Saint Esabell Pilgrimage Badge

14th-15th Century, England

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Materials Used

Soapstone
Lead-free Pewter

Tools Used

Wood carving tools
Jeweler's tools
Modeling clay
Needle files
Electric Hot-Pot

Figure 1 - Standing Mary with Child, in round frame with open-work border. Lead-Tin Badge. Paris, France 14th-15th century (Bruna, 103.)

Summary

This project was to create a badge to honor Saint Esabell Grant, the third Saint of my Kingdom. The image inside the badge is that of Esabell preparing to "bless" someone (with a thwack on the forehead!). The text on the inner border is *NON IACIES FORFICULAS*, Latin for "Thou shalt not throw scissors." The framework for this badge came from the Standing Mary with Child badge in Figure 1 and the bust was modeled after the Becket Head Reliquary badge in Figure 2 (on the next page).

The mould for the Saint Esabell badge is a three-piece mould from soapstone that I cut and registered. The face, back and uprights were hand carved using woodworking and jeweler's tools. The pouring process was incredibly tricky and required a combination of 5 sprue channels, 15 drilled air vent holes, pre-heating the mould, talc powder to increase flow rate, numerous carved channels on the back along with outer air vent scratches to get all aspects of the badge to pour.

Badge Design

This project was to create a badge to honor Saint Esabell Grant, the third Saint of my Kingdom. The image inside the badge is that of Esabell preparing to "bless" someone (with a thwack on the forehead!) The text on the inner border is *NON IACIES FORFICULAS*, Latin for "Thou shalt not throw scissors."

This design is based on the badge in Figure 1. The badge has an integral pin and clasp like the original in Figure 1 (for more information, see Appendix 1). The bust of St. Esabell in the design is patterned off of a number of Head Reliquary badges of St. Thomas Becket, as in Figure 2. The back, pin and clasp are like those on many extant badges and can be seen in Figure 3 on the back of a swan livery badge. Another badge back showing the lattice work can be seen in Figure 7. The crown, dress, face and pose are taken from the many depictions of the Saint's life, such as Figure 4, found in Appendix 2 (from the www.myscaphotos.com site.)

Figure 1 - Standing Mary with Child, in round frame with open-work border. Lead-Tin Badge. Paris, France 14th-15th century (Bruna, 103.)

Figure 2 – Head Reliquary of St. Thomas Becket in frame. Lead-Tin Badge. London, England. 14th-15th century (Spencer, 113.)

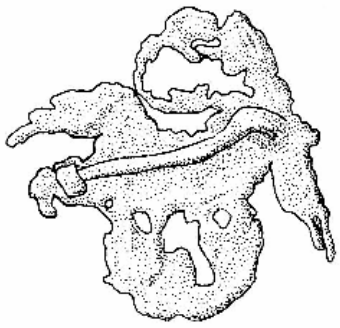

Figure 3 – Back of Swan Livery Badge with Pin. 15th Century, England (Spencer, 105)

Saint Esabell

Saint Esabell (Figure 4) is a lesser known, but highly renowned in some areas, Saint of these current middle ages. A feast day to Saint Esabell on October 18th was decreed in the year A.S. XLIII. She is known for many miracles, but the event that this badge depicts is the driving out of an evil spirit using her unique but effective method of blessing (by a smack on the forehead). The demon had caused an otherwise sane lady to throw scissors across a crowded room. The badge inscription *NON IACIES FORFICULAS*, Latin for "Thou shalt not throw scissors" also refers to this event. A more complete history on Saint Esabell can be found in Appendix 2.

Figure 4 - Saint Esabell

It is true that Esabell is not officially recognized by Rome as a Saint, but there are medieval precedents to shrines dedicated to unofficial Saints.

