APPENDIX 4 METALWORK

Julie Franklin, with contributions by Nicholas Holmes & Scott Timpany

The metalwork assemblage (Illus 29 & 30) was small and most of it related to the graveyard. Finds came either from grave fills or the surrounding graveyard soil, where they may have been redeposited from graves, or disturbed from the underlying deposits. A few unremarkable finds came from the thick layers of deposits underlying the graveyard soil. Below this was a series of cobbled surfaces, with related waterlogged deposits. Preservation of metalwork was extremely good in these lowest layers, including a copper alloy seal matrix with wooden handle in near perfect condition. The full metalwork report can be found in the site archive to be deposited at the National Record of the Historic Environment of Scotland.

A.4.1 Copper alloy

A.4.1.1 Coin

Nicholas Holmes

▸ James II–III copper 'Crux Pellit' issue (*c* 1450–82), Stewart type Ia; 20.5 × 21.5mm; 1.50g; die axis 165°. Both sides slightly off-centre; some poor striking in obverse legend; slight wear. SF140, Context 124, graveyard soil, Tr 2E (Illus 29).

A.4.1.2 Seal matrix

(with wood identification by Scott Timpany)

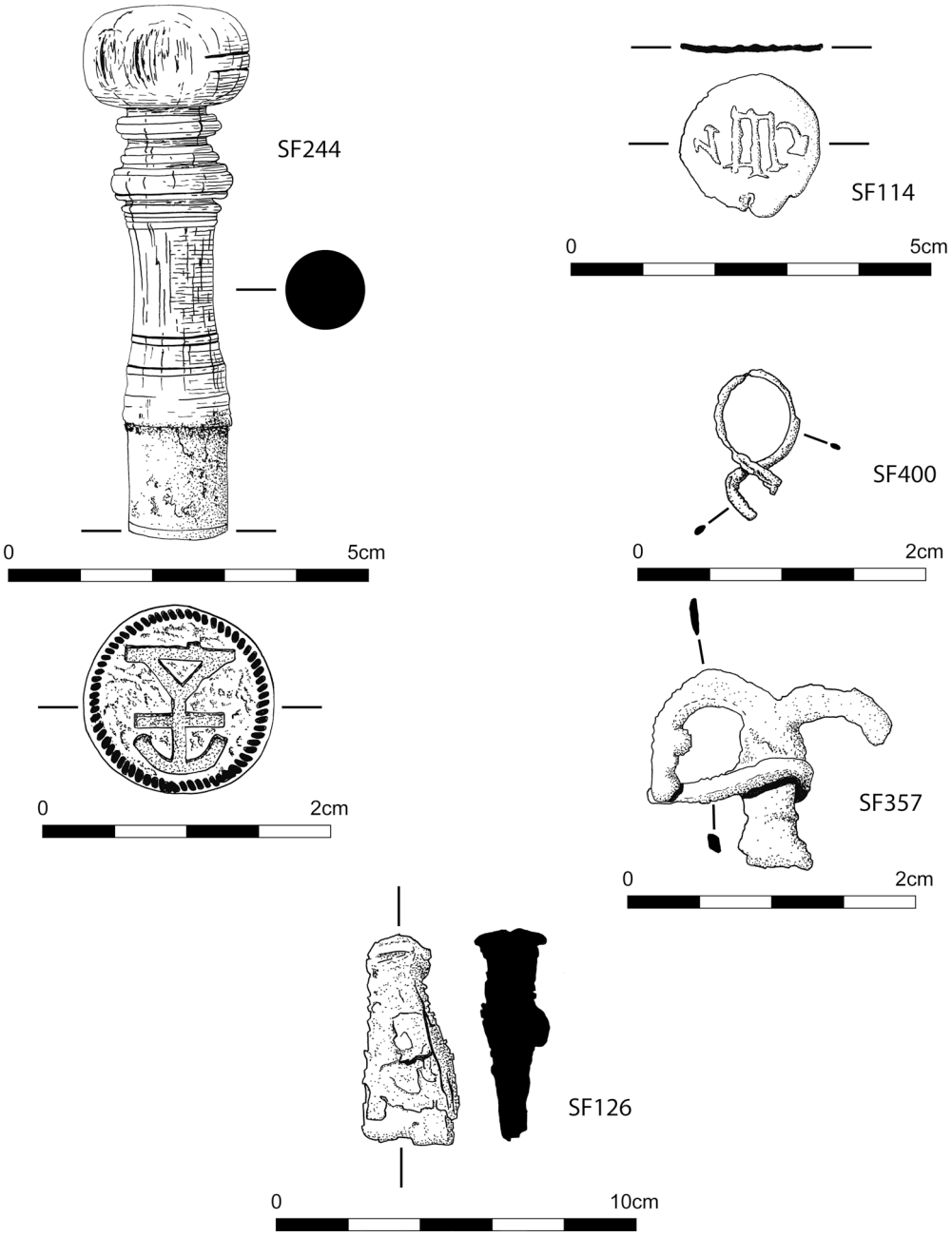
▸ Seal matrix. Turned birch wood handle with a knopped end. Copper alloy ferrule around last 14mm of handle, with soldered seam. Copper alloy disc with stamped anchor-shaped motif and decorative border soldered to end of ferrule. L: 74mm; max D: 23mm; stamp D: 14mm. SF244, Context 405, debris over cobbled surface, Tr 1C (Illus 30).

