

The Making of Pilton Priory's Seal – *The Matrix Reloaded*



Despite its modest size, Pilton Priory – certainly latterly - possessed quite a large and ornate seal. It was all the more unusual for bearing images on both sides, each half being formed in its own metal matrix with three little 'ears' that allowed the two halves to be correctly aligned.

Over 200 years after the suppression of Pilton Priory, both matrices came into the hands of John Bowle (1725-1788), a Wiltshire vicar and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries with a passion for Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Whether the Reverend Bowle (*Don Bowle* to his friends) was an extra proprietorial type or merely afraid of losing his acquisition, he had not one but both reverse sides of the matrices engraved with his name! Fortunately, future owners of the artefacts did not follow suit.

In the late 1870s, Pilton Priory's seal matrices were acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V.A.M.) in London. Following a recent enquiry, Dr. Kirstin Kennedy, Curator in the Metalwork Section, has been kind enough to re-examine these lovely Pilton artefacts. She has also taken the time and trouble to bring together the information available and to produce a document about them. You can access this by clicking on the link below:

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O322757/seal-matrix/>

It can also be found via the 'Search the Collections' section of the V.A.M's own website.

Though the matrices are currently in store, they may be brought out for viewing by interested visitors. For anyone thinking of doing this, the Museum would appreciate as much notice as possible.

With many thanks to Kirstin Kennedy for her work on the Pilton Priory seal matrices, and also for contributing the two photographs above.