Medieval Pilgrimage Badge History

After the long trip, medieval pilgrims liked to take something back to prove that they reached their destination. For instance in Jerusalem pilgrims often collected dust and rock chips from the Holy Sepulchre which took its toll on the shrine itself! From the 6th century on, ampullae (or small flasks) that stored holy water from the Jordan River (or a shrine or curative well) were offered as tokens for pilgrims to take back. (Hopper, 131) Starting in the 12th century, miniature relics were developed to sell to pilgrims to be worn as badges. (Mitchiner, 8) Whole industries were setup to manufacture candles, badges, ampullae, bells & festival whistles, reliquaries, mirrors and other such items. The running of a shrine became much more a commercial endeavor than a religious one. (Spencer, Intro) Pilgrim badges often depicted scenes from the life of the Saint or from the shine itself. They were made of lead, tin or pewter with occasional badges of higher cost metals.

Holy relics were believed to have many miracle-working powers. The pilgrim badges were considered holy because the pilgrim held it to or near the holy relics or shrine. To harness the power of the relics, badges were worn after pilgrimages (Figure 5), given to sick friends and family, given as gifts, dipped in water or wine to produce a cure, buried in foundations, worn on rosaries, used to ease the pain of childbirth, displayed in homes, stables, beehives, drinking troughs, buried in gardens and deposited in water at river crossings. Badges were often worn as pins or as pendants, pinned or affixed by sewing to hats or other articles of clothing. (Hopper, 132)

Figure 5 - Detail of Pilgrim Hat 1507 – Italy (Penny, 122)

Unofficial Shrines

There were shrines located all over Europe, as well as in the holy land, dedicated to major and minor Saints, as well as to reported miracles, visions, etc of Mary or Jesus. Not all shrines were devoted to Saints that were officially canonized. For instance there were two separate shrines to John Schorn, a rector who died in 1315. He was known for discovering a miracle-working well and performing numerous exorcisms. Despite never being officially canonized, the shrines to John Schorn attracted visitors from across England. (Spencer, 192)

Pewter Alloys

The composition of pewter in this time period varied quite a bit from area to area. Since pewter requires a mixture of lead and tin, significant pewter production in England began in the 13th century when larger tin deposits were found. Many industries sprang up around the casting of pewter badges, plaques and other items that had to do with pilgrimages. (Spencer, 7) Pewter was also used in many household items and was known as the “poor man’s silver”.

There have been mainland pewter mixtures found with over 50% lead and some found with no lead at all with melting points ranging from 350ºF to 600ºF. For example, Canterbury bells were made with 97% tin, 2% copper and traces of bismuth and antimony. Most pewter mixes used for casting badges did contain lead. I do not care to use lead in my pewter for all the obvious brain liquefying reasons. The pewter that I am using closely matches the Canterbury bell metal; mainly tin with some copper and antimony and it has a melting point of about 425ºF.

Medieval Soapstone Moulds

Materials used for the casting moulds included wood, baked clay, cuttlefish bone and stone. While many types of stone were used, a close-grained stone like soapstone, or steatite, worked very well. (Spencer, 9) Good soapstone is very easy to carve, holds intricate detail and will last through hundreds of castings. It should have an even consistency with few inclusions and should not be crystalline. Soapstone quarry locations in Europe included Norway, Germany, Italy and Greece.

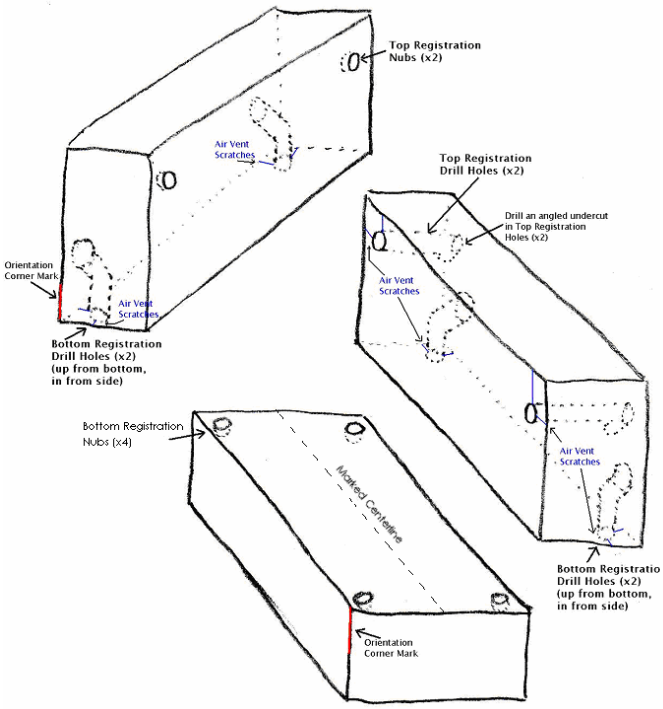

Figure 6 - Diagram of Three-Part Mold Registration (Wolf, 3)