The seal matrix was found in a thin midden deposit overlying a cobbled road or courtyard surface. Though only damp when recovered, its remarkably good preservation and associated organic materials indicated that it had been preserved in anaerobic waterlogged conditions.

Traces of clay were found within the stamp, suggesting it may have been used on pottery. However, this seems unlikely for several reasons. Pottery was a relatively lowly craft, generally conducted outside the burghs due to considerable fire risk and the need for access to raw materials. Pottery stamps are simpler and more crudely executed and were probably made of wood or bone.

Illus 29 Coin of James II–III, SF140, Context 124 (© AOC Archaeology Group)

It is more likely that it was a merchant's desk seal. Two 16th-century desk seals published by Cherry (1997: fig 17.12) have similar turned handles, though in this case in ivory, reflecting the higher status of their owner. Business became increasingly bureaucratic during the 15th and 16th centuries and, though the use of merchant's marks was not new, they took on a greater importance. They could be used in correspondence and to mark ownership of goods, and provided a sign that could be read in any language (Cherry 1997: 260). The use of the anchor in the design indicated some connection to shipping, possibly involvement in importing and exporting. The design was very simple compared to other seals in use at the time, with no lettering and could have been forged without too much trouble. The low level of security suggested relatively humble goods such as agricultural produce. It was found a



Illus 30 Seal matrix SF244, Context 405; lead token/seal, SF114, Context 170; wire eyelet SF400, Context 210; buckle, SF357, Context 342; wedge, SF126, Context 227 (© AOC Archaeology Group)

stone's throw from the Lawnmarket (or Landmarket as it was formerly known) on the High Street immediately to the west of St Giles'. This was where people who worked the surrounding countryside brought their surplus to sell.

A.4.1.3 Shroud fastenings

There were remarkably few shroud fastenings among the assemblage. Wire pins, lace tags and wire eyelets are common finds in late medieval and early post-medieval graveyard excavations. Shrouds could be wound round the body and stitched, without need of metal fastenings, but increasingly during the medieval period they were secured with pins or laces. Metal lace ends are used to bind the ends of laces to prevent fraying and ease threading. Wire eyelets may have been used in conjunction with laces, or with leather thongs and wooden toggles, as the evidence suggests at Linlithgow Friary (Stones 1989b: 159). However, the small size of the finds means that statistics for their use are variable and unreliable. Many may have corroded away to nothing and where they are found it is often not clear if the finds are in situ or are residual or intrusive. Excavation of over a hundred medieval graves within St Giles' Cathedral in 1981 (Franklin & Collard 2006) found a total of 77 wire pins, 53 lace tags and four wire eyelets, concentrated in the later (late 14th century to Reformation) grave fills and surrounding graveyard soil. At Whithorn the cemetery excavations revealed a considerable number of all three types in late medieval and later graves (Nicholson 1997: 361, 375, 384). However, excavations of 51 graves outside Holyrood Palace revealed only two pins, a lace tag and a possible eyelet, none of which were directly related to graves (Bain 1998: 1061), and in 121 late medieval graves at St Andrews there were only three pins and one lace tag (Cox 1997).

At Parliament House, where the 95 graves were dated between the late 15th and late 16th centuries, a number of shroud fastenings might be expected. In fact, only one wire eyelet was found (SF400, Skeleton 30) and two lengths of copper wire, possibly pin shanks, came from the general graveyard soil (Context 170, Tr 1B/C). Wooden coffins would make the use of shrouds unnecessary, but there was scant evidence for these (Appendix 7). There are many other factors which may affect retrieval of such small metal objects, such as soil conditions (the eyelet was in poor condition), whether the burial is inside or outside a church, excavation conditions and sampling strategies.

Four graves (Skeletons 26, 38, 83 and 85) contained small fragments of fine iron wire (SF352, SF330, SF349 and SF342); two further fragments were recovered from underlying deposits (Contexts 349 and 352, SF333 and SF336). These may have been the remains of iron shroud pins, and two bent fragments may have been part of an eyelet. If these were in common usage as shroud fastenings, the unlikelihood of the survival of such fine ferrous objects and the difficulty of spotting them during excavation (all but one of these were from sample retents) could explain the lack of them at some sites.

▸ Wire eyelet. Loop formed from twist of fine wire. Diam: 6–7mm. SF400, Context 210, Skeleton 30 (adult, possible male, mass grave), Tr 2E (Illus 30).

A.4.2 Lead

▸ Lead token/seal. Disc, with twisted and broken remains of possible loop or perforation at edge. Stamped design on one face. Diam: 19mm. SF114, Context 170, graveyard soil, Tr 1B/C (Illus 30).

