



THE CLARE  
COLLEGE SEAL  
&  
THE MAKING  
OF THE  
SEAL SCULPTURE









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The 1359 seal, actual size



The Clare College seal matrix: a small silver masterpiece; 63 x 41mm.  
 RTI photo flipped horizontally to display text and heraldry correctly, as in impressions.

# The 1359 seal

When the statutes of Clare College were formalised, the text set out the four parties to the agreement, and their four wax seals were attached. On 26th March 1359, the statutes were sealed by Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, at her home in Bardfield. The seal of Thomas de Lisle, Bishop of Ely confirmed his approval. In Cambridge the following day, the Master Nicholas Brunne and all the Fellows ratified the statutes using the new public seal of the College. So did the Chancellor, Thomas de Sutton, and an assembled congregation, applying the public seal of the University.

The seal of Clare College commemorates the occasion and was in regular use for several hundred years, a silver matrix used to make impressions upon wax. It shows Lady Elizabeth presenting the charter of foundation and the book of statutes to the kneeling Master and Fellows. Bearded senior figures and beardless younger men represent the whole community.

The inscription invokes for the College the eternal protection of the Virgin Mary:

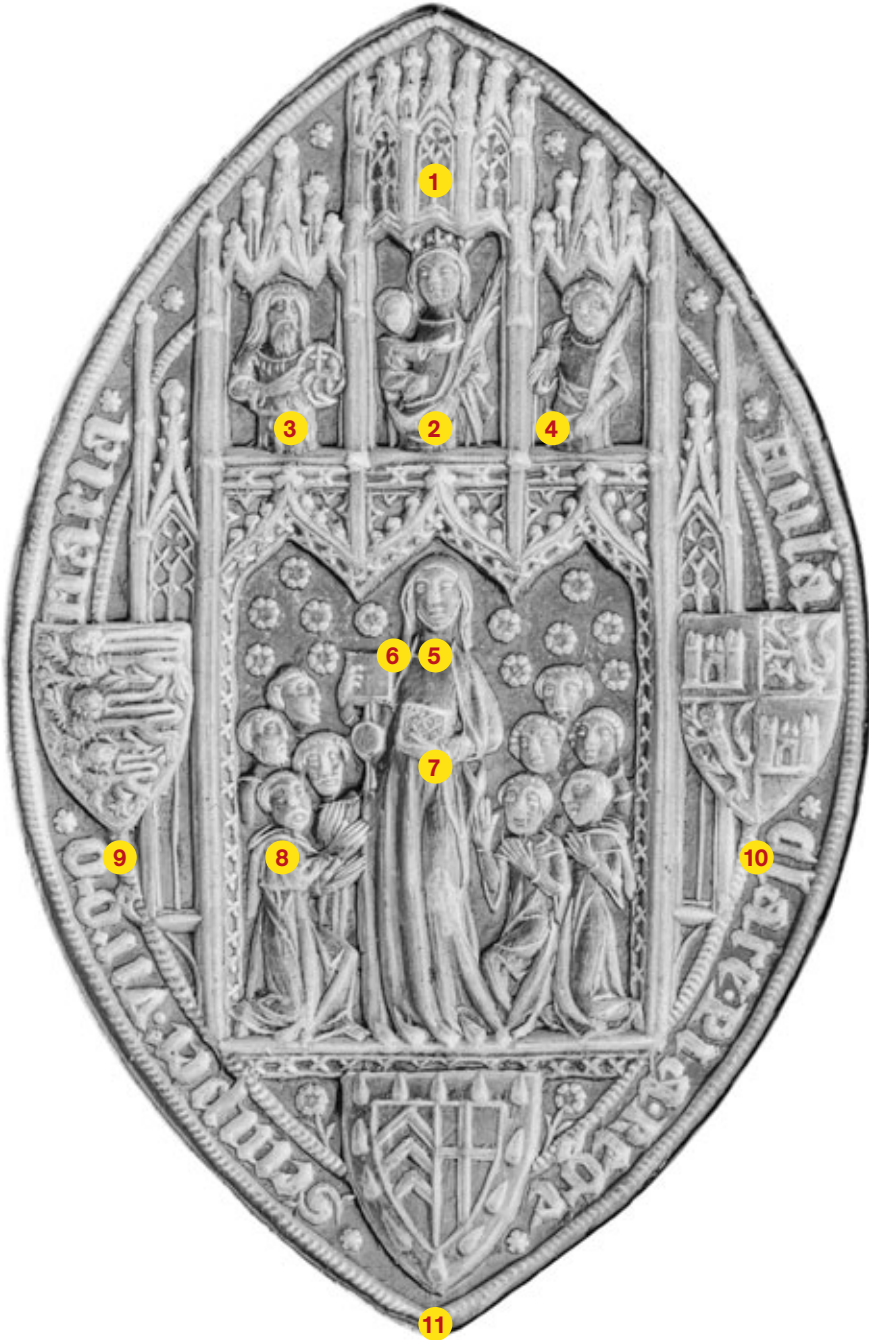
**Aulā (=Aulam) Clare Pia Rege Semper Virgo Maria**

and she is seen at the top, with a crown, holding the Child Jesus, flanked by St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist.

The shields to left and right show the royal arms of England, and of Castile and León, asserting Elizabeth's distinguished lineage. The lower shield depicts the final version of her personal arms, which were thereafter adopted by the College.

The statutes mention the seal, and the seal depicts the statutes. They were crafted together, with the seal as the visual counterpart to Elizabeth's ringing introduction to the statutes, explaining her intentions to future generations.

