

GREAT IMPRESSIONS: MUSINGS OF A SEAL COLLECTOR

By Andre Wagner

Ever since we transitioned from hunter-gatherer societies into connected groups of trading communities, seals have played a crucial role. They reassured consumers that goods they were acquiring were actually what they purported to be. A clear example of this was how wine was sold thousands of years ago. It was not unusual for the contents to have been diluted by unscrupulous merchants. Affixing a seal impression to the amphora was a guarantee that the person selling the goods was willing to stand behind them. A seal became a symbol of authenticity. It is intriguing to note how prevalent images of seals are to this day in modern marketing and still stand for authenticity. We have been successfully conditioned over the centuries to associate impressions in red wax with guarantees of quality.

In the course of this essay, I will touch on the origins of seals in commerce, beginning 7000 years ago. The ancient Greeks and Romans, with their extensive empires, also employed seals throughout their trading networks. Following a period of decline, the medieval period saw a resurgence, and this will be briefly examined as well. Stylistic characteristics of a documented Elizabethan trio of intaglios will establish an anchor point for discussing seals of this period. The bulk of my exploration of the topic will focus on working seals from approximately 1650 to 1950. Helpful pointers for dating illustrated examples will also be discussed. Excursions into the realm of notable seals belonging to nobility and/or prominent individuals will also be undertaken. Official government seals also have a story to tell. I will conclude by discussing their decline, the distinct advantages of this to a collector, as well as how the use of seals simply refuses to go away, even in the present day.

Ancient Seals



Fig. 1

Since the beginning of recorded time, seals have been used on documents, goods, and transactions. In fact, the earliest seal in my personal collection, the pottery stamp seal shown here, is 7000 years old! (Fig. 1) It is from the Vinca culture, which thrived in the area near present day Belgrade between 5400BC and 4500BC¹. “At its peak, the Vinca culture along the banks of the Danube, with major advances in writing and farming, was

the most sophisticated Neolithic culture in the world.”²

Utilizing DNA evidence, archeologists are able to state with authority that “a later great wave of migration from North-West Anatolia led to important cultures of South-Eastern Europe such as Vinca and Boian

1. Dolores Piperno, in *Quaternary*, 2002, 5-6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/quat5010006>.
2. Karl Wachter, in icpdr.org/main/publications, uncovering-prehistory-danube-culture.



Fig. 2

3. Montserrat Hervella et al, *Ancient DNA from Hunter-Gatherer and Farmer Groups from Northern Spain Supports a Random Dispersion Model for the Neolithic Expansion into Europe*. Published: April 25, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0034417>
4. Clemens Lichter, "Neolithic Stamps and the Neolithization Process. A Fresh Look at an Old Issue", in R. Krauss (ed.): *Beginnings – New Research in the Appearance of the Neolithic between Northwest Anatolia and the Carpathian Basin*. Workshop Istanbul 2009 (2011) 35-44
5. Karl Wachter, op. cit.
6. Harald Haarman, in *Early Civilization and Literacy in Europe: An Inquiry into Cultural Continuity in the Mediterranean World* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995) 33
7. Haarman, op. cit., 25
8. Robin Skeates, "Neolithic Stamps: Cultural Patterns, Processes and Potencies". Published: June 2007. *Cambridge Archeological Journal*, 17 (2), doi:10.1017/s0959774307000248, from the abstract.
9. Caroline Cannon-Brookes, reviewing "Engraved Gemas and the Classical Tradition". Published: April 20, 2013. *Journal of British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. [Bsecs.org.uk/critics-reviews/engraed-gemas-and-the-classical-tradition/](https://www.bsecs.org.uk/critics-reviews/engraed-gemas-and-the-classical-tradition/)

cultures."³ In fact, the distinctive shape of the illustrated seal, often referred to as a pintadera, has clear antecedents in ancient Anatolia.⁴

The abstract symbols incised on the seal face are an important stepping stone in the development of written language. "The first known form of a writing system anywhere in the world was created in the Vinca culture, with approximately 700 characters and symbols, mainly carved in pottery goods. More than 80% (of the writing symbols) are abstract. Most ceramics were decorated and, especially in the fine ritual pieces, signs and symbols were engraved, sometimes as seals, but often as a type of writing."⁵

"The creation of arbitrary signs (as opposed to pictorial), is an expression of man's faculty of relating symbols, regardless of their external shape or iconic affinity to real objects, with concrete ideas."⁶

Looking at this particular seal, the matrix appears to make little sense, at least to our 21st century eyes. Archeologists steeped in their study of this ancient Neolithic culture, respectfully disagree. "Although at first sight the composition of the lines seems scrambled, closer inspection reveals that it is not."⁷

Even though the likelihood of deciphering the proto-writing symbols of the Vinca seems remote⁸, it is nevertheless intriguing to speculate what message has been handed down to us from this very successful European prehistoric culture. In terms of its importance to this discussion about the history of seals, this particular example serves as an essential foundational baseline.

