularly in the outer register at Mens. Unfortunately, the latter having all been decapitated, it is impossible to say if they too were in full profile although their bodies all swing emphatically towards the central tympanum.

More grand courtier than religious cleric — he was only ordained priest at the time of his consecration (Howden 1871, iv, 31) — Roger came from the wealthy well-established Anglo-Norman Beaumont family. Probably by 1118, Roger’s grandfather Robert II, earl of Leicester (Anderson 1991, 318, n.5) had a very early example of a personal equestrian seal (Heslop 1984, 317, no 371) and his twin brother Waleran was among the first in England or France to have a proto-heraldic device on his about 1139 (Crouch 211). Two further equestrian seals, of Waleran’s son and Roger’s elder brother are known to have continued the Beaumont tradition (White 1926, 111–113). The Leicesters still had financial and territorial interests in northern France by the bishop’s time. In 1195, while in France, Roger issued a quitclaim to Philip II of the castle of Pacy in Normandy on behalf of his brother (Barrow, unpublished archive).

Roger had been William the Lion’s chancellor before his appointment to the bishopric, which was at the king’s own command and represented a major triumph over the authority of the pope (Barrow 1971, 10–11, 30). This followed a long wrangle between the king and the papacy over the patronage of the see after the death of Bishop Richard in 1178 (Ferguson 1997, 56–61). William and Roger were cousins and the latter was obviously treated with great indulgence as he was allowed to delay for ten years before even being consecrated and during his four years as bishop continued to spend long periods at the English court (Duncan 1975, 276–7).

His handsome seal befits such a character, but the version used by his successor at St Andrews, while competent and carefully executed, shows a woodenness in the interpretation of the fold patterns and little understanding of the anatomy beneath. William Malvoisine’s seal, illustrated by Birch (1907, 15, pl 56), is certainly copied from Roger’s, but it is not a reworking of the same matrix or even taken from an impression of it (Illus 2). It is altogether smaller and the figure is 6 mm shorter, the crozier is held at a different angle cautiously not engraving on the lettering and the lappets of the mitre have developed a slightly wavy outline. The most fundamental difference, however, is that William’s artist lacked the basic grasp of three dimensional form of Roger’s and has rendered the design as schematic and flat.

Roger’s seal maker owed an obvious debt to French sculpture of the 1180s and 1190s, but whether this is direct or indirect is impossible to say. The Beaumonts extended their power in England during the 12th century, where Robert II established the Leicester earldom and its great estates and also in Normandy and the western Ile-de-France (Crouch 1986, 58–98, figs 3 and 4). Waleran as count of Meulan had an important stronghold on the Seine, which gave him considerable power upstream to Mantes and beyond. The artistic connections between the sculpture of Sens, Mantes and ultimately St Mary’s Abbey, York were demonstrated by Sauerländer (1959, 68–69, pls XX–XXV). Some similar chain of communication may have led to an English engraver assimilating this French figure style. Certainly, the fine parallel fold patterns of the angel from the Mantes tympanum (Sauerländer 1959, pl XXIV, fig 1) resemble closely those of Roger’s vestments. However, it is as likely that the bishop elect commissioned the matrix actually in France while on family business (see above). William Malvoisine, although he too was rich and well connected, appears to have had his version made locally in Scotland.

By the mid-century the design had become little more than a routine symbol as witnessed by its almost diagrammatic use for Albin of Brechin. Some of the derivatives I have listed may have been by the same maker, but to say that they are all the work of one artist is to postulate an unusually long career and their quality is so variable as to make this virtually impossible.

As this particular tradition became exhausted, new fashions were adopted. Gamelin (1255–71) and William Wishart both used a representation of the martyrdom of St Andrew with a kneeling bishop below on their seals, which was to become standard practice in the diocese. William Fraser (1279–97) used the same design for his counter-seal.
Illus 2. Impression (AD 1204) of the seal of William Malvoisine, bishop of St Andrews (1202–1238).
Photograph Durham Cathedral Chapter Archives (MS misc 1317; Hunter Blair 3619). 76 mm x 48 mm.
Illus 3. Impression (AD 1281) of the seal of William Fraser, bishop of St Andrews (1279–1297). Photograph British Library (Cotton charter xviii.29; Birch 14,295). 65 mm x 44 mm.

(Birch, 1895, iv, 48–49, no 14,925) but returned to a frontally posed bishop figure, against a richly decorated background for the obverse (Illus 3).

