

Governmental seals of Richard I

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Richard I used a variety of seals – a personal seal, two great seals, and at least one Exchequer seal.¹ Their stories involve mystery, forgery, a drowning at sea, religious iconography, heraldic innovation and controversy, a Roman god, a loss for over eight centuries, kidnap and ransom, and, as with so much to do with the Lionheart, financial extortion. Contemporary chroniclers and modern-day historians have all pondered over the reasons behind the adoption, design, ownership, and vicissitudes of Richard's seals – usually to little agreement. This paper revisits Richard's change of first great seal providing a more definite date for his second great seal, and highlights a newly discovered seal belonging to his beleaguered home government.

Signet

Richard must have used a private seal or signet to close and validate his private correspondence. We know that shortly before he became king he sent out over 200 letters in one night. It is highly unlikely that he issued all these under his large equestrian seal as duke of Aquitaine.² Both his brothers, Henry the Young King, and John as lord of Ireland and count of Mortain, used a signet or 'secret' seal. According to the contemporary author Gerald of Wales, Richard's father, Henry II, when dying gave Richard's illegitimate half-brother, Geoffrey, his best gold ring which he valued highly and which depicted a panther; this may well have

been the old king's signet.³ As for Richard, a gold and glass gem intaglio now in the British Museum may have been his private seal. The Classical gem dates to about AD 400 and depicts the figure of Mercury. It is surrounded by the legend 'S' for SIGILLUM, followed by the name 'RICHARD', and then a word beginning with the letters 'RE...' perhaps for 'REX' or 'REG', and finally an abbreviated word beginning with the letter 'P...' possibly for 'PRIVATUM'. Unfortunately, the legend has been systematically defaced, and we cannot be sure of the provenance and ownership of this charming object.⁴

Great seals

We can be certain that Richard used in turn two great seals as king; the first from early September 1189 to at least early January (possibly April) 1198, and the second from mid-May 1198 at the latest to his death on 6 April 1199.⁵ Controversy has surrounded the heraldry of the first and the date of the second. The heraldry of the first great seal is noteworthy since it provides the first direct evidence of the design of arms borne by a king of England. Richard is portrayed on the reverse riding to the right (Fig. 7.1). He brandishes a sword and carries a large shield with central boss. The problem here is that his shield is shown in strict profile with a single lion rampant squeezed into the visible half and facing to the right, that is towards the centre of

Fig. 7.1 First great seal of Richard I, 1189-98 a) obverse; b) reverse. (Durham Cathedral Muniments, Medieval Seal G&B 3022. Reproduced by permission of Durham University Library and the Dean and Chapter of Durham).

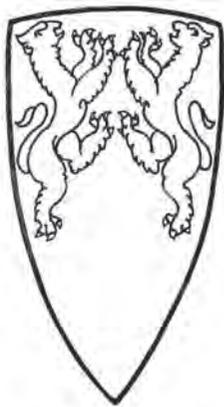


Fig. 7.2. (above) Arms once thought to have been used by Richard I, 1189-98 (A. Ailes).

the shield. Since the lion is shown whole, it was for many years thought that there must be a second similar lion on the hidden side likewise facing towards the centre, thus producing the heraldic arms, two lions facing each other or 'combatant' (Fig. 7.2). This would also explain why the visible lion is facing to the viewer's right (sinister for the shield bearer) whereas lions in heraldry normally face to the left (dexter).

Moreover, according to the contemporary crusading chronicle, the *Itinerary of King Richard*, the king's saddle bore two lions (this time probably passant) facing each other as if to fight.⁶ However, it has now been shown that other contemporary seals depicting identical lion-shields in strict profile belonged to men who definitely bore a *single* lion rampant for their arms, in particular the influential equestrian seal dating to about 1170 of that great patron of chivalry, Philip d'Alsace

count of Flanders. This is corroborated by contemporary manuscript illumination, and chronicle evidence talks of Richard's banner whilst he was on crusade as charged with a lion (singular).⁷

Richard's second great seal (Fig. 7.3) is also heraldically important, since it bore a totally new shield design: three lions passant guardant, still today the royal arms of England (Fig. 7.4). It also bore an early example of an heraldic fan-crest again depicting a lion. Unlike the heraldry of the first great seal none of this is in dispute. What is fiercely debated is the seal's date, however, and to understand why, one has first to examine the trials and tribulations of its predecessor, Richard's first great seal.