Multi-part casting, such as this, uses multiple pieces of stone, sanded flat and put together, as seen in Figure 6. (A larger version of this can be found in Appendix 3.) This type of mould is used for more three-dimensional objects like buttons, badges or belt mounts. The sprue, or funnel, is used to get the metal into the mould. The metal is poured from a seam between the two or more upper pieces of stone. Sometimes multiple sprues are needed to fill the entire mould. While I have not seen complete three-part moulds in any of my references, Brian Spencer (a very notable medieval badge researcher and scholar) describes the moulds that have been found in England as a multiple part mould where the reverse-mould is split along the line of the incisions for the pin, clasp and sprue. The reverse-mould is either left blank of lightly scratched with a lattice pattern. Even if the pin is broken, the line where the reverse-mould pieces come together is still visible. (Spencer, 9) A similar reverse, showing the lattice work, center mold line, pin/clasp and some outer channels can be seen in a French badge in Figure 7 (though 3-piece molds were rare in French badges.)

Figure 7 – Reverse of 15th century, French, Saint Fiacre badge, showing lattice pattern, pin/clasp and reverse-mold line. (Bruna, 136)

Saint Esabell Badge Mould

I followed the English style of moulds and so used a three-piece mould made from Brazilian soapstone. I like the quality of the soapstone (and have no source for European soapstone). It has an extremely even consistency and the coloration (or lack thereof) helps to see the carved mould.

Mould registration is used to get the mould pieces to line up the same way each time. They would have used a hand drill for this. I used a drill press (as a hand drill would have increased the likelihood of breaking the rock and I had no spares of this size!) to drill straight down through one piece of mould and slightly into the next piece. Once I drilled the holes, I lined them up and poured pewter into each hole. This creates, when solidified, a pin through the stone with a nub on the end that fits perfectly into the hole in the other piece. Because this was a three-piece mould, similar holes had to be drilled form one top piece into the other. Figure 6 shows the registration drill holes and nubs for this type of mould.

Figure 8 – 15th century soapstone mould (Koldeweij, 147)

Carving the Mould

Tools

As soapstone is such a soft stone, nearly anything will work as a carving tool. In the 12th-15th centuries, badge carving was done by a number of professions (eventually settling into a profession unto itself). As seal engravers and goldsmiths were among those pressed into this task (Spencer, 7) it stands to reason that jeweler's tools, in addition to basic knives and picks, would have been used.

I hand carved the mould using woodworking and stone carving tools as well as a selection of small jeweler's bits that I used with my hand drill. I added details of the piece with fine picks and a tiny knife and used modeling clay to help see what was being carved. The picture must be carved in reverse, both left to right as well as depth-wise. The details are very small, so it helped to take off my glasses and use my near-sightedness for all it is worth.

Uprights

On the upright pieces of the mould, I carved one side of the pin, as well as a wider piece to be used as the pin catch. The other side of the pin couldn't be carved until after the first pouring as there is no way to tell where to carve it so that it matches up. There are five runners into the mould, sending the metal to different parts of the design at the same time and two of these form the pin and catch for the badge.

Challenges

In addition to the artistic challenge of trying to re-create Esabell's face in the mould, the lattice work around the edge gave me a definite challenge. Because of the intricate nature of the mould, I had to do everything possible to get the inner circle to pour quickly so that the metal would fill the lattice work before the outer circle filled (and blocked off air venting!) First I created a thick channel around the back of the inner ring and also carved back channels over the lattice work.