Hunter Blair claimed this was the first British episcopal seal with a shield of arms (1919, 166, no 3624). Certainly it is replete with heraldic significance. In addition to his arms, small strawberry (fraise) flowers punning with his name fill the lattice ground and decorate the apparels at the hem of his alb.

William Fraser, a member of a baronial family of the second rank, was to become a major political figure serving for seven years as chancellor of Scotland and six as a royal guardian after the death of Alexander III in 1286 (Barrow 1988, 64–5). As Ash pointed out (1990, 47), his seal introduced other significant changes to the practices of his predecessors, including a surname for the first time in the legend – WILLI: FRASER: DEI / GRA: SCOTTOY: EPI.

On a document of 1286 (Durham, Misc 740), Fraser’s first seal was superseded by a more elaborate version on which an architectural canopy with traceried buttresses, cusps under the large ogival arch and leafy crockets was inserted, although he retained the same counter-seal. The fraises on the lozenge diaper ground remain as before, but the shield of arms occurs only once in a cusped frame within a circle at the bottom point of the vesica. The new seal may have been a mark of his growing status and his increasing contact with fashions prevalent in England and France.

It was the first seal of William Fraser which Matthew Crumblith slavishly imitated in a number of ways when he became bishop of Dunkeld in 1289. The best impression, on a treaty of 1295, was catalogued by Douet d’Arcq (1863–8, iii, 308, no 10,288) (Illus 4). Beaded borders framed both inscriptions, both bishops stood on three sided corbels and both probably had architectural canopies above, although I have not so far come on an impression of Fraser’s first seal with the top point complete.

Strikingly, both used the same lattice ground of fine double lines, Crumblith’s also decorated with a small flower in each lozenge, although for him this had no heraldic meaning. This kind of background occurs in England from the 1240s, the distinguished
Illus 4. Impression (AD 1295) of the seal of Matthew Crambeth, bishop of Dunkeld (1288–1309). Photograph Centre historique des Archives nationales, Paris (MS Arch de l’Emp J 457; no 3, Douët d’Arcq, no 10288). 73 mm x 48 mm.

Merton Priory seal of 1242, most recently catalogued as number 283 in the Art of Chivalry exhibition, is an example (Alexander and Binski 1987, 318–9, no 283). Fraser seems to have introduced it to Scotland for a specific purpose and Crambeth to have adopted it for purely decorative reasons.

Fraser and Crambeth (himself heir to a small barony near Kinross) were close colleagues; Fraser supporting Crambeth’s appointment to Dunkeld, ranked the third most important diocese in Scotland after St Andrews and Glasgow (Barrow 1988, 34). Quite why Crambeth did not choose to copy his mentor’s more up-to-date seal is unclear. Perhaps he was restrained by a sense of due deference to choose the more modest version.

Perth and its North Sea neighbours

The burgh of Perth had a riverside harbour where customs dues were collected under David I or even earlier (Duncan 1973; Spearman 1988; Ewan 1990, 7). Lynch and Stevenson demonstrate in the Atlas of Scottish History, pages 245 and 250, that by the end of Robert I’s reign it was regularly exporting wool, woolfells and hides, if on a slightly smaller scale than their downstream rivals Dundee (McNeill and MacQueen 1996, 245, 250). The identification of place-dates of royal charters by Barrow on page 162–4 of the same publication shows the town and more particularly the nearby abbey of Scone as important administrative centres during most of the 13th century. Diplomatic and royal events also centred on Perth. The treaty which ended hostilities with Norway over Man and the Western Isles was signed there on 2 July 1266 (MacDonald 1997, 119–21) and it was from Perth in 1293 that Isabella Bruce embarked with due ceremony for Bergen to become queen of Norway as described in the document published by Bain (1881–8, ii, no 675).

The bronze double seal matrix for Inveraray Abbey, which lies some ten miles west of Perth, is now in the British Museum and was catalogued by Tonnochy (1952, 202–3, no 938, pl XXVIII). It is in excellent condition, round with three lugs and matching pegs. The diameter of the seal is 69 mm. On the reverse (Illus 5) is a standing figure of a saint holding a palm in his right hand and a book
in his left (Harvey and McGuinness 1996, 13, pl 13). He occupies a tall round-headed arch at the centre of a schematic view of a church. This conventionalised building is much larger and more ambitious than the actual abbey church as recently excavated (Ewart 1996, 488–495, 514, illus 19). It has a main gable containing a quatrefoil in a lozenge and two trefoils in triangles, flanked by slender turrets articulated by three tiers of plain lancets with gables and crowned by spires with fleuron finials. At each side there is a two-storey transept with a diagonally hatched roof and a gable to a lower chapel containing a trefoil. The transept ends are turned to face the spectator and follow the same pattern with upper gables ornamented with three finials. The whole is mounted on a canted socle engraved with fictive masonry. The legend, within beaded borders reads *S*. COMVNE : ECCE : SCI . IOTHIS : EWANGELISTE · DE · INSVLA · MISSARUM.