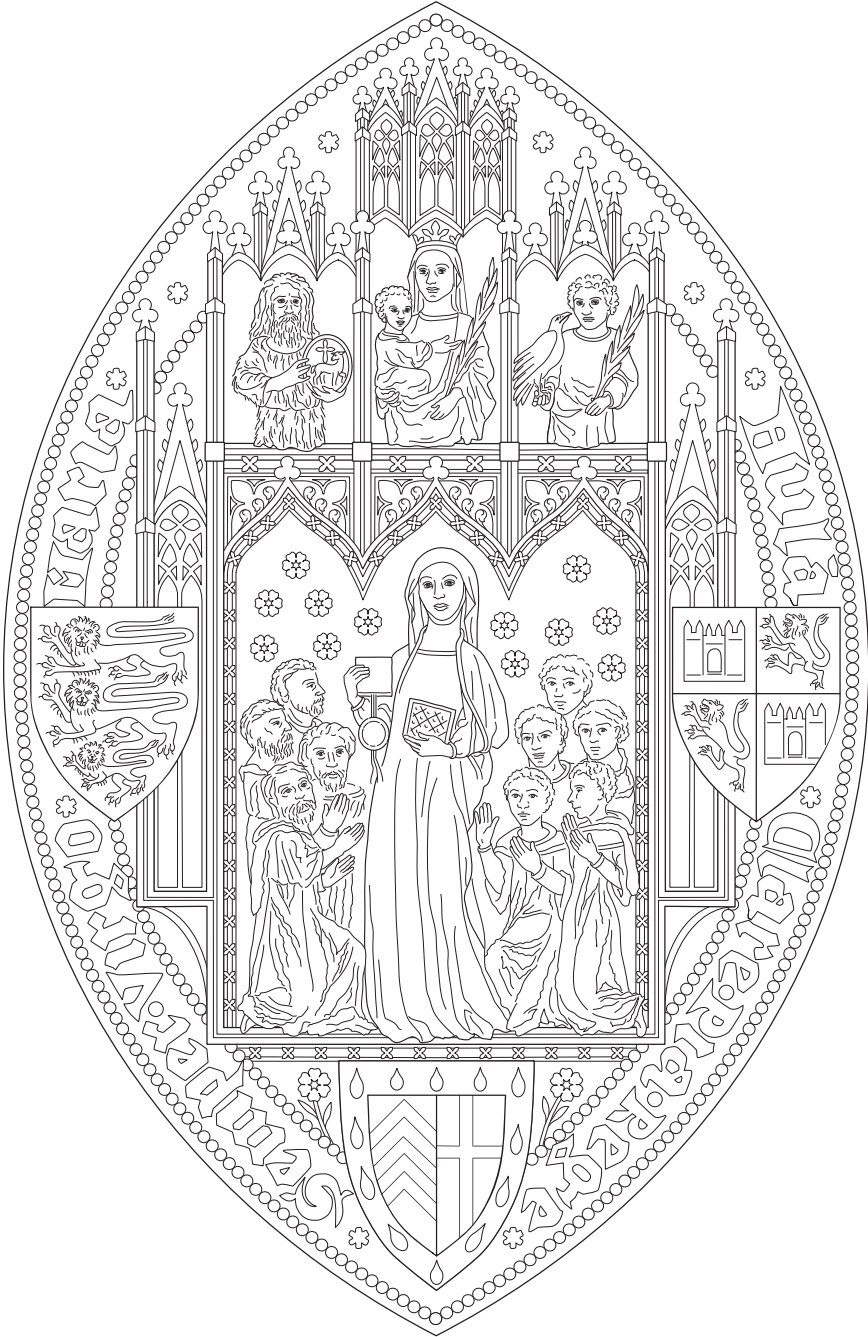




RTI photo of the seal matrix, flipped and inverted, with key.

# Elements of the seal

- 1 The canopy, pinnacles, tracery and ogee arches evoke contemporary architecture in wood and stone, still seen at Ely, and at Walsingham Friary which Elizabeth had founded twelve years earlier.
- 2 The Virgin Mary, protector of the College. She is shown with a crown, and a palm signifying eternal life, holding the Child Jesus.
- 3 St John the Baptist, identified by unkempt hair, beard, camel-hair garment, and carrying an oval wax *Agnus Dei* with image of lamb and cross. Clare College was in the parish of St John Zachary (the Baptist, son of Zachary).
- 4 St John the Evangelist: young, beardless, with emblematic eagle poised to speak into his ear. John too carries a palm, evoking stories from the end of the Virgin's life on earth. He was her closest supporter, associated with loyalty and duty as well as learning. St John's Hospital, dedicated to the evangelist, was an important institution in Cambridge, which had been hard hit by plague.
- 5 The Lady of Clare dominates the composition, with a strikingly confident stance, a fashionable Gothic sway, and a direct gaze which seems, like the statues, to command 'remembrance of our deed'.
- 6 In her right hand, the charter of foundation, with its large pendent seal, the double-sided Great Seal of her cousin King Edward III.
- 7 In her left hand, the book of statutes.
- 8 The Master, Nicholas de Brunne, surrounded by the Fellows and Scholars. The statutes provide for both Fellows and Scholars, and the seal depicts bearded older men and beardless youths.
- 9 Royal arms of England, 3 lions passant guardant: alluding to Elizabeth's maternal grandfather, Edward I.
- 10 Royal arms of Castile and León, quartering castles and lions rampant: alluding to Elizabeth's maternal grandmother, Eleanor of Castile.
- 11 Elizabeth's final arms, adopted by the College: the chevrons of Clare, impaling the cross of Burgh (dynasties united by her first marriage), surrounded by a distinctive border with droplets.



Seal of Clare College: artist's impression by Sarah Beare, 2022.



# Interpreting the seal

In a tiny creation only 63mm high, the unknown craftsman packed in fourteen people, five lions, one lamb and an eagle, together with three shields, seven words, and some highly ornamented architecture. Modern silversmiths are impressed. Several details of the design have been clarified by recent inspections and new photography, and our drawing has been updated accordingly.