Figure 9 – Gertrude of Nivelles Slate Mould showing Air Vent Holes. 15th Century – Brussels (Koldeweij, 146)

Air venting is often a trick with complex moulds as the interior of the open work will not want to fill once the outer edge is poured since there was no way for the air to escape. For added air venting, I drilled 12 very small holes from the interior of the through the bottom of the mould through to the outside and then stuffed it with straw (from a straw broom) to keep any stray pewter inside the mould. This entire process involved many pourings so that I could match up my progress and trace out the pattern on the back of the mould. This type of process can be seen as pockmarks on many extant badges and can be seen from the holes in the interior of the mold in Figure 9. Using straw to keep the metal in isn't documented but they would have had to use something, they had straw, and it works wonderfully!

I also had to drill air vents in the interior of the Esabell bust area and the uprights so that the pin would fill! In the original badge in Figure 1, it is apparent that parts of the badge did not fill. However, for some crazy reason I wanted this badge as close to perfect as I could manage!

Pouring the Badge

Tools

In medieval times, the casting would be done from a crucible heated up in a forge of some sort. For safety and cleanliness, I used an electric hot-pot for this process.

Process

For this mould I had to pull out all of the stops. First I pre-heated the mould to 475 ºF (slightly below the melting point of my alloy so that I would not melt the registration nubs.) While that was happening, I was melting my pewter to around 1000 ºF or so. I also use a dusting of talc powder (a.k.a. powdered soapstone) to break some of the surface tension and allow the metal to flow further and faster.

With the stone preheated and the metal extra hot, my mould had a fighting chance of pouring. This one was complex enough that the pouring process generally involved requests for divine intercession and the occasional profanity break.

Finishing

After clipping off excess sprue material, I used needle files to clean up the small amount of flashing and then bent over the catch and pin to finish the badge.

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Appendix 1 – Original Mary Badge Information

Translated from Enseignes de Pèlerinage et Enseignes Profanes by Denis Bruna (translation by David Tuck) on page 103.

Pilgrimage Badge: Notre Dame
Vaudouan, France, 14th-15th Century
Lead-Tin
Found in Paris in the Seine

A circular openwork badge which presents in its center an iconography similar to the preceding example. Unfortunately, certain details like the head of the main figure and the objects being presented to the Virgin and the scripts have disappeared. The framework of the badge presents openwork decoration of great intricacy. On the reverse, a fragment of a vertical pin, which permitted the wearing of the badge.

As the title states, it is appropriate to quote a circular openwork badge adorned with the effigy of Notre Dame de Vaudouan, at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague; that specimen is however provided with a framework different than this one.

Appendix 2 - Saint Esabell

Saint Esabell Grant is the third Artemisian Saint and the first to be officially recognized by sitting royalty. She performed a number of well-witnessed and documented miracles and their Royal Majesties, Timmur and Tiana, did name the 18th day of October as the High Feast Day of Saint Esabell on that date in A.S. XLIII (being 2008 Gregorian).

Figure 10 – Their Excellencies Esabell Grant and Morgan d'Antioche before her Laurel ceremony

Miracles

Of the many minor and lesser miracles surrounding the life of Esabell, the following are the major reported miracles:

Bag of Holding

Esabell carried about on her person a cloth bag in which to keep anything that might be needed during her day. The bag was simple and not large but could be made, by Esabell alone, to produce anything that could be demanded from it. Having produced everything requested, it was stated that she was likely powerful enough even to produce a dead animal from it, which she promptly did!

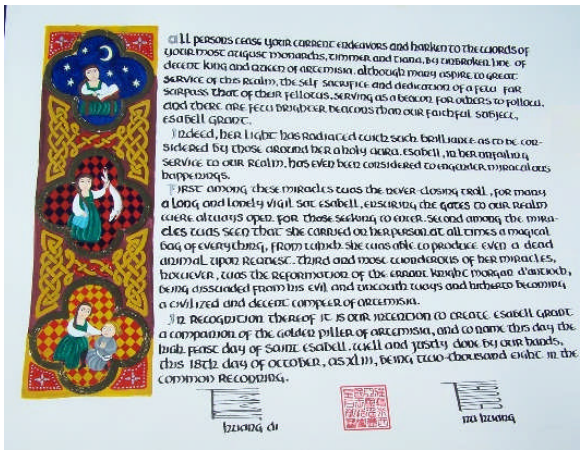

Figure 11 - Royal decree declaring High Feast of St. Esabell

Never-Closing Reeve

Esabell served diligently as Reeve in her Barony for many years. She was a dutiful officer who reported on time and correctly, as any group might hope. She was very protective of her duties and only rarely asked or allowed another to take over the burden of sitting at the Reeve's table during official events of the Barony. Despite this fact, the Reeve table was never closed! Not once did some gentle attempt to pay that she was not ready, even in the wee hours. She even defied local nobility who wished for her to be like normal folk and sleep.