The obverse has the device of the eagle of St John the Evangelist (Illus 6). It is against a ground of scattered flowers and leaves framed by a moulded octofoil, in a dramatic pose as if preparing for flight. The wings are spread to each side, the head with a plain halo turned towards the tail and a scroll reading [N] : PRINCIPIO : ERAT : VERBV[M], the opening words of St John’s Gospel is held in the eagle’s claws. The scroll is horizontal and the inscription upside down from the point of view of the onlooker. The border legend is the same as on the reverse.

The documents edited by Lindsay, Dowden and Maitland Thomson prove that Inchaffray had been dedicated to John the Evangelist even before it was re-founded for the Augustinians by Earl Gilbert of Strathearn in 1200 (1908, 22–3, 185, no XXIV). An earlier abbey seal still in use in 1238 (Illus 7) was a pointed oval portraying the eagle as a rather ruffled bird perched upright with folded
wings and looking over its shoulder (ibid, 55, 309, no LXIV, facs 16).

When this device was radically recreated for the British Museum matrix is difficult to establish. No charter has come to light with the seal attached earlier than the 16th century, although from the style of both faces it is clearly considerably earlier (Stevenson and Wood 1940, i, 184). There is a very close relationship between this Inchaffray eagle and one on a particularly fine copper-alloy matrix made for the town of Kings Lynn (Illus 8) and published by Gale Pedrick (1904, 90-1, pl I), which may help to establish a date.

The Lynn matrix is about 2 mm greater in diameter than that of Inchaffray, but the octofoils which frame the two birds are precisely the same size. The Lynn eagle is more upright (Gale Pedrick printed his photograph on its side) and has its wings extended behind it, the flowers and leaves are absent and a deep trefoil decorates each span-

del between the octofoil and the border of the legend. Nevertheless, one surely inspired the other and the eagle with its scroll is a rare subject for a seal. The only other medieval instances currently known to me are Liverpool and Colchester (Heslop 1999, communication by letter) and the town of Agen in south-west France, a seal which appears on a document of 1244 (Bedos 1980, 35, no 9bis).

Why it was chosen for Lynn is rather obscure. Gale Pedrick suggests it was in honour of King John who gave the town its charter. Certainly the Holy Trinity Gild, the merchant guild of Lynn, was still saying prayers for his soul in 1328. Whether the king was named in honour of the Evangelist or the Baptist is not recorded. He was not known for his devotion to any of the saints, but the royal family had a certain reverence for John the Evangelist reaching back to Edward the Confessor (Arnold-Foster 1899, i, 67-8). King John's birthday also fell about 24 December (DNB), close to the feast of the
Evangelist (27 December) and not the Baptist who Dunbar gives as 24 June, birth, 29 August, beheading and 24 February, finding of the head (1906, 335–6). In general the Evangelist was a rare medieval English church dedication (Bond 1914, 17).

The principal difference between the Lynn and Inchaffray seals is one of quality (Illus 9). The Lynn eagle is executed with the greatest care and skill, each feather on its body engraved with a central quill and slanting covert, including the down at the top of its legs. The tail feathers and the long wing feathers are carefully differentiated and the edges of the wings are textured with small dots and hatching. The hooked beak and particularly the talons are realistically vicious. The scroll inscription, while still facing outwards from the eagle, reads vertically in a curve parallel with the legend. The whole is in high relief and the octofoil is laid out with great precision – the compass points in the centre of the lobes are still visible in three instances. By contrast the feathers on the Inchaffray eagle are much simpler, the short body feathers marked with two grooves, the long wing and tail feathers with one and the leg feathers omitted. Instead of talons it has simpler less fearsome claws. The halo is a simple plain moulding whereas on the Lynn seal it is delicately beaded. The epigraphy is completely dissimilar, the Scottish inscription having heavy block like forms which fill the border, the Lynn legend carried out in curvacease letters with curly endings and extra lines emphasising the verticals. The latter also introduces two different forms of V, M and N.