I will only touch briefly on the ancient Greeks and Romans, as this significant era in the development of seals is well documented. In the beginning, the use of gold seals was restricted only to the elite, but over time, the needs of commerce and empire required an expansion of their use so that eventually almost everyone who had business to transact, owned one. I have illustrated the only two in my collection, with the gold and carnelian ring dating to either the first century AD, or last half of the 18th century. (Fig. 2) Why the uncertainty? Because in the mid-18th century, an explosion of interest in collecting genuine classical gems led to such unprecedented demand that the inevitable occurred – reproductions. The most notorious (and certainly not the only culprit), was Prince Stanislas Poniatowski (1754-1833), who "commissioned gem engravers to create a collection of 2500 "ancient gems", many of which were to bear counterfeit signatures of famous carvers."⁹ The

fraud was discovered only after his death, when the collection was being dispersed.

The other Roman seal is a wonderfully patinated fob, with a very nondescript intaglio – two bands of geometric lines. (Fig. 3) This speaks to the availability of cheap seals to those of even very limited means, as this example clearly indicates by its very ordinariness.



Fig. 3

Medieval

The medieval period brought about another resurgence in widespread adoption of personal seals amongst the general public. Its primary purpose was as a device for authenticating documents. In other words, the owner of the seal “accepts responsibility for what the document says.”¹⁰ The quality of the engraving tends to be more charming than exemplary, as that level of artistry was reserved for nobility and the clergy. The patinated bronze multi-seal shown in Fig. 27 clearly demonstrates this point. There are a surprising number of seals from this period available on the market, and unlike cylinder seals from ancient Mesopotamia or Egypt, fakes or reproductions are not common.



Fig. 27

Renaissance

In July 1982, Christie’s London offered a trio of important seals from an Elizabethan ambassador to the French Court, with documentation establishing a date of 1560. This offering illustrated a few important points that are worth noting:

a) The two working seals, with ivory handles and silver matrices, were exactly that – working seals, meant to be used for transacting whatever important business the ambassador had to take care of. No elaborate jewelled handles, dripping with gold or precious stones. That was reserved for the Victorian era (more on that later...).

b) Intaglio design of the period had a distinct form, relatively small shield in relation to the entire composition, and elaborate mantling on either side of the crest;

10. P.D.A. Harvey and Andrew McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (Toronto, Buffalo): University of Toronto Press, 1996) 1



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

c) The handle shape was chunkier and the proportions had more massing than later turned handles of the 18th and 19th century.

The example shown here captures all of the qualities enumerated above, hence the attribution to the Renaissance period. (Fig. 4)

During the Renaissance, initials were also sometimes added to heraldic crest bezels. This persisted into later periods as well, so it is not a reliable indicator of date in and of itself. Nevertheless, it is still worth noting that initials first began appearing alongside crests during this period (Fig. 5).

Personal seals of this period often included graphic representations of the seal holder's occupation, such as scissors for a tailor¹¹ or a fish and specialized knife for a fishmonger.

Baroque (1600 – 1760)

Elaborate mantling continues to be present, but often presents itself as looser, and at other times more embellished than earlier Renaissance examples. Handles display a wide variety of forms, from turned wood “mushroom” tops late in the period, to solid strikingly simple iron and steel rods (occasionally enhanced with a bit of turning, but not as a rule). These utilitarian handles have a massive appeal for me as a collector, as there is an honesty about the seal that I find very compelling. It is all about the engraving, and the story that the seal owner wants and/or needs to convey in his or her choice of matrix. For the elite, it tells the family origin story, according to strictly codified rules laid out in the College of Heraldry (established 1484, in order to prevent duplication and subsequent confusion as to which heraldic symbol was associated with what family). The seal illustrated, with the repeating blackamoor heads, (Fig. 6) broadcasts the message that this family was involved in the Crusades, defending the Holy Land from the godless infidels. That is, loyal subjects of the monarch,



Fig. 6

11. “Renaissance Signet Rings”, in *Antique Jewellery University*. langantiques.com/university/signet-rings/



Fig. 7

answering the call to service sometime between 1095 and 1291. In other words, a long established noble family. In the pecking order of heraldry, old families have a much higher status than newcomers. Old Money versus New Money; it was ever thus.