The Virgin is now seen to have a crown, she and St John the Evangelist are carrying palms, and the lamb is looking backwards at St John the Baptist. Discussion progressed from “Is there a bird?” to the type of eagle represented – probably a golden eagle, scaled down to stand comfortably on the arm of St John.

At minute scale, the silversmith used a few bold lines to depict the power and speed of an eagle, here standing calmly to speak into St John’s ear.

How the eagle is standing seems open to interpretation. Falconers expect that anyone holding a bird would do so on the fist, as shown by our sculptors. If the bird is standing on an open palm, as depicted in our drawing, it would emphasize the mutual trust in this unusual interaction – and that this is no ordinary eagle, but a messenger of God.

The flowers are also of interest, as all have six petals. The bending stems with alternate leaves point to a dicot, and the bifurcated petals suggest a rose – but wild roses have five petals, and few dicots have six. Scholarly consensus currently favours a stylised rose. Perhaps the silversmith wished to suggest a fuller flower – or a special one, alluding again to another realm.

The presence of the Crowned Virgin and Child Jesus, with St John the Baptist carrying the lamb with which he identified the fulfilment of prophecy, and both the Virgin and St John the Evangelist carrying palms, represent the key stories of Christ’s life and Mary’s mission from beginning to end – a powerful evocation of the Revelation, and of eternal life, as the country recovered from plague and looked forward in hope of a brighter future.

## From silver to stone

The seal of Clare College identifies it unmistakably, and expresses great hopes for the future. It alludes to the statutes, which speak of the needs of a society battered by war and plague, and of the confidence to move forward with a vision of human talent, meritocracy, and the Precious Pearl of Learning. The seal is a powerful symbol of identity, like a brand image, designed to be seen and recognised.

In modern times, documents with wax seals are rarely seen. Even at Clare College, many recent members have been unaware of the seal's imagery. The beautifully crafted silver matrix is a physical link with the College's fourteenth-century patron, who almost certainly would have taken a close interest in the design and handled it for approval, and with all the Masters and Fellows involved in formalities over the centuries. However, two-inch treasures are challenging to display. A much larger stone sculpture would make the design visible to members of the College on a daily basis.

To find out if this might be possible, the College turned to a local Cambridge firm. The Cardozo Kindersley Workshop had previously carved inscriptions for the College, and the soaring swifts tracing out a huge CC on the front of the accommodation block at St Regis. Would it be willing to attempt a seal sculpture?



# The stonecarvers' tale

In December 2019 the Cardozo Kindersley Workshop was invited by Clare College to discuss the possibility of carving in stone a greatly magnified version of the College's 1359 seal. This was a most welcome proposition and exciting challenge.

Our workshop, seven carvers plus three or four support staff, cuts letter forms and inscriptions by hand in stone, wood and glass. We design typefaces and works in metal, and we publish books on letter-cutting and related subjects. We are committed to training the next generation of stonecarvers, especially in letters. We use the alphabet as our inspiration, and call ourselves 'alphabeticians'.

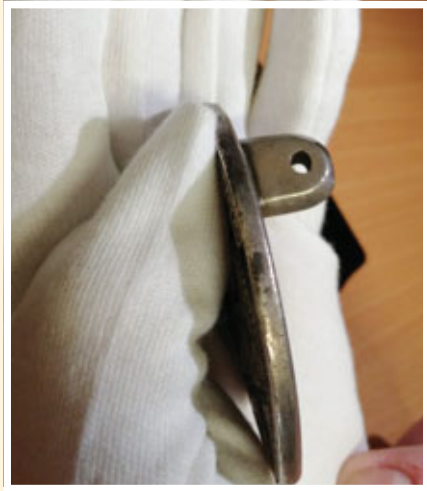
We do plenty of relief carving, including heraldry with all its richness of natural and man-made forms. We sculpt portraits too, also mainly in relief. We anticipated, therefore, that we would be able to carve the figures, heraldry and lettering of the seal. The design was complex, but the variety seemed enticing.

The first meeting of any commission is the most important. It allows for discussion of possibilities while the field is wide open, but Clare College had already identified a proposed site, on a blank wall facing the entrance of H staircase. It's near the hall, and at the heart of College life. On our first site visit, during the COVID-19 pandemic and building works at Old Court, we toured the whole College, and came back to the chosen location.

We tapped the wall vigorously before discussing size with the architects. To cut the various levels for the intricate carving, the stone would need to be at least four inches thick; that was agreed on the spot. Four feet tall by approximately thirty-one inches seemed an appropriate size, but we would return with a cardboard template to check.







### Viewing the matrix

Before beginning any carving, we have to know what we want to achieve. To understand the matrix, we had to see it for ourselves. The three College keyholders gathered to arrange access, and we counted ourselves lucky to be given plenty of time to inspect and to photograph. As the project progressed, high-resolution photos were taken with Reflectance Transformation Imaging, and these proved invaluable.

As the matrix is used to create an impression in wax, it is carved in reverse, with bumps translating to indentations, and left to right. We had to remember this throughout the carving process, and not be fooled into carving a shield the wrong way around.

We also had to understand why the matrix had been carved as it had. Was the appearance of each element intentional, or the best that could be achieved, by an exceptionally skilled craftsman, at this scale? We wanted to be true to the original, but also to execute the design in the best way possible at larger scale in a different material. Some of the aesthetic decisions would become quite challenging.



### Choosing the stone

What stone to use? Cambridgeshire stone is clunch, a powdery fine chalky limestone that is actually quite good to carve but not available in any size. It dissolves when wet, and anyone brushing past with a backpack might knock bits off. It would therefore be totally unsuitable.

The architects wondered about Ketton stone, the golden limestone of Old Court. It's good for building, but too open-grained for fine carving.

We dismissed Purbeck stone, an oolitic limestone full of shells, decorative in some contexts but no good for carving fine detail.