The Tempering of Count Morgan d'Antioche

Count Morgan d'Antioche was a beast of a knight. He was a brute of a man who delighted in crushing hopes and dreams and making small orphans cry. He wore a sneer from the moment that he awakened to slightly after he had passed out drunk after a day's debauchery. Even as Count Morgan first laid eyes on Esabell he was tamed somewhat for she was not repulsed by his evil ways. She looked deep into Count Morgan and, seeing the soft heart of the gentlest creature, she laid her hands upon him and removed the barbs that he surrounded himself with and revealed a noble who is now invited out to dinner and the occasional play. Small children and fuzzy animals of all species are now drawn to the soft hearted Morgan who, in the words of Saint Esabell, "…is a squirrel mommy."

Figure 12 - The Evil Count Morgan

The Ditch

Esabell reigned over Artemisia as Princess and then Queen for a time as the inspiration, and threat in the case of poor behavior, of her beloved Morgan d'Antioche. There came a time that Countess Esabell found herself pursued by a crowd surely up to no good. She fled as fast as she could but she would soon be overcome. A ditch bordered the field that she ran across and she made ready to jump across… and vanished!!! As her pursuers, spooked, looked about where she had gone, a disembodied giggle told them that they would catch no quarry that day! (The fact that the pursuers were her own retainers is irrelevant, I'm sure.)

Figure 13 - The Shrine of the Ditch, a permanent shrine at the Uprising War site

Intervention of the Scissors

At a gathering of nobles and gentles alike, Esabell, then a Countess, was seated on one side of a large room. From across the room, Esabell saw that the Baroness of the realm was taken by an evil spirit. The evil spirit completely stripped the noble of her will and good senses. The scissors in her hand were flung across the crowded room, sure to cause pain and destruction... only to be caused to land at Esabell's feet, harmless. Esabell's proclamation of "There is a proper way to pass scissors!" drove out the evil spirit. Thus the commandment "Thou shalt not throw scissors."

Figure 14 - Queen Esabell, after a hard day of fighting evil

All photos (Figures 4 and 10-14) are courtesy of Jason Connor (http://www.myscaphotos.com)

Appendix 3 - Mould Registration and Layout Diagrams

Below are some larger diagrams of the mould registration and setup that I used. I registered my mold as shown in Figure 15. The technique of drilling only a little ways into the uprights and then drilling in from the side at a diagonal makes it trickier to pour in the metal to form the nub (the mold must be clamped together and held at an angle) but much less footprint is lost because the upright and sideways drill holes don't intersect and there is much less chance of breaking the mold due to stress than the method seen in Figure 16.

The image in Figure 16 shows several possible ways to lay out a three-part badge mould. Due to the *large* amount of open-work, this mold needed to have a top-poured sprue.