This may be a cloth seal, though it was only a single disc. One-part seals with perforations are known from England in the late 16th and 17th century, used as an official quality control system in the textile industry (Egan 1992). Alternatively, it may be a lead token, used as small change in England, though they are very rare in Scotland, where there was copper coinage for small change (Nick Holmes, pers comm). The design was simple and one-sided, and thus of limited diagnostic value. Crude one-sided tokens are known from 16th- and 17th-century contexts in London (Egan 2005: 167).

A.4.3 Iron

A.4.3.1 Buckles

▸ Buckle. Small figure-of-eight buckle. Remains of two oval loops and iron wire pin. L: 17mm; W: 15mm. SF357, Context 342, graveyard soil, Tr 2E (Illus 30).

▸ Buckle. Simple ring buckle with square sectioned frame and strip pin. Diam: 22mm. Context 345, grave fill, Skeleton 71 (not illustrated).

Both buckles were rather plain and utilitarian, being more commonly found in copper alloy, or sometimes pewter with iron pins. Small figure-of-eight or spectacle buckles are common in the late medieval and early post-medieval periods (Egan & Pritchard 1991: 82; Whitehead 1996: 52). Undecorated examples cannot reasonably be dated any closer than mid-14th to early 18th century, though they are more common in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was a very small example, to fit a strap no wider than 8mm, and was probably for a shoe. It was from the graveyard soil and thus may derive from a burial.

The ring buckle was a simpler and more archaic form, more common in 13th- and 14th-century contexts (Egan & Pritchard 1991: 57–65). It was found during post-excavation analysis associated with the bones of the torso of a young man. It was possibly residual, though it seems likely it was buried with the body. It was a little small for a belt buckle and a little large for a shoe buckle. It may have been used to secure two halves of an undershirt together (cf Egan & Pritchard 1991: 247, fig 158), though by the 15th century this was rather outmoded and was generally done with laces.

A.4.3.2 Coffin nails and fittings

There were 53 nails from the graveyard soils. They were found in 27 of the grave fills, though in no cases were there more than two nails in any grave, suggesting they may be displaced from other burials.

There was little evidence for wood associated with coffins (Appendix 7). In the case of Skeleton 60 there were traces of mineralised wood adhering to a nail shank, a feature commonly found where wooden coffins have decayed in situ. The nails ranged in size from small tacks (head W: *c* 7mm; shank L: *c* 20mm), suitable for fixing down a lid, to medium-sized woodworking nails (head W: *c* 15mm; shank L: *c* 50mm), suitable for fixing the corners.

Two further objects may also have been related to coffin construction. A small (32mm × 25mm) plate in the shape of a right-angled triangle with concave hypotenuse may have been part of a corner bracket (SF30, Skeleton 5, juvenile). A small wedge-shaped object may also have been of use in joinery (SF126, Context 227, Skeleton 35, mature adult male).

Excavations within St Giles' Cathedral found that among the late medieval (Period 3, late 14th century to Reformation) graves inside the church nearly half the graves (16 out of 37) contained traces of wooden coffins (Collard et al 2006: 20). This is a marked contrast to the scant evidence from Parliament House. However, it may be supposed that only the more elite members of society were buried within the church. Thus, not only are burial conditions outwith the church less conducive to good wood and metal preservation, but the people buried there were less likely to have been provided with coffins. At Holyrood Palace, only three out of the 33 14th- and 15th-century burials showed traces of wooden coffins (Bain 1998: 1054).

There was a wide range of techniques for coffin construction in the medieval period. Boyd states that at least a dozen nails were needed to make a coffin, though the use of wooden pegs for all or part of the construction would lessen this (Boyd 1989: 118). The five best preserved of the St Giles' coffins were of an unusual construction with partially open slatted bases, held together with between 24 and 60 nails (Collard et al 2006: 20).

▸ Wedge. Small wedge-shaped object with a nail-like head off-centre at the wide end. L: 59mm; max W: 27mm. SF126, Context 227, Skeleton 35 (mature adult male), Tr 1C (Illus 30).

A.4.3.3 Other ironwork

A further 17 iron nails, of various sizes and a possible broken clench bolt were found in the layers below the grave soil. The largest of these has a head width of 30mm and a shank length of 80mm and was possibly large enough for structural work, whereas smaller nails were for attaching fixtures and fittings. Clench bolts were used for securing thicknesses of wood together, such as for a door.

Three complete and well-preserved nails were found in the waterlogged conditions below the cobbled surfaces (Context 419, Tr 1C and 446, Tr 2F). All were of middling size (shank L: 50–60mm), and two had distinctive flat T-shaped heads, as opposed to the more usual round heads. T-headed nails appear in Ford and Walsh's Perth nail typology (Ford & Walsh 1987: Type F) from the later 14th century onwards, though they are never common. These two nails were nearly identical and it may be supposed they were from the same object or construction, though they were found some distance apart in different trenches.

A.4.4 Discussion

The graveyard deposits were notable for the lack of shroud and coffin fittings often found in contemporary cemeteries. This may have reflected the relatively lowly status for this area of the graveyard, or poor soil conditions, or a combination of both. There were several objects that could be related to trade: the seal matrix, the coin and the possible token, reflecting the site's location in the heart of the burgh near to various marketplaces.