Our recommendation was Portland stone: light in colour, even-textured and dense: excellent for this large and minutely detailed work. It would rhyme with the Portland stone used in other parts of the College, including the semi-circular steps to H staircase.

Having recommended this for its aesthetic and technical qualities, we were delighted to hear that Portland was one of the manors owned by the Lady of Clare herself, and that the quarries were already renowned in her day. That settled it!





### **From raw to mandorla**

We found an ideal piece of Portland stone through a local merchant. The next task was to cut it to shape. Our workshop is a place for concentration and refinement. We make a point of having no disruptive equipment, so large blocks of stone have to be cut to size elsewhere. For this, we enlisted our trusted mason friends at Hibbitt. Our firms have been working together for three generations. They also have the equipment and stone-handling knowledge needed to install the finished work at Clare College. We made a digital template from an image of the seal matrix, and Hibbitt sawed our chosen piece of Portland into a mandorla-shaped blank.

### **Fixings first**

Installation holes were prepared before drawing or carving in case we came across any hidden faults in the stone. We made a template to position four holes, and using masonry bits drilled two inches deep into the back. (Later, brass pins four inches long would be glued into the stone with epoxy resin, and a masonry dowelling glue used to secure these pins into holes in the College wall.)

**Turning the stone after drilling the installation holes.**





### First strokes

It was an exciting moment when pencil touched stone for the first time, as Lida drew a border around the perimeter.

We then used a chisel to secure the vulnerable edge with a large level. We worked from the outside in, to avoid splintering the edge.

Note the storyboard, with images of relevant architecture and artworks to guide our interpretation of the seal design. The arrival of high-resolution photos of the matrix helped enormously, enabling us to sense the silversmith's hand and rethink some earlier assumptions.

We used a foamboard template to map out the architectural structure, and traced around this, to ensure that the outline did not change as we carved. (There is a danger that elements widen as you work more deeply into the stone.)

With various tiny details needing to sit on the top level of stone, we had to lower the surface everywhere else. Points, claws, bullnoses and flat chisels were used to take away the limestone and reduce the level of large areas by a few millimetres: a slow, steady, iterative process, removing stone little by little to avoid fractures. We then traced around the template again on the new surface, and began carefully outlining the architecture. The process was repeated as we created more and more levels in the stone.



## Establishing levels



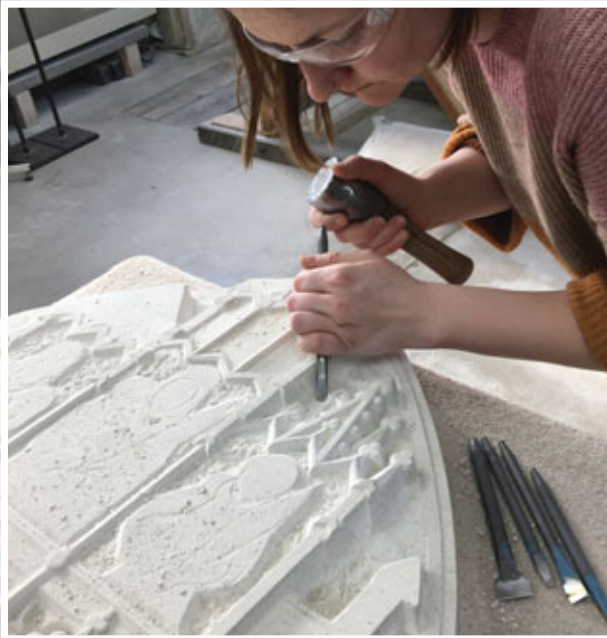
### Architectural structure

The innovative octagonal lantern and magnificent Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral were built between the establishment of Clare College and the making of the seal. Looking at Ely helped us to appreciate the seal's ogee arches and tracery, and the pinnacles and crockets of its canopy.

Establishing the depths and angles for the canopy set the precedent for the background and levels in between. About 1 inch of stone was carefully carved away, to leave the canopy raised above the background, before checking that the impact was sufficient and we did not need to carve the background any deeper.

Carving the ogee arches in the centre enabled us to determine the depth and position of Lady Elizabeth and the surrounding Fellows. We started with large bevels, a neat surface on which to draw the subsequent latticework of decorative crosses.

Carving away the window tracery above required fine flat and fishtail/angled chisels to reach into awkward places. The ornate rooftop detail required intricate carving with fine chisels and round-tipped bullnoses.







## Figures

Once the structure was mapped and the ogee arches carved, we outlined the figures with a flat chisel, then pecked and clawed at the background to establish the depths.

To model the Lady of Clare, we first carved a soft line with a bullnose, roughly positioning her limbs and the vitally important charter and statutes. Then we dug down to the deepest areas, leaving the face, hands and other high points on the surface, before gradually refining.

We thought carefully about how to portray the younger, beardless members of the College, in more detail than was possible for the silversmith. We imagined a diverse group of Scholars.



### The charter, and the seal-within-the-seal

The seal depicts the Lady of Clare holding the College charter in her right hand, and the book of statutes in her left, presenting these to the kneeling Master and Fellows. One of the first uses of the College seal would be to ratify the statutes depicted in it.

The charter looks very similar to the foundation document of Corpus Christi College, also issued by Edward III. Hanging from the parchment on silken threads is the large round Great Seal of the King; the two sides show him enthroned and on horseback. In the Clare College matrix, the seal image is less than 2mm in diameter and the silversmith has left details to the imagination. Carving at larger scale, we opted to include the horseman.



Foundation document, dated 1352, for Corpus Christi College Cambridge.



Great Seal in use from 1341.

## Lettering

The lower case lettering used in the seal was in line with our expectations: an Old English Gothic style of the medieval period. However, some of the upper case letters with which each word starts were unusual in form, and did not relate to the other letters in a way that we recognised.

