Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Aberystwyth University
Unit of Assessment: 30: History
Title of case study: ***Seals in the Medieval World: a case-study of impact on cultural life, the heritage professions and education***
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)   The medieval seals projects have enabled substantial non-academic audiences to engage more effectively with and appreciate more fully the cultural heritage of Britain. There is now a deeper understanding among schoolchildren and adult interest groups (e.g. local history societies) of the importance of seals in medieval culture and their role in establishing identities. The projects have also alerted heritage professionals to the significance of seals as a heritage asset, and developed their skills in preserving and presenting this undervalued resource. In attracting visitors to Wales and the Marches through exhibitions and outreach events the projects have delivered an economic return.   [100 words]
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)   The *Seals in Medieval Wales* (SiMeW) AHRC-funded project was carried out under the direction of Principal Investigator Professor Phillipp Schofield between September 2009 and August 2012, and was based in the Department of History & Welsh History, Aberystwyth University. The Aberystwyth team comprised Professor Schofield, Senior Researcher Dr Elizabeth New and Researcher Dr John McEwan. The same team are engaged on the *Exploring Outreach through Medieval Seals* (ExOMS) AHRC follow-on project which started on 1 February 2013 and runs until 31 January 2014. The British Academy *Seals in a Local Context British Academy* project is headed by Professor Schofield, with Dr John McEwan as project Researcher and Dr Elizabeth New as project Advisor. This ran between March and August 2013. Dr Elizabeth New completed a Welsh Assembly Government funded Strategic Insight Programme (SIP) placement hosted by the National Records of Scotland (*Exploring Seals in Scotland*, Project no. 191/11G003/ABR CS 2017) in May 2013, to engage in knowledge-transfer based upon the SiMeW project.   The SiMeW project undertook an extensive programme of data-gathering, analysis and interpretation that pioneered fresh approaches to the material, in particular through an investigation of a wide range of archival collections and systematic recording of all material in these. The research revealed the limitations of previous approaches to data-gathering (e.g. privileging certain types of seal / seal-user within collections) and necessitated the creation of more sophisticated recording templates and methodologies that enabled, for example, variations in the gender of seal-users to better be detected. This work was underpinned by prior research on seals undertaken by members of the project team [**3.ii, 3.v, 3.vi**]   Major findings from the research are (i) that there appear to be significant geographical trends in how seals were used, with the sealed instrument being adopted later but more rapidly by a greater range of people than seems to be the case in London (ii) clear regional trends in the motifs found on seals, some on careful investigation being closely connected to nuanced gradations in social and familial status **[3.i].** This has profound implications for our understanding of legal and administrative practice, communication and economic exchange, and concepts and expressions of status and identity throughout the British Isles, and is forcing scholars to rethink a number of issues. For example, the seals project findings clearly demonstrate that Michael Clanchy's work on the adoption of the sealed instrument, while seminal in many ways, requires further refinement.   [400 words]
3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)   i) E. A. New, 'Lleision ap Morgan makes an impression: seals and the study of medieval Wales', *Welsh History Review* 26/3 (2013), pp. 327-50 [Peer reviewed]. [***REF 2 Submitted***]   ii) E.A. New, *Seals and Sealing Practices*. British Records Association Archives & the User 11 (London, 2010) ISBN 978-0-9000222-15-3 [***REF 2 Submitted***]   iii) P.R. Schofield, 'English law and Welsh Marcher courts in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries', in R.A. Griffiths and P.R. Schofield, eds, *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 108-25, ISBN 9780708324462. [***REF2 Submitted***]

iv) J. McEwan, 'The Seals of London's Governing Elite in the Thirteenth Century' in J. Burton, P.R. Schofield, B. Weiler, eds, *Thirteenth Century England XIV*, (Woodbridge, 2013) ISBN 9781843838098. Can be supplied on request.

v) J. McEwan, 'The development of an identity in thirteenth century London: the personal seals of Simon FitzMary', in Marc Gil et Jean-Luc Chassel, eds, *Pourquoi les Sceaux ? La Sigillographie, Nouvel Enjeu de l'Histoire de l'Art* (Lille, 2011), pp. 255-74, ISBN 9782905637628. Can be supplied on request.

vi) E.A. New, 'Biblical imagery on seals in medieval England and Wales', in Marc Gil et Jean-Luc Chassel, eds, *Pourquoi les Sceaux ? La Sigillographie, Nouvel Enjeu de l'Histoire de l'Art* (Lille, 2011), pp. 451-68, ISBN 9782905637628. Can be supplied on request.