Richard's first great seal was probably made in France in August 1189 shortly after his accession. It is far more naturalistic in design than that of the late king. As was usual, Richard would have entrusted it to the custody of his

Fig. 7.3. Second great seal of Richard I, 1198-99: a) obverse; b) reverse (The National Archives DL 10/47. By permission of the Duchy of Lancaster. Duchy of Lancaster copyright material in The National Archives is reproduced by permission of the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster).





chancellor, William Longchamp.⁸ The new great seal was put into use almost immediately after Richard's coronation, which took place on 3 September.⁹ From December 1189 to March 1190 Richard was in France, with Longchamp at home looking after the kingdom. The great seal, which had to be kept in close attendance upon the king at all times, was, therefore, entrusted to John de Alençon, archdeacon of Lisieux, as seal bearer and vice-chancellor.¹⁰ In March Richard left for the Holy Land and henceforth the great seal was carried further afield by Roger Malcael, the king's seal-bearer. In April 1191 disaster struck when he was drowned off Cyprus. Roger's body along with the seal were washed ashore and the seal quickly returned to the king.¹¹ After this it continued with Richard on his crusade.

On the king's return journey from the Holy Land disaster struck again. In December 1192 Richard was taken captive in Austria by duke Leopold V and handed over to the emperor, Henry VI. The seal was almost certainly with him at the time and was now in enemy hands. In England Richard's brother, Count John, may have taken the opportunity to circulate a false (*sophisticatum*) great seal possibly in February or March 1193.¹² Longchamp was again with Richard in Worms in late June. This resulted in Longchamp's resumption of activities and his renewed use of the great seal in August of that year whilst both he and the king were abroad; he was still using it in Brussels in late February 1194.¹³ On 13 March Richard returned (with his seal) to these shores. After his so-called second 'coronation' (it was probably more a glorified crown-wearing ceremony) Richard left England on 12 May 1194, never to set foot in his kingdom again. He took with him his first great seal which we know he was still using on 7 January 1198 but not after 16 May of that year by which time he was using his second great seal.¹⁴

According to Roger of Howden, a royal clerk who accompanied Richard on crusade, it was during the king's brief stay in England in 1194 that he first ordered that all charters and confirmations under the old seal were to be renewed under a new great seal.¹⁵ Howden claimed that the change of seal was due both to its temporary loss in the shipwreck off the coast of Cyprus in April 1191 when Malcael was drowned, and also to Longchamp's mishandling of the Truce of Tillières in July 1194, when Richard was so irritated by his chancellor's handling of the negotiations that he took the same seal from him. The text of charters subsequently renewed under the second great seal at the end of the reign (which Howden, of course, may have seen before writing up his account of 1194) likewise claimed that the new seal had been introduced because of the temporary loss of the first great seal, but added the further reason that it had also fallen into enemy hands (in 1192–93), during the time when Richard was held hostage.¹⁶