Scale seemed relevant. The silversmith used a burin to dig into to a soft surface to form letters a couple of millimetres tall. Refining a letterform at that tiny scale would have been difficult, but we had the advantage of sharp chisels and a workable letter size. Should we reproduce the original letter forms, or take the opportunity to improve them? Which aspects of the original lettering were deliberate, and which due to limitations of material and scale?

We decided to use our knowledge of Gothic lettering to make refinements. With lower case letters, we would be more consistent with angles and slab serifs. With upper case letters, we would make adjustments for legibility.



Pen-nib C.

The letter C in 'Clare' was unusual. A calligraphic gothic C formed by a nib is commonly made up of three parts, including a thin downward stroke. The C on the matrix has only two parts, a round and a thinner upright. In the calligraphic letter, the weight of the thick might be angled at 45 degrees, based on the angle at which the pen is held. In the matrix, the weight lies more centrally in the upright curve. It would be almost impossible to achieve all the detail of the calligraphic letter in the size required for the matrix. The silversmith must have condensed the letter to two strokes in order to engrave it with his burin. We would not have designed a C like this, but carved one that stayed true to the original.

The original capital S has very fishtail-like serifs and is very high in contrast. In a medieval manuscript, the thin strokes would have been created by the thin edge of a pen nib. In stone it would not be sensible to try and achieve such a thin stroke in a raised letter 1cm deep. It would be technically difficult, and also very vulnerable. Our aim is to carve something that will last for hundreds of years. We chose to make the serifs of the S less pointed, to avoid fragility and to improve consistency with the other lettering.

Early sketches of lettering as we tried to make upper and lower case cohesive.







The A in Aulā is also odd. The makers of the matrix have again struggled to achieve the desired contrast between thick and thin. Normally, the legs of an A tilt inwards. The original upright legs make the A read much like an H. Rather than copying blindly, we decided to make the top left serif of our A follow the angle of the minuscules. Working at twenty times the silversmith's scale, we could have an A informed by a nib.



The M in the matrix looks almost Roman, but with two thick vertical strokes and apparently a joining serif along the top. The serifs at the feet join too, perhaps due to limited space. We changed the M very little, but omitted the top line to aid legibility.

The rest of the inscription was more straightforward. We aimed at precision, with a regular contrast of thick and thin strokes, and consistency in the height and angle of serif.

After working through several versions of the letterforms on paper, we drew parallel lines around the edge of the stone, and loosely sketched the letters in position with a border for the surrounding beading. We then carved away the background either side, leaving a raised panel about 1cm high for the letters and beads.





We could now begin to outline the letters roughly with a sharp chisel and peck away at the background with a point. We left a small margin around the drawn line for security, as small chips fracture away.

Each stage of a carving is an opportunity for refinement. We left serifs slightly long and thicknesses slightly wide. Once all the lettering was roughed out, we checked that everything was aligned and consistent.

It was a slow and careful job to reach the depth of the surrounding beading, while not working beyond that point. We first took away slightly more than half the depth, leaving about 4mm of thickness for the beading. Particular care was taken where the lettering would overlap or touch the surrounding beading.

Once a flat surface had been established for the beading, we drew a strip around the edge and began carving away between this and the lettering, now aiming to reach the full depth of the background.





With increased depth comes vulnerability, so we had to be very careful here. We cut away the empty spaces, the enclosed counters and the spaces between letters, without knocking any surrounding letters or high points.



As we deepened the background, the edges of the lettering became less and less steep. Slowly we sharpened and straightened up the edges, to be almost perpendicular.

For the beads, we used a paper ticker to mark consistent widths along the outside strip. We then drew straight lines loosely radiating from the centre of the seal matrix. Once happy with the positioning, we could stab into the stone with a chisel slightly wider than the beading to create the groove between each bead, working from each side to make and deepen a symmetrical groove.





## Shields

With the shields, we first defined the outlines, then chamfered and bevelled repetitively to soften the sharp edges and create subtle convex curves in the surfaces. We then rubbed these with rough 240-grade wet and dry paper to create a smooth finish before drawing. We tried to maintain as much height in the stone as possible, to allow scope for depth in the design.

To create a division between shield sections, we left a raised ridge. Securing lines were scored with a sharp scribe into the stone either side. Using a flat chisel, a sharp edge was cut away, up to these lines. The same process was followed around each of the charges on the shields, allowing a little margin for small chips in the stone. A bullnose and claw were used to remove background waste, and a chisel tidied up the surface.

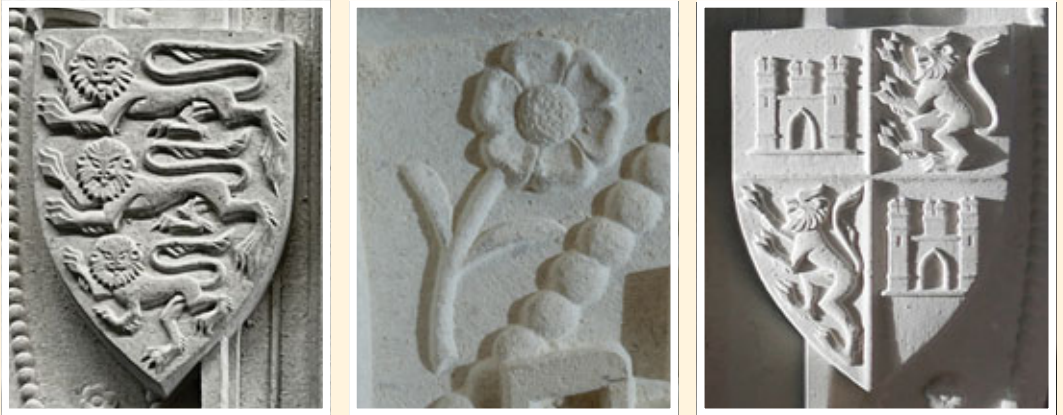
The lions on the Royal Arms of England are very distinctive in the seal. They have large hairy feet and tails, and very round heads. They are elongated and tightly packed. The back legs of each upper lion tessellate with the tail of the one below, for optimal use of the awkward space. We enjoyed reproducing these.





