Slide 1:

So, with a show of hands, how many of you wore shoes today?
It's an odd question, but it will tie in later.

Slide 2:

My name is Gerald Livings.
Today, I'll be sharing some of my insights from the last several years of research into how aiglets were, and are, manufactured.

Slide 3:

Due to time limitations, we will very quickly cover what the 6 types of aiglets are, and some of the manufacturing techniques used.

I will be focusing on aiglets from the post medieval era which encompasses the Tudor era.

Slide 4:

Now, back to that first question. If you wore shoes today, and they have laces, there is a really good chance that you have aiglets with you.

As you can see, I am talking about the little things on the ends of your shoelace that keeps it from fraying.

Who: Katharina zur Lippe (1594-1600)
Where: Blomberg (Kreis Lippe)

Slide 5:

Aiglets were also used to hold your clothes together and hold your pants up.

If you had lacing, it most likely had an aiglet of some sort on each end.

Slide 6:

Right now there are 3 common definitions that are used to classify aiglets. This set of definitions developed over time and is complex and confusing.

When an aiglet is being considered for classification, this set of definitions will, more than likely, simultaneously include and exclude it from any particular type.

Slide 7:

I took it upon myself to try and simplify the definitions for aiglets.

These are the simplified definitions using the one common characteristic that type 1, 2, and 3 aiglets all have in common: the seam.

In defining the common characteristics of aiglets, it became clear that there were aiglets that did not fit into the above system of classification.

Slide 8:

I have proposed some additions to the classification system for aiglets.

This adds 2 classes for many extant aiglets.

It also adds a class for a type of aiglet that, to my knowledge, has not survived in the historical record. I hope that by adding this type, that at some time in the near future, an extant example will be recorded.

Slide 9:

After all, what do jewelers do? They make small, metallic items. The skill set is compatible.

Slide 10:

Jewelers are in a unique position to examine extant aiglets, decipher the remaining tool marks, and extrapolate the processes used to manufacture them.

Function dictates the form of the item being manufactured. To make that form, we work back using conjectured and known manufacturing techniques.

Slide 11:

This aiglet is a basic type 1 aiglet.

Also, note the rounded ends on the top with four tabs, each with a drilled or punched hole. This would have been done before the aiglet was formed around a mandrel. This is an indication that some aiglets might have been sewn to cords. This might be closer to a modern aiglet due to a possible date of manufacture from 1600 to 1800.

LACE TAG Unique ID: SUR-91CC76. A post medieval lace tag, or aglet, made from a rolled triangular sheet. In the wider end are four securing holes. Chronology Date from: Circa AD 1600 - 1800

Slide 12:

Type 1 aiglets are made over a tapered mandrel with a burnisher. As long as the metal is properly annealed, this is all you need.

Type 1 aiglets tend to be tapered more often than not.

Slide 13:

Type 2 aiglets are made around the cord or lace. As a general rule, they tend to be plain in design, but they can be decorated.

This aiglet is Chelmsford #30.71

Slide 14:

This was the question I had that started my research. I thought that pliers would not have been used to make aiglets. As I learned more about aiglets, I discovered I was half right.

For type 1 aiglets, pliers are not needed. But for type 2 and 3 aiglets, they can be used. Not to form the metal into shape, but to crimp the metal seam over the cord.

I am now continuing my research to answer all of the questions that came up while trying to answer that first one.

Slide 15:

Here I am making a tapered type 2 aiglet.

You can see how pliers are used to crimp the metal of the seam over the cord. The aiglet is then shaped on an anvil with several small grooves in it. This is one of the few specialized tools needed for aiglets.

Slide 16:
Type 3 aiglets are very similar to type 2 aiglets. Straight or tapered, they may have one side of the seam turned in to hold the lace.

Many have rivets to help secure them to cords. I have seen a couple on finds.org that suggest the tops were compressed. However, the images were not clear enough to determine this for sure.

This aiglet is the Chelmsford #30 68

Slide 17:

This aiglet is quite large as I was using it to show the manufacturing technique.