Evidence for quality of the research:
- Peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters (Section 3); book under contract with the University of Wales Press
- British Academy award, AHRC follow-on funding and Welsh Assembly Government Strategic Insight Programme project awarded on the strength of the original *Seals in Medieval Wales* project
- Invited lectures and conference papers in the UK, Europe and USA

Grants awarded:
- 2009/12: AHRC Standard Research Grant: *Seals in Medieval Wales* project: £ 491,770.19
- 2012/13: British Academy Small Grant: *Seals in a Local Context*: c.£9,500 [Data recording, analysis & interpretation to enable contextualisation / enhance research findings of SiMeW]
- 2013: Welsh Assembly Government Strategic Insight Programme placement (*Exploring Seals in Scotland*, Project no. 191/11G003/ABR CS 2017): £2,500. [Knowledge-transfer based upon SiMeW, outreach and CPD events, discussions aimed at supporting a future Scottish seals project]
- 2013/14: AHRC Follow-on Funding award: SiMeW / *Exploring Outreach through Medieval Seals* (ExOMS): £114,586.20 [Expanding and extending the SiMeW outreach agenda, with particular reference to the education and commercial sectors]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impact through outreach has been an integral part of all the seals projects, with cutting-edge academic research being targeted at as many and diverse audiences as possible. The recording and analysis of a substantial new corpus of data has enabled the project team to share exciting new discoveries far beyond the academy, and all the SiMeW and ExOMS talks, events and exhibition have been underpinned by the material recorded, analysed and interpreted by the research. Through knowledge transfer and a deliberate policy of public engagement, the team has managed to engage with the following impact types:

Impact on Practitioners and Professional Services:
The seals project has created and interpreted cultural capital, through the team's work in gathering material in relation to medieval seals and disseminating the same. Major beneficiaries of knowledge transfer have been archivists, conservators and museum and other heritage professionals through continuing professional development (CPD) events which included an ICON / British Library conservation workshop; ExOMS CPD workshops at National Records of Scotland (NRS); Ruthin (Denbighshire Record Office); Cambridge (Trinity Hall); Cardiff (Glamorgan Archives). Responses to this work demonstrate that the awareness of a variety of beneficiaries and their engagement with this material and their understanding and appreciation of it has been enhanced **[5.4]**: 'Archivist: we will think about how we store & protect seals… this course has certainly given us more knowledge & ideas on how this can be done'; 'Will help to inform my conservation work'; 'I would like to incorporate them [seals] in exhibitions'; 'Will think about grant application for improved storage'. Following ExOMS dissemination events, heritage professionals are, by their own acknowledgement **[5.2, 5.4, 5.7, 5.8]** now better-equipped to preserve and interpret seals as valuable heritage assets. In some cases this is leading to a change in policy and procedure within institutions and groups of heritage professionals. In other instances, repositories

are adopting significant elements of the SiMeW / SiLC recording template for their own collections. For example, the NRS have acknowledged the importance of the SiMeW / SiLC hierarchical classification system and are considering adopting this as the template for the systematic recording of sealed documents across Scotland (NRS Head of Medieval Records: 'A[berystwyth] U[niversity] model for recording seals will clearly be beneficial, as exchange of information between archive/library institutions…can be accomplished more readily with a common format for data entry', SIP placement Completion Report; **[5.9]**). Following a meeting with the project team and Portable Antiquities Scheme England, adjustments in the PAS template / procedures for recording seals are being considered. Staff from Powys Archives who had attended the Ruthin event contacted the project team for advice when considering the purchase of a medieval deed because they had been made aware that seals can help identify and authenticate such items **[5.7, 5.8]**. The deed was acquired through public donations and the role the seal played in verifying authenticity was highlighted by the media **[5.14]**.

Cultural life:
The seals projects team have also engaged with much broader audiences through, among other things, exhibitions, public talks and media (broadcast and print). Through all these activities there has been an emphasis on enabling members of the general public better to understand and appreciate their cultural heritage.

In particular, *Seals in Context: Medieval Wales and the Welsh Marches* was a major exhibition, (21/04/2012 – 29/09/2012) curated by the SiMeW team and held in Hengwrt Gallery at the National Library of Wales. This emerged directly from the team's research, with 42 of the 47 items on display newly recorded by SiMeW, while the analytical and interpretative work of the project facilitated the selection and interpretation of the items (interpretation made available to broad audiences through bilingual display panels). According to data from NLW, 5008 people visited the exhibition, comparing favourably with other recent exhibitions at NLW (e.g. c.4,500 visitors to the Clive Hicks-Jenkins exhibition in the Hengwrt Gallery in spring-summer 2011). Comments in the Visitor Book were overwhelmingly positive, and repeat visits and further investigation of seals prompted by the exhibition were indicated in several cases **[5.1]**: 'lovely to see and learn' (visitor from Utrecht); 'will definitely come back' (visitor from Wales). The exhibition was accompanied by a complementary publication with extended commentary on exhibition items and thematic introductory essays contextualising the material, designed for a wide audience (*Seals in Context: Medieval Wales and the Welsh Marches*, ISBN ISBN 978-1-84521-486-9).