### Finishing touches

Twelve large flower heads, two stemmed with leaves, ten smaller flowers... we started the latter as flat circles before drafting off the sharp edges to create domes, then working with pencil and bullnose. These ornamental details were a pleasure to cut.



### Stonecarvers' reflections

We were honoured to be given this commission, and underestimated its challenges.

We learnt to appreciate the artistic freedom with which we can normally translate ideas into stone. This project constrained us, not through any rigidity in the present but because we were in effect working to a brief created by a craftsman working in a different age, at a different scale, in a different medium. Moreover, he was working in mirror image to ensure that the impression would be legible, and in reverse depth, gouging into the surface to create the highest levels of the wax impression. By contrast, we had to carve away background waste, leaving elevated the features on which viewers will focus.

If designing a stone sculpture afresh, we would have done some things differently. Some of the faces, discontinuities in beading alignment, and incongruities in the lettering seemed disconcerting. However, the matrix was made hundreds of years ago when perceptions and priorities were different, with the silversmith's own constraints of medium and scale. We had to acknowledge some guesswork as to exact shapes and intentions, and attempted to translate the latter faithfully.

The craftsmanship of the silver seal matrix is breathtaking. At tiny scale, the silversmith created an intricate design which would be incredibly hard to copy, and is also beautiful. We are privileged to have had the opportunity to honour this historic piece by making a complementary work. We hope that it too will survive and provoke discussion for hundreds more years to come.



# The statutes of 1359

The first recorded use of the college's seal was on 27th March 1359, to ratify the statutes. Since the presentation of the statutes is depicted in the seal, the seal was made with this occasion in mind.

Changes have been made to the statutes since the Reformation, but Elizabeth's introduction remains unchanged, the original Latin now accompanied by an English translation.

## Preamble to the statutes of Clare Hall (now Clare College)

Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, to all children of Holy Mother Church who read these words: greeting and remembrance of our deed! Experience, the universal guide, plainly shows that learning is no mean advantage in every rank of life, ecclesiastical or civil. Though many people seek it in many ways, it is best acquired in a recognised university community; and when its pupils have acquired it and tasted its sweetness, it sends them out well qualified to rise according to their merits to different ranks in church and state. But so many men have been swept away by the ravages of the plague that learning has lately suffered a sad decline in numbers. We, therefore, desiring to assist true religion and to further the public good by promoting learning so far as God has put it in our power to do so, have turned our attention to the University of Cambridge in the diocese of Ely, where there is a body of students. There is a hall there, hitherto commonly called University Hall, which we have made our own foundation and which we wish to be called by the name of Clare and none other for ever. We have enlarged its revenues from the wealth that God has given us, and have increased the number of its students. Our purpose is that through their study and teaching at the university they should discover and acquire the precious pearl of learning, so that it does not stay hidden under a bushel but is displayed abroad to enlighten those who walk in the dark paths of ignorance. And to enable the scholars residing in our said college to live in harmony under the protection of a firm discipline and so enjoy greater freedom to study, we have with the advice of experts made certain statutes and ordinances, set out below to stand in perpetuity.

# Heraldry and identity

In 1885 William St John Hope described to the Society of Antiquaries the seals of the University and colleges of Cambridge. He had puzzled over one aspect of the heraldry of Clare College's "most beautiful seal":

*"I am inclined to suggest, with the utmost diffidence from want of corroborative evidence in the shape of parallel contemporary examples, that the black bordure denotes the lady's widowed condition, and the drops her tears of sorrow."*

The conclusion has been oft-repeated ever since, usually without noting that it was a guess. The Lady of Clare had a long widowhood, but is it likely that she would have defined herself by mourning and sorrow?

It's timely to reassess, in the light of subsequent archival and archaeological evidence. We know more now about Elizabeth's character, how she chose to represent herself visually, and how that changed over time.

## Character

In 1955, G.A. Holmes published a document in which we hear Elizabeth's own voice (as we do in the statutes, and her will). It's a vehement denunciation of her imprisonment and maltreatment by Edward II, and the asset grabs and bullying of the Despensers. The secret testimony may have been prepared for later use in court, or to support the case for the imminent 1326 uprising against tyranny. Other victims remained silent at the time, filing claims only after the brutal Despensers had been executed; Elizabeth had repeatedly lobbied King and Parliament to mitigate injustice while it was ongoing.

In recent decades, historians such as Frances Underhill, Jennifer Ward and recently Kathryn Warner have teased insight from administrative records. Widowed for the first time at age seventeen, the third time at twenty-six, Elizabeth flourished in later decades during the reign of Edward III. Leading intellectuals, society figures and young relatives all sought her company. She entertained with style, and worked with the finest architects and craftsmen in the land. Noticing the lack of hospitality for poor pilgrims at Walsingham, she established a friary that would be welcoming to all, facing down furious protests from incumbent monopolists. She took pleasure in gardens and pet parrots, books and music. She lived life to the full.

New discoveries continue. The significance of a letter in the Irish archives was realized in 2021. It's the sender's copy of a letter c.1334 about the return of personal effects from Greencastle in Ireland, including a velvet bedspread with the arms of Clare, Damory, and the King, and cushions of Clare and Damory. It shows two things: that Edward II made public his desire for the remarriage of his niece Elizabeth in 1315, before she followed his orders to return to England; and that eighteen years later, after the extinction of the de Burgh male line, amid civil war, household staff were still looking out for her interests. A bedspread so explicit about the King's plans for Elizabeth's marriage to his suddenly-elevated favourite Damory would have prompted discussion throughout the household and beyond. When Elizabeth was subsequently abducted by Theobald de Verdon, she never protested and he claimed a betrothal. The Greencastle letter supports the likelihood that the 'abduction' was prearranged, with the consent of 20-year-old Elizabeth. With outward obedience and careful ambiguity, she had found a white knight and eloped.