The inescapable conclusion is that the Inchaffray obverse is copied from that of Lynn by a less adventurous and accomplished craftsman. Possibly he worked from an impression of the town seal which gave him the size and layout of the octofoil, if there were compass points here they were hidden by flowers, a leaf and parts of the bird and scroll. The redrawn bird fills the space in a less satisfactory manner, which may be another reason for the background flowers.

Taylor, who is generally reliable, states that a document of 1300 bore this Lynn seal, without specifying what it was (1844, 141). A more precise dating based on stylistic considerations may be reached by a study of the reverse. The reverse of the Lynn seal, like that of Inchaffray, has a standing figure of a saint in a large niche within an architectural setting (Illus 10). The figure in this case is St Margaret of Antioch, joint dedicatee with
Illus 8. Impression (modern) from the 13th-century matrix for the town seal of King’s Lynn, obverse. By permission of the Lord Mayor of the Borough of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk; photograph National Museums of Scotland. Diameter 72 mm.

Mary Magdalene of the principal church in the town (Richards 1990, 1), standing on a wonderfully scaly and reptilian amphibia. In her right hand she holds a long cross-headed staff which she thrusts into the creature’s mouth and in her left a book. The folds of the cloak, which is swathed across her body in shallow rather angular folds and then falls to a swirling zigzag hem below the book, are reminiscent of the large portrait miniatures in the Oscolet Psalter dated by Morgan to 1265–70 (1987, 138, no. 151, figs 140–148).

Around St Margaret is a meticulously articulated piece of miniature architecture. At each side is a hexagonal tower with a pointed spire, the
receding planes rendered in perspective and as full detail as the main facades. The elevations consist of three tiers of paired trefoil headed lancets with a quatrefoil above under a gable with large scrolling crockets. The saint is in a deep niche with a pair of columns leading inwards at each side, a heavy moulded rounded cusped arch above under a large triangular crocketed gable pierced with a trefoil. There is a realism about the architecture which does not appear in English manuscript painting in the 13th century and only makes a rather more staid appearance on the framing of the Westminster Retable (Binski 1995, 152–167, lxi).

It is, however, on another seal that the closest similarities are to be found. Kingsford (1940, 160–2, pl VIIIb) places the seal of St Paul’s Cathedral, London, in a sequence of elaborate architectural designs ranging from the second seal of Norwich Cathedral Priory, which is dated 1258 by its inscription, through Milton Abbey, Faversham, Southwick and Boxgrove. To this he might have added the chapter seal of Ely Priory (Gale Pedrick 1902, 68–71, pl III). Lynn was in the diocese of Norwich, whose successive bishops kept as tight a rein as possible on the affairs of both St Margaret’s Church and the mayor, but was geographically much closer to Ely and Richards describes how it served as the port for exporting and importing goods for Ely Cathedral and its lands (1990, 18).

St Paul’s would certainly have had their seal made in London and it would have been natural for Norwich, Ely and the town of Lynn to use a similar source. Norwich, Ely and St Paul’s all have a full Gothic church facade with spires on the obverse. On the reverse, St Paul’s has the name saint enthroned in a niche which matches almost line for line that of St Margaret. Only the receding flanks of the towers are lacking, replaced by three-storey wings perhaps representing a structure set behind the main canopy. Birch dates the St Paul’s
Illus 10. Impression (modern) from the 13th-century matrix for the town seal of King’s Lynn, reverse. By permission of the Lord Mayor of the Borough of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk; photograph National Museums of Scotland. Diameter 72 mm.

seal simply as ‘13th. cent.’ (1887, i, 299). However, it must presumably coincide with the new work on the east end of the cathedral which Hastings argues began in 1258 and was mostly finished by 1283 (1955, 13–18). This was the first major building campaign in London to take forward the style newly introduced at Westminster and that is precisely the type of architecture reproduced on the Lynn seal.

The craftsman who made the Inchaaffray matrix reflects the pose and drapery patterns of St Margaret for the figure of St John, but has reduced them to a two dimensional linear pattern (Illus 11). The architecture of the Lynn seal, however, was altogether too sophisticated for him and his traditional rendering of an abbey church is composed entirely of flat planes imposed on top of one another. In this case too there is a close relationship with another seal.