However, not everyone who needed a seal for business purposes was in the exalted position to have applied for and been granted an officially recognized coat of arms. This led to some creativity, to say the least. The intaglio shown here, (Fig. 7) of a performer balancing on a ball with a skipping rope in motion above his head, was definitely not a design approved by any College of Heraldry. This leads me to the conclusion that seal engravers had pattern books (not that different from what tattoo

artists have today), where their clients could design their own fanciful device, and sometimes even have fun doing so.

Georgian (1760-1820)

A number of distinct design elements appear that distinguish Georgian seals from those of other periods. Fobs no longer had the elaborate florid handles of earlier times; now they almost always sprouted the iconic three point fob top so characteristic of the period (Fig. 8). As well, a series of elegantly proportioned “spear tips” often formed the main body of the fob; when these two elements are present, the seal is definitely Georgian. Another classic signifier of the period is the distinctive Georgian bow, usually incorporated as a design element at the top of the intaglio, indicating to all that the owner of this seal clearly is *au courant* with all the latest fashion trends. In terms of desk seals, “mushroom” tops remain popular, (Fig. 9) and a new form emerges – the “beehive” base. (Fig. 10) Other wooden and ivory handles gradually become more elaborate and refined in their turning. This of course carries on well into the Victorian period, complicating attempts at precise and/or accurate dating for many 19th century examples. Then it becomes a question of fonts (if writing is present), and if not, then informed guesses based on experience and other documented examples of the period.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Regency and William IV



Fig. 11



With fobs, a new distinctive form emerges – a recumbent oval. Decoration gradually becomes more elaborate, with an emphasis on dense stylized foliate motifs. Glass intaglios are now mass produced, as are their mounts. (Fig. 11) Material varies from brass, to thin cheap gilding, and at the higher end, gold cased base metal. Over time, these glass intaglios, usually of classical themes or portraits, displaced the much more expensive carved gemstones. Invariably, a connection to James Tassie (1735-1799) is made by those unfamiliar with the high quality of Tassie's paste medallions and intaglios. To make a modern comparison, he produced work that was Lalique quality. Through misattribution, and a desire to give a sheen of respectability to often very poor glass copies, "Tassie's" is the term mistakenly given to any glass intaglio of the 19th century, regardless of quality.

In terms of desk seals, we begin to see a move away from the more utilitarian to the more lavish, luxurious and highly decorative forms that graced the entire 19th century. Carnelian and bloodstone handles begin to appear, augmented by rock crystal, various quartzes, and occasionally, citrines. Wood and ivory turned handles still constituted a major part of the market. A new material was used in seal manufacture, both for handles and matrices – mother of pearl. It was easy to carve, had a lovely iridescence, was exotic, and became fashionable for a time.

Victorian

A period of industrialization, affluence, travel, and greater literacy all combined to make this the flowering of the last great age of seal production. Industrialization meant mass production, and at the lower end of the market, numerous examples still abound. Affluence meant greater use of gold, although to be clear, gold examples are still relatively scarce compared to the vast number of seals produced before 1900. Semi-precious stone handles for desk seals proliferate as never before, with fine examples showing great skill in their manufacture. One particular shape (Fig. 12), becomes almost the standard for Victorian carnelian and agate handles. Full coats of arms are not as common as they were in previous eras. Mottos and single heraldic devices (such as a cat or a rooster) (Fig. 13) become more the norm, at times with initials to personalize it further. Seals with just a single or combination of initials become popular.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

With affluence came travel, especially now that railroads meant ease of movement at much more affordable prices than ever before. Grand Tour souvenirs in the form of seals were easy to transport and served as treasured mementos of vacations in once exotic locales.

A magazine article from 1862 documents the thriving trade in ivory *objets d'art* intended for English tourists to be found in Dieppe, but also in Boulogne and Caen.¹² The examples shown here were almost certainly produced from these prolific coastal French workshops. (Fig. 14)

Another feature of Victorian seals is their love of sentimental sayings or symbolic motifs as a sort of foreshadowing of what the recipient will discover upon reading the letter. One such matrix is a particularly striking example of this phenomenon. I refer to it as either the “paragraph” or “spurned lover” seal. (Fig. 15)



Fig. 14

POTENTIAL MOOD, PLUPERFECT TENSE

Thou couldst, wouldst and shouldst have
LOVED ME!