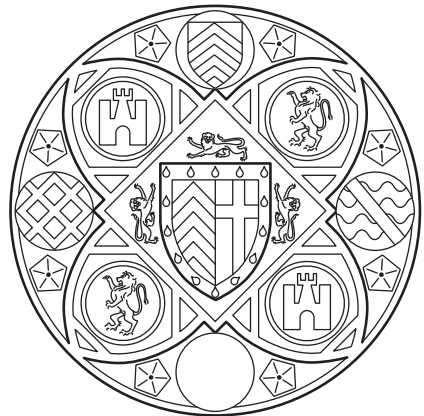
### Visual representation

The Clare College seal, the subject of this booklet, is the only contemporary depiction of the Lady's figure. She stands confidently, showing off this legacy with pride and great hope, demanding to be remembered for the achievement.

Elizabeth's final coat of arms, the shield adopted by Clare College, was in use by 1353; it is shown on a personal seal that she used from that date. Until 1352 she continued to use a seal with the shield of her last husband Roger Damory at its centre, but over the three decades since his death, new evidence shows that her heraldic identity had been gradually evolving.



Elizabeth's seal, known impressions 1327-52.



Elizabeth's last personal seal, in use 1353-60.

There was a medieval fashion for adorning horse harnesses with pendants, studs and bells. They were often brightly enamelled with heraldic arms or badges. Some were lost on roadsides, and many have now been unearthed by metal detectors.

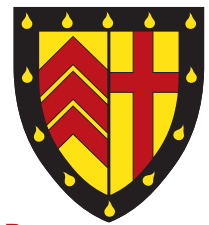
Harness stud **A** bears Elizabeth's final arms, **B**, those of Clare College today: the chevrons of Clare impaling the cross of de Burgh, inside a border gouttée (with droplets).

Shield pendant **C**, found near Cranborne, has the same arms the other way round, with the Burgh arms in 'first place' on the dexter side. Octagonal pendant **D** has these arms without the border.

On decorative items, the heraldic charges could be combined in different ways. On round harness fitting **E**, gouttes (droplets) are the central feature, with Clare chevrons and Burgh cross on the outside.

A diamond-shaped harness pendant with droplets, **F**, was found at Broughton, on the route between Clare/London and Elizabeth's Dorset headquarters at Cranborne, a route often ridden by Clare officials. Within hours of the 1326 invasion that overthrew Edward II, a messenger left Clare Castle "in haste to Cranborne" to alert and summon counsellors.

Meanwhile, fragments of opaque dark glass with golden droplets were found in recent excavations at Clare Castle, with size and spacing suggesting standalone use for a window border. The technique to stain glass yellow had been discovered only a few decades earlier.



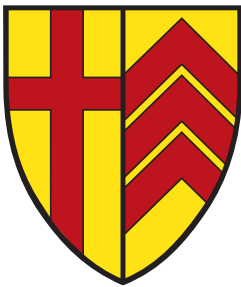


Badges were popular at the time, used like logos: they could be adopted without formality, and changed at will. Elizabeth's Bohun cousins used a swan, and the Black Prince adopted the three feathers still used by Princes of Wales.

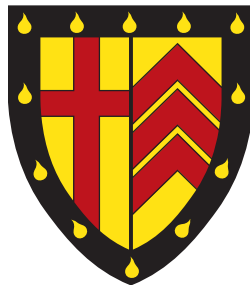
Neither the octagonal nor the droplet pendant can definitely be tied to Elizabeth, although the relationship to other finds is suggestive, but the round harness fitting **E** and the window glass suffice to suggest that Elizabeth adopted droplets as a badge.

Since we know the final version of Elizabeth's arms, we can guess at the order in which the various designs were rolled out, as she proclaimed her identity in different ways – a de Burgh wife/widow, innovating with the addition of border and droplets, and later reemphasizing her Clare lineage.

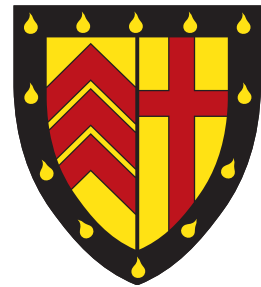
We can also guess at the timing. Elizabeth's first husband John de Burgh died before succeeding his father, and used the Burgh arms with a label of difference, as shown on the earlier of Elizabeth's personal seals. She would not have used the Burgh arms undifferenced until after her father-in-law died in 1326. Using them in a novel composition to signify her dowager status during her son's life seems possible, but after his death in 1333 more likely. The addition of droplets may have followed by the early 1340s, with decorative windows among many building improvements then at Clare Castle. The flipping of Burgh–Clare precedence probably occurred before 1348, as the first wave of the Black Death seems to have curbed either the fashion for harness pendants or the availability of their makers. Elizabeth's Burgh granddaughter married the King's son Lionel in 1342; it may have been after this that she chose to reemphasize her Clare heritage.



1. Burgh impaling Clare



2. add border, sable gouttée d'or



3. Clare to dexter side

### Black border

What might have prompted Elizabeth to adopt a black border and golden droplets?

Borders were not yet common in English heraldic design, but in more widespread use in Castile and Portugal. The well-read Elizabeth was a granddaughter of Queen Eleanor, so Castilian influence seems possible.

In England, two border precedents would have been familiar to Elizabeth: a black one for Richard Earl of Cornwall, married to her aunt Margaret de Clare who lived until 1312, and the more recent white border around the royal arms for Edmund Earl of Kent, shockingly executed in 1330. Elizabeth would have grown up with Edmund, and several of his supporters were close to her; solidarity with his widow and infant children might have been considered by Elizabeth when choosing a black border.

