

A Glass Bottle Seal from Oxford

By DAVID A. HINTON

DURING 1967, a glass bottle seal was found in a trench in Oxpens Road, Oxford, by Mr. Barry Kicks, who generously gave it to the Ashmolean Museum (A.M. 1968.67). The seal has a design not recorded by E. T. Leeds in his brilliant work on 17th- and 18th-century serving bottles.¹ It shows (see FIG. 4) a mermaid, presumably holding a comb and mirror, with the initials R E L to the right, within a beaded frame. The E is poorly cast, but it does not seem that an F was intended. The seal can safely be



FIG. 4 (Scale 1:1).

associated with the Mermaid Tavern, also known as the Swyndlestock, which stood at the corner of Carfax on the site of the present Martin's Bank. This inn's licence for retailing wines was held by an absentee landlord, and its history after the death of Anthony Hall the younger in 1691² is obscure.

There can be little doubt that the seal found by Mr. Kicks was made for Richard and Elizabeth Lynes; Lynes' name occurs only once in connexion

1. LEEDS, E. T., '17th and 18th Century Wine-Bottles of Oxford Taverns', *Oxoniensia*, VI (1941), 44-55.
2. 'Wood's "Life and Times"', vol. III, *Oxford Historical Society*, xxvi (1894), 373.

A GLASS BOTTLE SEAL FROM OXFORD

with the Mermaid, in a lease of 1705-6,³ but he had almost certainly taken over the tavern some time before. He was well established in the Carfax neighbourhood by March 1700, when he was granted the lease of ground in front of a new building at Carfax which he had recently bought.⁴ In May the same year, he was given the lease of a 'vault and passage he is about to build in the street between his new house and the Mermaid Tavern',⁵ and by July these were complete.⁶ He also leased other property in the neighbourhood. He had two children christened at St. Martin's Church in 1697 and 1700, but neither his marriage bond nor his will has survived. He last appears in the Church Rates Book in 1715, Mrs. Lynes paying the Rates from 1716; and Elizabeth Lynes was buried at St. Martin's in 1719.⁷ Lynes' name also occurs elsewhere for the last time in 1715;⁶ however, he had given up the Mermaid some time before, when it was demolished to make more room for the Butter Market, probably in 1709.⁸ What happened to the retail wine licence thereafter is uncertain; it may have been taken over by Alexander Richmond at The Crown, to reduce competition; he certainly held it, with John Freeman, in 1724,⁹ but by then the profitability of this branch of the trade was dwindling, as Colleges had their own supplies. Lynes himself probably concentrated on his business at the coffee-house at 141-2 High Street, a business continued by Mary Lynes, spinster, after Elizabeth's death.¹⁰

Lynes' predecessor at the Mermaid was Daniel Prince, who was tenant of the Swyndlestock building when the retail licence was renewed in 1692/3,¹¹ presumably having succeeded Anthony Hall in 1691. The initials D A P for Daniel and (presumably) Anne Prince have been found on Mermaid Tavern seals (e.g. A.M. 1874.46); these seals are more complex than the new find, bearing also an ox and an open book, symbolic of town and gown.¹² The shape of the bottle 1874.46 confirms a date in the 1690's. For how long Prince retained the tenancy is not certain, but a Mr. Prince was paying 7/- Church Rates at St. Martin's until 1694; only three properties in the

3. SALTER, H. S., 'Oxford City Properties', *Oxford Historical Society*, LXXXIII (1926), 158.

4. *Ibid.*, 145.

5. HOBSON, M. G. 'Oxford Council Acts, 1666-1701', *Oxford Historical Society*, New Series, II (1939), 293.

6. SALTER, *op. cit.*, 145.

7. Information kindly supplied by Dr. M. Barratt.

8. SALTER, *op. cit.*, 157.

9. *Ibid.*, 349.

10. *Ibid.*, 142.

11. *Ibid.*, 158.

12. LEEDS, *op. cit.*, 47.

DAVID A. HINTON

parish were assessed as high as this, suggesting an importance appropriate to The Mermaid. Daniel Prince signed the vestry minutes for the last time on 26 March 1695, and the 1694-5 Rates were paid by Mrs. Prince ; there was no payment in 1695-6, and in 1696-7 it was made by Mr. Lynes. D. Prince was buried in July 1699, and this is presumably the Mr. Prince previously active in the parish.¹³ It cannot be the same Daniel Prince who was on the City Council, however, as this Daniel was still alive in 1703,¹⁴ and his wife was called Sarah.¹⁵ He was reported 'blind and incapable' as early as 1696,¹⁶ so that it is tempting to connect him with the Daniel Prince of The Mermaid, who fades out of affairs in 1695, but is not buried until four years later. But there are too many discrepancies for this to be possible, and we are left with the extraordinary coincidence that there were two Daniel Princes in Oxford in the 1690's, both of whom became unable to manage their own affairs in 1695-96.

It is not therefore possible to give an exact date for the beginning of Lynes' tenancy at The Mermaid, although it was probably in 1696, some time before he first paid the Church Rates. However, the Ashmolean's new accession adds another name to the list of those who sold wine by retail in Oxford, and helps to fill a gap in the history of one of the Taverns, by establishing who was probably the last of its tenants.

13. Information: Dr. M. Barratt.

14. HOBSON, M. G., 'Oxford Council Acts, 1701-52', *Oxford Historical Society*, New Series, x (1954), 19.

15. Information: Dr. M. Barratt.

16. HOBSON, *op. cit.* in n. 5. 230.