So much text, engraved in such a tiny matrix. A most unique seal, summarizing a compelling story of spurned love.

Another development during Victoria’s reign was the completion of the transition from functional to decorative handles for desk seals begun earlier in the century. At the higher end of the market, lavish attention was paid to transforming seals into *objets de vertu*. Miniature sculptures now adorned the desks of those wanting to convey a sense of culture or refinement, as illustrated in the *champlevé* example below. (Fig. 16)



Fig. 15

ART NOUVEAU and ART DECO

With the invention of the gummed envelope in 1876, the era of seals as functional items was drawing to a close. From my perspective, the most interesting seals of the period are the sculptural representations of animals, people and natural motifs. Some are elevated to high art, and are signed bronzes by accomplished artists. More often than not, they are mass produced desk ornaments in either silver, wood or brass. Presentation sets, complete with miniature chambersticks for melting the wax, had a certain market amongst those looking for the complete package to give as a gift.



Fig. 16

12. Anna Harrison, “Ivory Carving in Dieppe”, in *Once a Week Magazine* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1862) No. 172. Published: October 11, 1862.

Fortuitous Finds and Notable People

It goes without saying that this pedestrian pewter fob only has significance for the author, given that it is my last name. Nonetheless, it was still an exciting discovery. (Fig. 17)

This well-cut bloodstone intaglio belonged to J.W. Morrice, noted Canadian post-Impressionist painter. It was added to the collection during my time as an employee of Waddington's Auctioneers, so I had inside knowledge as to who the original owner was. In 2020 a canvas by this artist sold at Heffel's for \$1.1 million dollars. (Fig. 18)

Clare Booth Luce was an American playwright, author, politician and towards the end of her career, ambassador to Italy. She was also fabulously wealthy, being married to Henry Luce, publisher of Time, Life, Fortune, and Sports Illustrated. Her hit 1936 play, *The Women* (with an all female cast), was adapted for the silver screen in 1939 for the movie of the same name. Known for her pithy quotes, one of my favourites is "*No good deed goes unpunished.*" This intriguing little seal was a souvenir of her 1941 trip to China. (Fig. 19)

Hiram Walker made his mark as a distiller and founder of "Canadian Club" whiskey. A generous philanthropist, he helped establish the first children's hospital in Detroit, and played a prominent role in the founding of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Walkerville was the company town he established and closely supervised, which has now been incorporated into the present day city of Windsor Ontario. (Fig. 20)

An impression from the personal seal of Ludwig von Beethoven is a rare find indeed. Discovered at a flea market, this was attached to a piece of wood with a faintly stamped message of authentication to the back, "*Holz von Beethoven's Geburtshaus, Bonn*". *Holz* is German for wood, and "*Geburtshaus*" translates to birthplace. (Fig. 21)



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

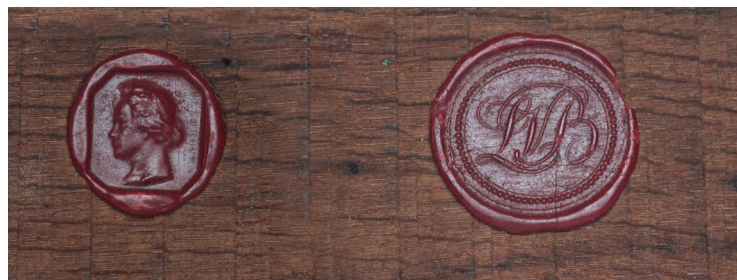


Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

13. Hilary Jenkinson, "What Happened to the Great Seal of James 2nd?" *Antiquaries Journal*. 23 (1-2) Published: January 1943. 1-13. doi:10.1017/s0003581500042189
14. J.B. Duvergier, "Collection complete des lois, decrees, ordonnances, reglemans et avis du Conseil-d'Etat, depuis 1788 jusques et y compris 1824". Tome dix-septieme (Paris, 1826) 209-227, in Martijn Van der Berg, *Napoleonic Governance in the Netherlands and Northwest Germany: Conquest, Incorporation and Integration*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) 72

