

Early Modern English Wax Seals in the Brown Collection

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Heraldry, Symbolology, and Usage of Seals

Doc.Brown.7.Seal , Seal.Brown.1, and Doc.Brown.5.Seal are **wax pendant seals** dating to the early modern period in England. Pendant seals are seals attached to their associated document with a thin parchment tag, piece of paper, or cord (Surrey 2022). **Seals served as “object[s] of authentication,”** offering a physical means through which royals, and non-royal elites and the public after the thirteenth century, could express “identity, power, agency, and legitimacy” (Whatley 2019). Seals were used to validate documents in place of or alongside of signatures; this was a crucial function for those with limited literacy (Surrey 2022, Whatley 2019, Clemens and Graham 2007).

Several seals within the Brown Collection feature **armorial bearings**. These range from complex armorial achievements in royal coats of arms to personal heraldry. Heraldry originated from practical utility; heralds in the Middle Ages utilized armorial bearings to distinguish armored warriors, allowing them to perform their ceremonial and message-bearing duties (Giles and Brooke-Little, 1963). The hereditary aspect of armory led heralds to genealogy, which is reflected in the longstanding relationship between heraldic insignia and seals serving as **symbols of identity** (Giles and Brooke-Little 1963, Whatley 2019).

The **great seal** was utilized by English monarchs beginning after Edward the Confessor in the eleventh century (The Royal Household, Great Seal of the Realm). The seals have designs on both the obverse and reverse sides, requiring a circular double-sided matrix to create (Clemens and Graham 2007). **The Great Seal of the Realm is considered the “chief seal of the Crown”** and depicts the ruler(s) in two positions: enthroned, known as “in majesty”, and on horseback, referred to as the “equestrian” position (The National Archives, Seals). These positions represent the dual responsibilities of the king or queen as the civil and military ruler of the realm.

Three Early Modern English Wax Seals

Doc.Brown.7.Seal (Fig. 4, 5, 16, 17) depicts **Mary I of England and Philip II of Spain** in a rarer design of great seal where both king and queen are illustrated. Mary I ruled from 1553 to 1558 as Queen Regnant and married Philip II in 1554 (The Royal Household, Mary I (r. 1553-1558)). Philip II held several titles, including King of Spain from 1556 to his death in 1598 to *jure uxoris* King of England and Ireland until Mary I’s death (The Royal Household, Mary I (r. 1553-1558)). Doc.Brown.7.Seal features the combined arms of England and Spain on both obverse (located to the right of Mary I and Philip II) and reverse (located directly between the king and queen).

Seal.Brown.1 (Fig. 6, 7, 10, 11), recorded as the great seal of King Edward VI, was determined to be the second great seal of King Charles II. This misidentification can be attributed to the broken edge of the seal disrupting the legend where the king’s name was inscribed on both the reverse and observe sides of the seal. Seal.Brown.1 is dated to 1653, two years after Charles II succeeded Charles I and was crowned by the Scots in 1651 (The Royal Household, Charles II (r. 1660-1685)). Charles II served as both King of Scotland (1649-1651) and King of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1660-1685). This position is reflected in his seal’s reverse depicting him enthroned between a lion and unicorn holding the flags of England and Scotland, respectively.

Doc.Brown.5.Seal (Fig. 8, 9) dates to **March 15, 1592, and features the seal of Sir John Fortescue of Salden, the seventh Chancellor of the Exchequer of England from 1589 to 1603** (The History of Parliament 1981). The seal is attached to Doc.Brown.5 via a vellum tag; an additional tag on Doc.Brown.5 once held the seal of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Lord Treasurer of England. John Fortescue of Salden entered the service of Queen Elizabeth I in 1555 in his position as Keeper of the Great Wardrobe after he had directed her learning as a youth under Mary I’s reign (Rodgers 2022). Doc.Brown.5.Seal is one sided and may have been imprinted with a signet ring or a matrix (Clemens and Graham 2007).

Seal Legend Transcriptions

Transcription of Doc.Brown.7.Seal - Obverse - Top Right to Top Left

ARCHIDVCES · AVSTRIE · DVCE · BVRGVNDIE · [MED]IOLANI · ET · [BARBANCIE · COMITES ·]
HASPVIRGI · ET · [FLAN]DRIE · ET · TIROLIS ·

Transcription of Doc.Brown.7.Seal - Reverse - Top Right to Top Left

[PHILIP · ET · MARIA · D · G ·] REX · REGINA [· ANGL’ · HISPANIAR’ · FRA]NC · VTRIVS[Q’] [· SICILE ·]
IERVSALEM · ET · HIB · FIDEI · DEFEN[S]OR

Transcription of Seal.Brown.1 Legend - Obverse -Top Right to Top Left

II DEI DEFENSOR MAGNÆ BRITANNIÆ ET FRANCIA ET HIBERNÆ REX FIDEI [DEFENSOR 1653
CAROLVS]

Transcription of Seal.Brown.1 Legend - Reverse - Top Right to Top Left

[1653 CAROLVS] II DEI GR[AT]IA MAGNÆ BRITANNIÆ FRANCIÆ ET HIBERN · REX FIDEI DEFENSO[R]



Figure 4: Doc.Brown.7.Seal obverse



Figure 5: Doc.Brown.7.Seal reverse



Figure 6: Seal.Brown.1. obverse



Figure 7: Seal.Brown.1 reverse



Figure 8: Doc.Brown.5.Seal obverse



Figure 9: Doc.Brown.5.Seal reverse

Brown Collection

The Bruce and Dorothy Brown Collection is one of several collections within the McPherson Library Special Collections at the University of Victoria. The Brown Collection is named for Dr. Bruce L. Brown and Mrs. Dorothy E. Brown, who collected rare items during their extensive travels. Many of these items were donated to the university by the Browns to provide students with opportunities to study “a range of artifacts of aesthetic and historical interest” (University of Victoria Libraries). The Brown Collection consists of eighty-seven artifacts, twenty maps, and sixty-four medals and decorations representing history from ca. 2000 B.C.E. to 1970.

Included within the collections’ medieval and early modern manuscripts are several wax seals and documents with evidence of wax seals. Information on these seals is provided through the University of Victoria Special Collections digital catalog. The entries corresponding to these items are largely comprised of the information provided to the Browns by the dealers from which they purchased the seals and documents, apart from Doc.Brown.1. This offers student and faculty researchers a unique opportunity to examine this information and assess its validity in person, utilizing their knowledge of art history, transcription, medieval studies, and symbolology.



Figure 10: Seal of Charles II reverse



Figure 13: Seal of Edward VI reverse



Figure 16: Seal of Philip II & Mary I reverse



Figure 11: Seal of Charles II obverse



Figure 14: Seal of Edward VI obverse



Figure 17: Seal of Philip II & Mary I obverse



Figure 12: Seal of Sir John Fortescue



Figure 15: Metal struck by Sir John Fortescue with red residue, potentially wax



Figure 18: Arms of Fortescue impaling Arms of Beauchamp

Conclusions

Seals offer critical insight and context for medieval and early modern manuscript studies.

Rather than simply a piece of ephemera with little scholastic use independent of its associated document, seals are complete historic objects that deserve dedicated study (Woods 1994). Studying select seals in the Brown Collection provided for an examination of original provenance records, offered additional insight into Doc.Brown.5 and Doc.Brown.7 while introducing context for the associated document of Doc.Brown.Seal.1, and encouraged the study of materiality within the archival record of medieval and early modern manuscripts.