None of this, however, explains why it was not until sometime between early January and mid-May 1198 that the second great seal was first put into use. Lionel Landon, who in the 1930s constructed a detailed itinerary of the Lionheart, suggested that this substantial delay was to avoid the inevitable outcry by those having to pay for the renewing of their charters initially issued under the former seal.¹⁷ In the process Landon revised Howden's initial date for the change of seal from 1194 to mid-1195. He did so on the basis of two references taken from the annual accounts of the Exchequer. The first, in the pipe roll for 1195, states that the goldsmith, William, 'who made the seal of the king [*sigillum regis*]', was paid two marks to buy a robe and for the payment of his hire.¹⁸ The second, found in the chancellor's roll for 1196, records that plate worth 5 marks was to be paid by order of a writ of Hubert Walter archbishop of Canterbury for the making of a new royal seal: *ad sigillum R[egis] novum faciendum*.¹⁹ This actually occurs in an account of payments made between 21 May 1195 and 6 July 1197 which was added to the roll after the account for the year to Michaelmas 1196 had been presented to the Exchequer. Since Landon believed both references were to the same seal, namely Richard's second great seal, he concluded that its production must have been between 21 May 1195, the earliest date

Fig. 7.4. Arms from the second great seal of Richard I, 1198–99 (A. Ailes).

Fig. 7.5. Counterseal of William Longchamp, bishop of Ely, 1191 (*The National Archives, DL 27/3*. By permission of the Duchy of Lancaster. Copyright material in *The National Archives is reproduced by permission of the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster*).



given in the chancellor's roll, and Michaelmas 1195, the accounting date, and, therefore, the last date, of the pipe roll.

There are, however, serious problems with both Howden's and Landon's datings. Howden may well have been in error to suggest 1194 since, when he refers to the edict again in 1198, he fails to refer to his earlier statement.²⁰ Maybe the idea of changing the seal had been mooted in 1194 but not enacted until 4 years later. 1198 is the date given by other chroniclers and the date when we know the second great seal was first used. The eminent Victorian genealogist and historian, J. H. Round, for one, was convinced that Howden's earlier statement should be totally rejected.²¹ Landon's dating too is suspect. Indeed, he admits that the first payment does not explicitly state that it was for making a new great seal – it might have been for something else and simply paid to William, a goldsmith who at some point in the past had made a royal seal. If then this was the case it allows us to accept the dates in the account

of payments later added to the chancellor's roll, namely, 21 May 1195 to 6 July 1197. This would allow us to bring forward Landon's date of mid-1195 for the production of the second great seal by approximately 2 years, to July 1197.

Moreover, and Landon had not realised this, the pipe roll and the chancellor's roll refer only to a *sigillum regis* and we know from the *Dialogus de Scaccario*, written in the late 1170s, that the Exchequer seal was also known as the *sigillum regis*.²² Could it be that the *sigillum regis* referred to in 1195, and again possibly as late as mid-1197, is not the second great seal at all, but a new Exchequer seal? If so, this would permit us to date Richard's second great seal to even later, such as late 1197, or more probably between mid-January (the first great seal was still in use on 7 January) and 16 May 1198, by which time the second great seal had been produced. Above all, late 1197/early 1198, provided the perfect opportunity for Richard's new keeper of the great seal, Eustace, later chancellor, to raise extra cash not only for the king but also for himself, since, as already noted, the Chancery could exact substantially higher fees for the resealing.²³ 1198 would also tie in with Howden's second statement, the testimony of other contemporary chroniclers, and, of course, the introduction of the second great seal.

There may well be further, if less substantial, reasons for favouring late 1197 or early 1198 for the production of the second great seal. After Longchamp's death in late January 1197 Richard may have been keen to exorcise from his great seal the device of the star and crescent. This was a religious symbol later adopted by his brother, John, on his Irish coinage, by John's son Henry III on his great seal, and as far afield as Hungary by Andrew II on his famous Golden Bull of 1222.²⁴ The problem arose because in the 1190s this device was being prominently and widely used by the haughty William Longchamp as chancellor on his own personal seal, which he often used instead of the royal great seal (Fig. 7.5). A single sun and single moon as portrayed on Richard's new second great seal may well have been seen as less offensive, bearing in mind Longchamp's unpopularity.²⁵ Suns and moons decorated Richard's cloak when he was in Cyprus, and his ally and nephew, Otto IV, bore a sun and moon on his seal of majesty as emperor.²⁶

A new great seal for Richard would also have afforded the king the opportunity to display