Trætteberg (1968, 74–77, 99–101, no 17) was the first to note the fact that the Inchaaffray reverse is almost identical to the chapter seal of Bergen Cathedral (Illus 12). This was also round and about 4 mm smaller than the Inchaaffray seal. The standing figure is St Sunniva, trailing a long scroll down her right hand side. The surviving impressions are not very clear, but the architecture is an almost perfect match for the Scottish seal except that the quatrefoil in the main gable has been replaced by an oculus. The earliest surviving document to bear this is 1302, but a charter of 1276 which has lost its seals may also have done so. On stylistic grounds, Trætteberg suggests this is the case and also that the Inchaaffray and Bergen seals may share a date of about 1275, although he hesitates to say which may have come first and which may be the copy.

It is difficult to compare the Bergen seal with full-scale architecture in Norway. The obvious
source could have been Trondheim Cathedral, where the nave and west front were under construction throughout the second half of the century (Ekroll et al 1997, 16, 38–41). Unfortunately, the quality of the impression is so poor that only the barely discernible pointed trefoils reveal an attempt at the Gothic style and the cathedral has been so repeatedly restored that one cannot say exactly how its 13th-century exterior looked. At all events, the seal maker did not attempt to imitate its most striking feature, the great screen of the west front. Turning to panel paintings, Trøtteberg’s fairly early date can be accepted as plausible. Fashionable Gothic architectural layouts were transmitted from England or France from at least the 1270s and became the norm by 1300 (Morgan
Illus 12. Impression (1303) of the chapter seal of Bergen Cathedral. Photograph Riksarkivet, Oslo (MS DAM 7.10). Diameter 66 mm.


Of the fifteen Augustinian houses in Scotland, Inchaffray was the fifth richest (Ewart 1996, 476–479, table 1) and it had influential patrons in the earls of Strathearn. The earls maintained close contacts with both the Scottish and English royal houses and married into landed families in Northumberland, Northamptonshire and throughout Scotland. Their political significance can be judged by the fact that successive earls officiated at the inauguration of Alexander II of Scotland at Scone in 1214 and Alexander III in 1249 (Duncan 1975, 552, 555), while Malise II of Strathearn gave a personal undertaking to Henry III of England in 1258 to safeguard his young daughter, the Scots queen (Duncan 1975, 573). The fertile and strategically important Strathearn lands yielded sufficient power and income for the overlords to run a quasi-royal household with their own officials such as the chamberlain, the marshal, the carver, and the dempster or judge (Lindsay, Dowden and Maitland Thomson 1908, lvii).

The contacts of Malise III, earl of Strathearn, with Norway are well documented. He was party to the marriage treaty with Scotland in 1281 and to the treaties with Norway and England at the time of the deaths of Alexander III in 1286 and the Maid of Norway in 1290 (Lindsay, Dowden and Maitland Thomson 1908, lxv). On these occasions he would have used one of his own two seals, most likely the larger equestrian example with the two Strathearn chevronells on the rider’s shield (Lindsay, Dowden and Maitland Thomson 1908, 314, 105, no CXIII, facs 23). None the less, Inchaffray Abbey, with which the earls were so closely involved and which served as their mortuary, may have played a part in the administration behind these negotiations, when their seal could also have been in use. By whatever means, this was the most plausible route for knowledge of it to have reached Bergen.

Perhaps inspired by Lynn, Inchaffray has a little more architectural detail on its seal. The buttresses either side of the main arch have three tiers of niches and there are rather more elaborate and pronounced finials to the spires than used at Bergen. Ultimately it is impossible to prove whether this shows a craftsman in Scotland improving and updating his Scandinavian model or a conservative Norwegian toning down a foreign import. On the whole, by the second half of the 13th century Scottish seals were much more varied and ambitious than their Scandinavian counterparts and I am inclined to favour the view that the
design originated here. This would mean placing a
date on the Inchaffray seal after Lynn and before
Bergen, in other words between circa 1260 at the
earliest and 1302 at the latest. In any event before
the '14th century' rather loosely applied by
Tonnocny.

In whichever order the seals were created,
documented links exist between the three areas
which would explain their similarities. Lynn was
one of the most important ports on the English
eastern seaboard, with large numbers of vessels
available for hire or charter. In the 13th and 14th
century, trade voyages are recorded to Bergen,
Holland, France and later Danzig. Grain to sup-
plement local production was shipped to Scotland
from the 12th century onwards, along with barley,
beans, wine and salt (Owen 1984, 52–3).

The de Lens of Lynn figure prominently in the
Perth gild, granted its privileges by the king in
1209, along with other incomers from Leicester,
Bedford, La Bataille, Stamford and Scarborough
(Duncan 1975, 492). In the Inchaffray Charters we
see that by 1240 William and Martin de Lene
appear as witnesses in Perth, William already a
benefactor of Scone Abbey, and John de Lenna did
homage in 1291, by which time they had been
leading Perth citizens for over a century (Lindsay,
Dowden and Maitland Thomson 1908, 62, 63, 283).