Nobility, and their often close association with royalty, offers a connection to objects personally handled by prominent titled individuals. The most compelling noble seal in the collection belonged to the illegitimate great-great-great-grandfather of Queen Elizabeth II, Baron Senarclens-Grancy. Coming from a noble family able to trace its lineage back to the 14th century, Senarclens-Grancy became the lover and father of four children born to the estranged wife of Louis II between 1821 and 1824. Theirs was an unhappy marriage, largely due to the Grand Duke of Hesse's numerous affairs. Princess Wilhelmine moved into her own palace in 1820, with Senarclens-Grancy appointed Chamberlain to ensure the smooth running of the princess's secondary royal household, far away from her philandering husband. Louis II, to his credit, recognized his wife's new children as his own, thus ensuring their legitimacy and future marriage prospects. One of the daughters married a Romanov, and this eventually led to the establishment of the house of Battenberg. (Fig. 22)

Official Government Seals

In 1688, with Cromwell chasing him, James II fled to France. In his best attempt to sabotage the new regime, he threw the **Great Seal of the Realm** into the Thames, "hoping that the machinery of government would cease to function."¹³

This speaks to the central role the Great Seal played in the day-to-day administration of government in the 17th century. Even in modern times, when the president of the United States speaks, his lectern is always adorned with the Presidential Seal.

Three examples from the collection are of particular interest. With the engraving "WEST ZAANDAM ZUIDERZEE JUGE DE PAIX, and the central crest featuring the Imperial Eagle of Napoleon, research points to this seal being emblematic of the aspirations and imperial ambitions of the Emperor. "On October 18, 1810, Napoleon ... issued a decree organizing Dutch departments, laying the foundations for Napoleonic governance in the Netherlands."¹⁴ Between 1795 and 1810, the French ruled the Netherlands as a vassal state. Dissatisfied with how that was working out, late in 1810 Napoleon decided to just fold it into the Empire. Hence the need for a new symbol of authority for the Justice of the Peace ("Juge de Paix) of what is now a suburb of Amsterdam. Therefore this seal, and all the other ones like it, reinforced the message of Napoleon's control and dominance of a conquered nation. (Fig. 23)



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

The next matrix represents the transition from “tax farming” to the system still in place today. Before 1789, tax farmers’ accumulated great wealth since the taxes and charges they collected exceeded by two or three times the amount deposited in the treasury. The French Revolution played an important role in bureaucratization in that it “swept away impediments to reform”.¹⁵ The “impediments” in this case being those who benefitted from this corrupt exercise of state power.

Dating from the Bourbon Restoration between 1814-30, what sets this seal apart is the proper procedure followed by the diligent bureaucrat who did exactly what he needed to do in order to decommission an official seal – he defaced it. Thankfully he chose not to destroy it, as many similar examples undoubtedly were. Common examples of “CONTRIBUTIONS INDIRECTES” typical of the period would be taxes on alcohol consumption or customs duties collected at ports. (Fig.24)

The WWII Canadian Army seal represents the latest date for a working seal in the collection. Envelopes can be steamed open; seals on documents need to be broken in order to access the highly confidential information inside. Thus, as late as 1945 an ancient technology was still found to have merit when secure transfers of highly confidential documents was required. (Fig. 25)

Some Notes on Heraldry

In many respects, heraldry is yet another manifestation of the caste system, expressed using symbols. An excellent example of this is the use of lozenge shaped shields to denote that it is a woman who is the titular head of the house, only because a man was not available to carry the esteemed family name (and associated coat of arms) forward. The only example of this in the collection belonged to a Marchioness, which is the female equivalent to a Marquess. Just below Dukes and Duchesses (titles reserved for royalty alone), there are only thirty-eight noble families of this rank in Great Britain. (Fig. 26)

In an attempt to further demystify the often arcane world of heraldry, below is a partial list of the symbols associated with birth order in noble coats of arms:

1. First born son – full coat of arms.
2. Crescent, which can also mean “honoured by a sovereign”
3. Star, 4. Bird, 5. Ring, 6. Fleur-de-lis, which can also symbolize “purity”

Please see appendix 1 for a curated list of heraldic symbols and their meaning.

