

Seals

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a seal as

“A device (e.g. a heraldic or emblematic design, a letter, word, or sentence) impressed on a piece of wax or other plastic material adhering or attached by cords or parchment slips to a document as evidence of authenticity or attestation; also, the piece of wax, etc. bearing this impressed device”.¹

St. Catharine’s has a small collection of documents that have seals attached. The seals are often very fragile and need to be handled with great care. The College’s own seal features a crowned figure of St. Catharine of Alexandria in an attitude of prayer, standing in a niche beneath a traceried canopy. At her right side is a sword, the point downwards, and behind her left shoulder a Catharine Wheel. The circumscription appears to read: ‘sigillum collegii sive

aule S[an]c[t]e Katerine virgi[n]is de Cant[a]b[rigia]’. The inscription is unclear even on the original silver matrix which is still in the College’s possession and was in use from c. 1475 until 1953 when a steel replica was created.



This image to the left shows the earliest surviving impression of the College seal taken on the 22nd November 1475. It is attached to a Letter of Attorney from the Master and Fellows to take possession of Robert Woodlark’s [the founder of the College] lands, thus effecting his conveyance of them to the College (Reference: XL/7/3, 5).

One of the other seals to feature in the archive is the Great Seal of Queen Anne. The Great Seal is the royal seal attached to important state documents. The version of seal seen below is attached to Letters Patent under the Great Seal of Queen Anne, 26 April, 13 Anne [1714] granting that Thomas Sherlock [Master of the College] and his successors as Master shall be a corporation Sole, and also granting a Canonry in Norwich Cathedral in perpetuity (Reference: M/2/1). This is Queen Anne’s second seal, identified because on the reverse she is not on horseback. The fact Queen Anne is not on horse back makes this an interesting seal as bar Edward the Confessor, Queen Anne, George V and the second seal of Queen Elizabeth II, the image on the reverse has always shown the monarch on horseback.

¹ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>, accessed 11th October 2010.



Seal



Counterseal

Further sources of information on seals:

- Worcestershire Record Service (<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/community-and-living/records/projects/croome-collection/croome-treasures/croome-seals.aspx>), guide to seals.
- Introduction to Medieval Seals (<http://medieval.library.nd.edu/seals/index.shtml>), the Medieval Library, University of Notre Dame
- Research guide to seals (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=225&j=1>), The National Archives
- Images of the Great Seals of Britain (<http://www.mernicks.com/seals>).