Scots also settled in Kings Lynn as the records
collected by Owen reveal. Adam, Robertus and
Henricus Scot are on the 13th century roll of gild of
the Holy Trinity. Possibly the same Adam had
property at the west end of St Margaret's church
during 1297 and was pursuing a debt of 10s some
time after 1301. They may not have come from
Perth itself, but there is no doubt about Laurencius
de villa sancti Iohannis in Scocia on the same docu-
ment or William Boer who was owed 2s by a Lynn
merchant in 1294. Towards the end of the century,
three married couples surnamed Scot appear on
the calendar and obit roll of the hospital of St Mary
Magdalen in Lynn, along with Petri Scot de Tineye.

Ships owned by Walter and Hugh the Scot paid
customs dues on wool in 1323 (Owen 1984, 114,
115, 298, 303, 309, 313, 336, 341, 409, 427–8, 455).
The passing trade included ships carrying supplies
to Edward's army via Perth (one of which was
attacked by pirates, possibly Scottish, with a loss
of seventeen men in 1314–15) and fish coming in the
reverse direction which were landed in 1313.
Hugh, a less worthy Scot, was found dead on the
sands at Lynn in September 1302. As an
eyewitness explained 'predictus Hugo inebriatus fuit
et ingrediaturum quamdam Skaffe ... in aquam et
submersus fuit' (Owen 1984, 427–8).

Lynn and Perth both had numerous trading
connections with Bergen and, after the Treaty of
Perth, political links between the town and Bergen
also became frequent. The sea journey was haz-
ardous, but could be relatively short. Margaret,
daughter of Alexander III, left Scotland probably
from Perth (the Lanercost Chronicle is unclear) on
11 August 1280 and 'after great danger to her life' 
arrived at Bergen on 14–15 of the same month
(Anderson 1990, ii, 680).

The very evident North Sea communications
demonstrated by these three seals led not only to
the transfer of goods from one centre to another,
but also to the transmission of ideas within a rela-
tively short period. Thus the taste and style of a
metal-worker close to the fashions of the English
court could be appreciated in a Perthshire abbey,
at the same time as it shared a design with the
cathedral of Bergen, principal royal seat and effect-
ive capital of Norway until the reign of Håkon V
(1299–1319). A picture emerges, as it did in the
recent re-examination of the Tristram and Isult
mirror-case from Perth (Hall and Owen 1998), of
an area of Scotland in close contact with its con-
tinental neighbours and readily assimilating their
trends.

Conclusion

Continuing research into artefacts from Perthshire
and the surrounding area shows repeatedly that
the region was far from isolated or remote in the
later Middle Ages. Pottery, enamels and metal-
work were all imported. Luminaries like Bishop
Rogier introduced foreign fashions to St Andrews
and great local families like the Strathhearns dis-
seminated their own knowledge of contemporary
customs from England and the continent. Because
seals and their matrices can be firmly associated
with particular individuals and institutions and
are frequently datable, they offer an unusually
precise insight into the links between Tayside, Fife
and the wider world.

Appendix I

In date order Scottish bishops adopting the profile
design of Roger of St Andrews are:-
1. William Malvoisine of St Andrews (1202–1238).
2. Richard de Praebenda of Dunkeld (1203–1210).
4. Walter of Glasgow (1207–1232) (Laing 1850,
163, no 942, pl XV, fig 4).
5. Abraham of Dunblane (1210–1224) (Lindsay,
Dowden and Maitland Thomson 1908, 26, no
XXX, pl 9).
6. Hugh of Dunkeld (1214–1221) (Lindsay,
Dowden and Maitland Thomson 1908, 30, no
XXXVI, pl 10).
7. William de Bondington of Glasgow (1233–1250)
(Hunter Blair 1919, 161, no 3609).
9. David Bernam of St Andrews (1239–1253)
(Hunter Blair 1919, 165, no 3620).
10. Albin of Brechin (1246–1269).
Hunter Blair (1919, 157, note 5) assumed that 1, 2, 3, 8 and 10 were engraved by the same artist as Roger of Leicester’s seal.

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Abstract

Seal designs from Tayside and Fife demonstrate two phenomena, the influence of the bishops of St Andrews and the international links of the area along the North Sea.

Keywords: St Andrews, Inchaffray, King's Lynn, Bergen, seals, medieval