15. E. Kiser and J. Kane, “Revolution and State Structure: The Bureaucratization of Tax Administration in Early Modern England and France”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 107, No.1 (University of Chicago Press: July 2001) 183-223

Multiples in the Collection

Multi-faced seals are an attempt to achieve maximum flexibility while employing a single device. This form is very popular with collectors, and rare complete examples can command exceptional prices. (Fig. 27)

The Device that Refuses to Go Away

The invention of the gummed envelope in 1876 was the beginning of the end for working seals. Examples can still be seen into the Art Deco era, but they are uncommon. This has distinct advantages for the collector, as reproductions seem to be clustered around examples from the ancient world. Having said that, a few firms such as Dexter Rings in England still do proper engravings of intaglios. Price for a brass desk seal in 2022 - \$836. For a quality engraved classical gem, Olithica in California does beautiful work for \$1,689 and up. One can see from these prices that it does not make economic sense for reproductions to be entering the market, since most seals can be found for less. Handles that are new look new. In relative terms, the market is small and highly specialized. These are all advantages for this particular facet of collecting.

In popular culture, the Harry Potter franchise has created a market for seals appealing to fans of the series. In fact, a cottage industry exists where a personalized letter can be sent to the recipient of your choice, emblazoned with a hand pressed Hogwarts seal. These are letters of acceptance into the Hogwarts School of Wizarding and Witchcraft. Some children who receive this on their 11th birthday actually believe that this correspondence is genuine; the seal impression plays a major role in making it all seem that much more convincing.

Concluding Thoughts

In 1950, the architect Frank Lloyd Wright commissioned ceramicist Jeanette Pauson Haber to make 25 tiles inscribed with his initials, which Wright intended to place on forthcoming structures. Much like in the tradition of Japanese printmaking, Wright's red tiles served as both a signature block and, when finally secured to a completed building, represented the architect's seal of personal approval.

Frank Lloyd Wright was not only a great architect, he was a master of branding. His red tiles have come to represent all the qualities we have come to associate with seals for thousands of years; quality, authenticity, and that what you see before you is actually what it purports to be.

Seals have been with us for over 7000 years. They have been long associated with prominent families, artistic excellence, portable wealth, and some have quirky stories associated with them. Seal collecting gives one the opportunity to own a device that was truly valued by previous generations as one of their most important possessions. The mottos inscribed on them are vivid reminders to future generations of values that their ancestors wanted to pass on - attributes such as loyalty, honesty, valor, integrity, hopefulness in the face of adversity. All these messages are designed to help the next generation to draw inspiration from the past. Are these aspirational goals? Certainly. Are they worthwhile messages? Definitely!

Andre Wagner grew up in the antique business, as his mother opened her antique store, The Olde Shoppe, in 1965. He did his first solo antique show at the age of 16. When he was 21, he taught an evening course on antiques for a number of years at St. Clair College in Windsor. Moving to Toronto, he worked at Waddington's Auctioneers & Appraisers for four years, where his education in the field really began. He has conducted "Antiques Roadshow" type appraisal clinics a number of times in the past, and has lectured on "Fakes, Frauds & Forgeries" at the Art Gallery of Windsor. His collection of over 250 seals is comprehensive, but never complete.

APPENDIX: HERALDIC SYMBOLS & THEIR MEANING

ANCHOR - hope, as well as the obvious naval reference

ANGEL – dignity, glory & honour; bearer of joyful news

BLACKAMOOR - a family that was involved in the Crusades

BOAR – bravery, fight to the death

CAMEL – humility, temperance, perseverance

CAT – liberty & courage

CLOVERLEAF – happiness

COCK – hero in battle

COMET – insight & wisdom

CRESCENT – honoured by a sovereign

CRANE – watchfulness

CUSHION – authority; QE II personal seal has 4 cushions

DOLPHIN – swiftness, diligence, charity, love

DRAGON – guardian of all knowledge

FLEUR-DE-LIS – purity

HARP – well composed person of tempered judgement; mystical bridge between heaven and earth

HORSE – readiness to serve monarch & country

LEG – expedition & gain

MERMAID – eloquence

MOUNTAIN – stability

PLUME OF FEATHERS – willing obedience; serenity of mind,

ROSE – grace & beauty

SHAMROCK – perpetuity (indented leaf)

SPHINX – omniscience & secrecy

STAG/ANTLERS – one who will not fight unless provoked;
Peace & harmony; strength & fortitude

TORCH – life, zealousness, truth & intelligence

TREFOIL – happiness (easy to confuse w/ shamrock)

VOL (2 conjoined wings): swiftness & protection

Sources: heraldryandcrests.com & genesreunited.com