Special interest groups have also benefited from ExOMS knowledge-transfer; local and family history societies, amateur archaeologists, metal-detectorists **[5.5]**. The seals projects team have delivered a number of talks and workshops, drawing upon the SiMeW data-set and interpretative work. Particular attention has been paid to tailoring presentations and activities to individual groups and local areas (e.g. drawing on material from north Wales for the Ruthin event), so that participants can benefit from a closer engagement with their particular locale and area of special interest. In this way individuals and groups have been able better to appreciate and engage with their cultural heritage ('Abandoned Communities' local history group member: 'talk has given me much useful information' **[5.5]**).

A series of public talks, workshops and a Q&A session at the National Eisteddfod 2012 have all drawn extensively upon the new data and findings of the seals projects and have facilitated the release of the cultural potential offered by seals, especially in Wales and the English border counties. Events have included a National Museum Wales *Origins* lunchtime talk; NLW Drwm talk ('best lunchtime talk ever', **[5.3]**); public talks at Ruthin, Cambridge and Cardiff (feedback includes 'A fascinating insight into… how important this is as a historical resource – particularly social history'; 'will now examine them [seals] more closely and it will help in [my] future study'; 'I am going to do more reading on the subject'; **[5.5]**); Tewkesbury Medieval Festival 2013 stand in the education tent. One visitor emailed 'I am developing my wax seal re-enactment display and have made a lot of progress and gathered a lot of new ideas since reading your book [*Seals in Context*] and meeting you'; **[5.6]**).

Media engagement has drawn extensively upon SiMeW / SiLC findings and reached a diverse range of beneficiaries. This has included invited participation in *Wyneb Glyndŵr*, S4C, 2010 (broadcast March 2011; 15th ranked programme on S4C during week of broadcast; repeated on two further occasions, Section **[5.13]**); Welsh History Month essay, *Western Mail* **[5.11]**.

Education:
At HEI level, students from a range of universities have benefited from training workshops, including: 4/02/10: American International University in London; 10/01/11: Royal Holloway, University of London; 22/02/12: University of Lincoln **[5.10]**

The project's commitment to education and cultural engagement remains of central importance to the team's work. An important feature of this is that data and the interpretative results of the seals projects are being made available through the Exploring Medieval Seals website **[5.12]**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)
 Feedback from exhibition:
   5.1 Visitors' Book (available as scan)
   5.2 Blog about importance of exhibition for changing perceptions about seals
      http://www.llgc.org.uk/blog/?p=3890

Feedback from events:
   5.3 Email from Head of Archival Data Section NLW, 24/05/2012
   5.4 Feedback from CPD events (available as scans)
   5.5 Feedback from *Exploring Medieval Seals* public events (available as scans)
   5.6 Email from living history practitioner encountered at Tewkesbury Medieval Festival
   5.7 Email correspondence with Powys Archives confirming request for assistance based on participation in ExOMS event, and the role specialist advice played in acquisition of the item.
   5.8 The Assistant County Archivist, Archifdy Sir Powys / Powys County Archives, has agreed to act as a Contact to Corroborate Impact.
   5.9 Welsh Assembly Government Strategic Insight Programme Completion Report, *Exploring Seals in Scotland* (Project no. 191/11G003/ABR CS 2017); sections completed by the Head of Medieval Records and the Head of Conservation, National Records of Scotland.
  5.10 A Reader in Medieval History at the University of Lincoln has agreed to act as a Contact to Corroborate Impact for the student training workshop held at that university.

Online resources and references:
  5.11 Western Mail Welsh History Month essay (108 'Likes' on Facebook, 17/10/2013)
http://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/welsh-history-month-seal-llywelyn-3409649
   5.12 Exploring Outreach through Medieval Seals www.exploringmedievalseals.org
   5.13 http://www.s4c.co.uk/top20/rm/view_top20_welsh_progs/uploadid/681/language/eng/ (for *Wyneb Glyndŵr* viewing figures)
   5.14 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-23717505 (article about acquisition of sealed deed by Powys Archives)