With crimping the metal over the cord, and rolling the metal, it was very secure and could not be pulled off the cord.

I later added two rivets to this as well.

Slide 18:

This picture is of Costanza Caetani. She has a single large type 4 aiglet at her bodice, made from tapered wire. From the color, it is probably silver or Electrum.

There are many extant examples of type 4 aiglets. The ones pictured on the right are made of simple copper wire.

(Electrum is a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver, with trace amounts of copper and other metals.)

Slide 19:

Being a proposed type at this point, I have only thoughts and conjecture about these.

They might have been made by craftspeople in other professions, so the manufacturing of them would vary by those skill sets.

The example on the left is something I have done many times repair cord ends. (If you have cats, you understand!) With a bit of fabric glue, it is a quick and easy fix for a missing aiglet.

My hope is that with a defined type, type 5 aiglets that are in collections and currently unidentified, will be recognized for what they are and added to the body of knowledge we have about aiglets.

Slide 20:

Look at the silver aiglet on the left. The current system of classification would say this is a type 1 aiglet as this was riveted to a cord. However, having a rivet is not a definitive reason to classify an aiglet.

Is this a type 1 or a type 6 aiglet? Without knowing the context of how it was used, either could be correct.

Darch, E (2014) NMS-F13D26: A POST MEDIEVAL LACE TAG Web page available at: https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/650625 [Accessed: Jun 4, 2017 8:32:07 PM] This silver aiglet is a type 6.

Parol, J (2013) LON-FE3341: A POST MEDIEVAL LACE TAG Web page available at: https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/583165 [Accessed: Jun 4, 2017 8:29:56 PM] A type 6 aiglet.

Slide 21:

These were made using standard jewelry making techniques: sawing, repousse', constructed, soldered, and polished.
While these are aiglets, they are not functional due to their size.

Slide 22:

Some aiglets were decorative and functional as well.

The metal (or metal blank) of this type 3 aiglet was probably decorated using the same concave faced punch that would have used to peen over the rivets on other aiglets.

Incidentally, this also suggests the use of small concave faced punches to rivet aiglets.

Slide 23:

Many aiglets have been compressed at the top to secure them to cords. I have seen this with type 1 and 2 aiglets.

I replicated this tool and it worked perfectly on the first try. With an empty aiglet, it is possible to get about a 30% or better closure on the top. Also, many of the replica and extant aiglets secured with this method will have a small bit of bend in them from being tapped into this tool.

This matches perfectly with extant aiglets that have been compressed at the top. I feel this proves, without a doubt, that the process proposed by Geoff Egan and Frances Pritchard is correct.

Dress Accessories, c. 1150- c. 1450 (Medieval Finds from Excavations in London) [Paperback] by Geoff Egan, Frances Pritchard. Page 286

Slide 24:

It has been suggested that the faceting at the tops of aiglets was to secure them to cords. At this point, my experiments do not support this hypothesis.
The faceting is possibly a decorative detail. It might simply be due to the top being filed poorly filed while removing any burrs that might interfere with inserting the cords into type 1 aiglets.

Several aiglets in my collection show this at the top; both Type 1 and type 2.

This aiglet is Chelmsford #30.70. A type 1 aiglet.

Slide 25:

Tabs were cut at the top of aiglets and then bent in to secure them to the cord.

This can also be seen with modern bolo tie ends.

Slide 26:

This was a very common way to secure aiglets.
But how do you rivet something so small with a rivet that is not much larger than the lowercase "I" in a book?

You do it with a curved groove on your anvil and a small concave punch made of case-hardened iron.

This gives you a rivet that does not extend past the line made by the taper of the metal so it does not snag and ruin the eyelets in your clothing.

Incidentally, this punch can also be used to decorate the metal of your aiglets.

Slide 27:

No Notes for this slide

Slide 28:

As I learn more, I will add information to my website.
If you have questions, comments, or would like to suggest an area of study, please email me at the email address above.

Thank you for attending this presentation on aiglets.

Does anyone have any questions?