The border may also signal mourning for the two powerful families of Clare and Burgh, extinguished in the principal male lines by the deaths of Elizabeth's brother and son (Gilbert de Clare, d.1314; William de Burgh, d.1333). The families had been allied by the double marriage in 1308 of John de Burgh to Elizabeth, and his sister Matilda to her brother Gilbert. A quarter century later, Elizabeth was the only survivor of the four, and the Burgh heiress was her infant granddaughter. Through heraldry, the Lady of Clare could commemorate her role in uniting the Clare and Burgh families, and highlight the lineage of her granddaughter Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster, as she focused on securing the infant's future.



### Golden droplets

Heraldic 'gouttes' or drops of fluid might evoke blood, tears, water, oil, honey, or molten gold. All these had some of the connotations of cleansing, healing, and purity.

Puns could help recognition of emblems. Elizabeth's de Vere neighbours at Hedingham used the badge of a boar (Latin: verres). The sound of Clare in Latin and French would evoke clarity, light and insight.

Tears were thought useful in a spiritual context, to prepare the soul for meditation and insight. Almost a millennium earlier, St Augustine prayed for the Gift of Tears. By the 14th century, advice abounded on the cultivation of affective piety. Weeping was thought to wash away sins, validate repentance, and deepen empathy with the suffering of Christ and his mother Mary. Both men and women were exhorted to imagine the grief of a mother at the death of a son.

The Three Marys at Christ's tomb formed the dramatic peak of the mystery plays enacted around the country during the summertime feast of Corpus Christi. Their tears of sorrow are rewarded with the first insights into Resurrection, and transformed to tears of joy. It might well be appropriate to depict these as golden.



The Three Marys at the tomb, from the Beaupré Antiphony, Hainaut 1290.

Tears were a sign of humanity and compassion, not weakness. They were included in practices to strengthen character and refine the soul – a process analogous to tempering steel. In medieval romances, King Arthur and his knights weep copiously, before great challenges as well as after.

*“I beg you, most sweet Lord, that there may come from my wicked hard heart a great abundance of tears and that they flow from my eyes in streams for you just like the blood that coursed out of that blessed side for us”*

& to Our Lady of Sorrows, *“I pray you, my Lady that my wicked heart be so washed and washed again and so fully and so often immersed in those tears that my heart may dissolve completely into tears and flow out of my eyes”.*

Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster, one of the foremost military commanders of his day, in his *Book of Holy Medicines*, written in 1354.

Visually, Elizabeth’s novel combination is aesthetically satisfying, the black border balancing the red and gold of the Clare and Burgh arms, and fluid droplets complementing their straight lines.

Metaphorically, she may have known that gentle streams can wear down mountains. She certainly took an interest in their power, and the design of her water mills. In her confrontations with the powerful, she may have reflected on water’s ability to find a path through apparently-impenetrable rocks.

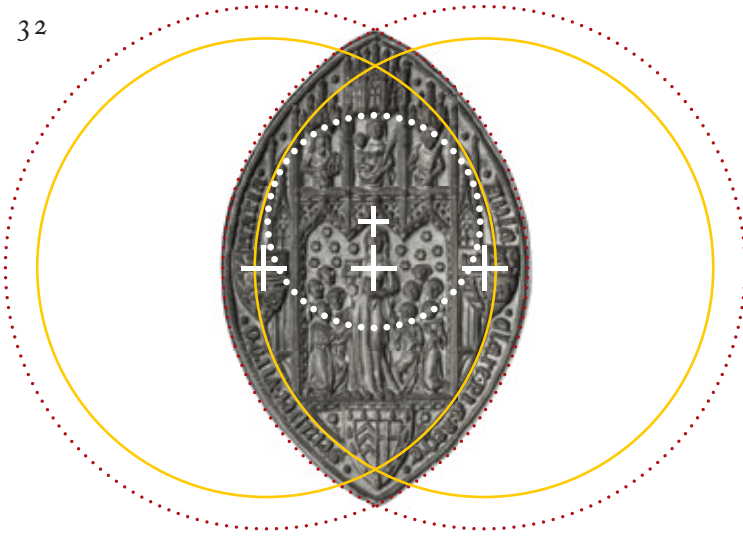
Elizabeth was devoted to the Virgin Mary, for whom tears could be a symbol. Corpus Christi was one feast celebrated with particular fervour at Clare Castle; the other was Candlemas in midwinter. She ordered the finest beeswax candles, and the flickering glow through the innovative golden glass must have made quite an impression.

Following devastation by plague, the guildsmen of Cambridge founded the College of Corpus Christi and the Virgin Mary under the patronage of Elizabeth’s close friend Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster. Elizabeth set out a vision for the preservation of learning at Clare College, to serve the needs of society.

The droplets may thus be read as tears, without any implication of self-pity. We interpret them as a symbol of survival through dark times, sustained by faith. Out of darkness and sorrow may come determination and new joys.

Clare College carries forward Elizabeth’s hopes for a better future.





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- A Diamond-shaped stud with final arms: John Baker Collection, JHB 1865
  - B Final arms of the Lady of Clare, and today of Clare College
  - C Shield-shaped pendant, Burgh impaling Clare, bordure gouttée, found outside Cranborne, Dorset: John Baker Collection, JHB 1854
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The seal of Clare College in the University of Cambridge was used to ratify the statutes in 1359, and many transactions over the centuries. Wax impressions were made by a silver matrix, a masterpiece of craftsmanship and a treasured physical link with the college's patron, the Lady of Clare. A large stone sculpture of the seal was commissioned to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the admission of women, the completion of major renovations to Old Court, and ongoing appreciation of the Precious Pearl of Learning.

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