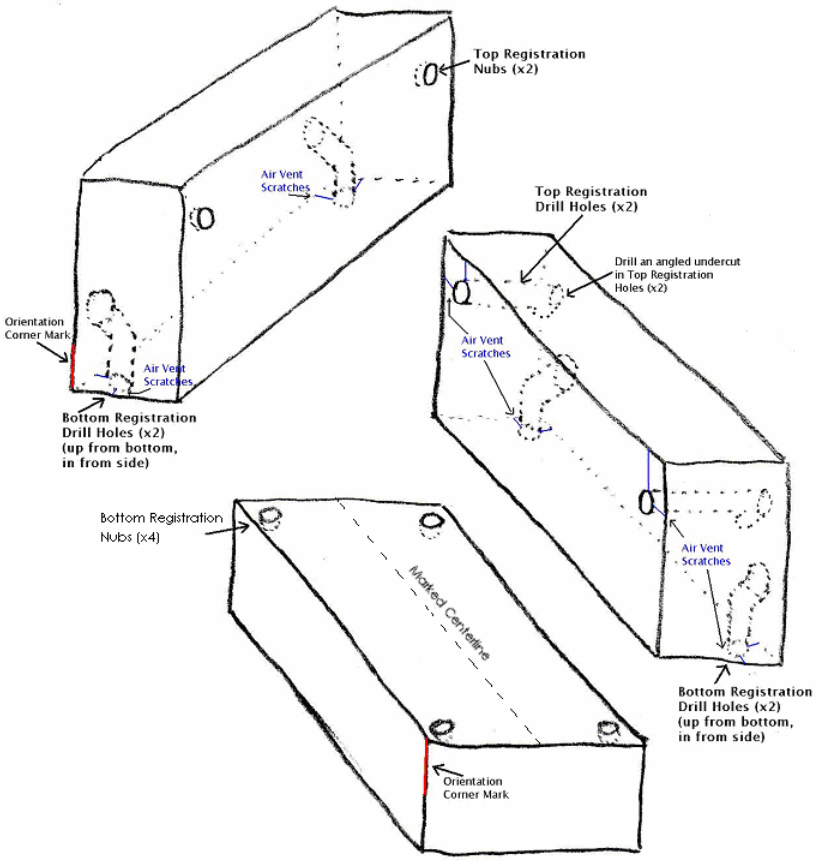

Figure 15 - Diagram of Three-Part Mold Registration (Wolf, 3)

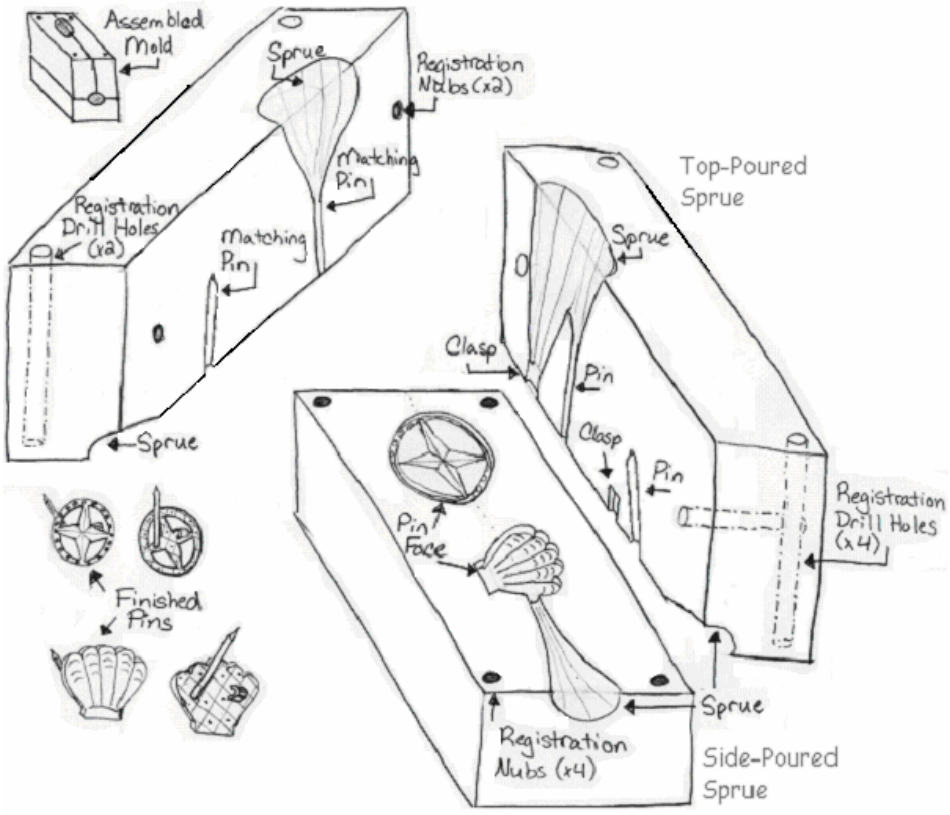

Figure 16 - Cast Badge Mould Layout (Wolf, 8)