

THE HERALDRY OF THE DE BOHUN EARLS

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This paper analyses the evidence relating to the heraldry used by the patriarchs of the de Bohun family (1066–1373) as preserved in seal impressions, rolls of arms, manuscripts, wills, inventories and personal objects held in private collections. It traces the development of the family's coat of arms, as well as the adoption and use by the de Bohun earls of various heraldic symbols (such as the swan, the trefoil, the leopard and the wyvern) to serve as a reminder of the family's glorious ancestry and its many royal and noble marital alliances. By analysing the unique heraldry adopted by each de Bohun earl, this paper concludes that the family's noble identity evolved over several generations and that the choice of heraldic symbols by each earl was highly individual, providing a unique insight into their sense of identity and personal values, as well as their desire to ensure family memory.

Keywords: Medieval history; sigillography; heraldry; lineage and identity; nobility

INTRODUCTION

Heraldry, defined by Anthony Wagner as ‘the systematic use of hereditary devices centred upon the shield’,¹ developed in England during the twelfth century. The earliest extant example of a coat of arms, the decorated shield given by Henry I to his son-in-law, Geoffrey of Anjou, when he was knighted, dates from 1128.² Originally used to identify the heavily armed knight, by the second quarter of the twelfth century shield designs had become hereditary, being used consistently to associate their owners with certain lands, titles and offices.³ Coats of arms became the visual representation of a family's identity and the most important symbol of a magnate's lineage and power, associating him with his ancestors and their noble deeds. This contributed to family memory, providing a means for families to continue being remembered even in the absence of direct male heirs. Within a short time, hereditary symbols transcended the shield, with coats of arms and family badges being added to everything from seals to household furnishings and personal objects. Evidence of the heraldry used by the patriarchs of one of the longest surviving Anglo-Norman noble families, the de Bohun earls of Hereford, Essex and Northampton (1066–1373), survives in rolls of arms, seal impressions, wills, inventories, personal possessions and illuminated manuscripts.⁴ This evidence indicates that the choice of heraldic symbols by successive earls was carefully considered and inextricably tied to their sense of identity, and that the family's heraldry evolved through time as individuals obtained powerful titles and offices and entered into marriage alliances with other noble families.

1. Wagner 1956, 12.

2. Halphen and Poupardin 1913, 178–9.

3. Ailes 1990, 1–2.

4. The de Bohun family tree is set out in Tables 1 and 2 in the online supplementary material.

THE DE BOHUN EARLS AND THEIR COATS OF ARMS

The coat of arms now generally associated with the de Bohun earls of Hereford and Essex is *azure*, a bend *argent* with cotises *or*, between six lioncels *or*. This is the coat of arms described in the earliest rolls of arms, dating from the reign of Edward I (1272–1307), and in most surviving impressions of de Bohun seals.⁵ In practice, the colour silver was usually represented as white; thus on most surviving depictions the central bend in the de Bohun coat of arms is white.⁶ It is presumably for this reason that the banner of Humphrey VII (d. 1322) is described in what is believed to be one of the earliest rolls of arms, the Roll of Caerlaverock, composed in the year 1300, as ‘a banner of deep blue silk, with a white bend between two cottices of fine gold, on the outside of which he has six lioncels rampant’.⁷ It has been suggested that the design arose from the combination of the arms used by William of Longespée, Earl of Salisbury (d. 1226) (*azure*, six lions rampant *or*), and those attributed to Miles of Gloucester, Earl of Hereford (d. 1143) (*gules*, two bends, one *or* and the other *argent*) (fig 1).⁸ Humphrey I de Bohun (d. c. 1123), son of the first Humphrey de Bohun, who arrived in England with William I in 1066, married Matilda, daughter of Edward of Salisbury, sheriff of Wiltshire.⁹ His son, Humphrey II (d. 1164/5), styled lord of Trowbridge, married Margaret of Gloucester (d. 1197), eldest daughter and co-heiress of Miles of Gloucester (d. 1143), Earl of Hereford and Constable of England. The de Bohun family’s hereditary right to be Constables of England arose from this last alliance, as Miles’ father had acquired the office of royal constable probably sometime in 1114, and Miles held it during his lifetime.¹⁰ It is thus plausible that the de Bohun arms, as recorded in the later part of the thirteenth century, were designed to remind others of the family’s noble ties dating back to the time of the Conquest.

Yet it appears that the de Bohun coat of arms in its earliest version did not have a bend cotised, or perhaps even six lioncels rampant. The family’s earliest datable coat of arms survives in an impression of a seal belonging to Henry de Bohun (d. 1220), attached to an undated charter most probably written around the year 1200, when Henry was created *de novo* Earl of Hereford.¹¹ The design on the seal portrays him as a knight on horseback,

5. Brault 1997, I, 78, 89, 96, 152, 179, 205, 210, 213, 248, 406, 435, 465, 513; II, 59–61.

6. Scott-Giles 1950, 27.

7. Wright 1864, 4.

8. Scott-Giles 1950, 132; Planché 1871, 188–9. William of Longespée was Geoffrey of Anjou’s illegitimate grandson and wore the same arms: Tremlett *et al* 1967, 55. There is no verifiable contemporary record of Miles of Gloucester’s arms, but the arms later attributed to him consist of two separate bends on a shield: Woodcock 1996, II, 107. These arms can be seen in the brass of Eleanor de Bohun (d. 1399) in Westminster Abbey, and in drawings of seal designs of her husband, Thomas of Woodstock (d. 1397). Thomas may have adopted Miles’ coat of arms to represent his office of Constable by right of his wife. The seals are reproduced in Sandford 1707, 125, 229. Evidence that the shield’s two bends were one *or* and the other *argent* comes from a chasuble associated with Thomas and Eleanor’s daughter, Anne of Woodstock (d. 1438). It has a red velvet orphrey embroidered with this shield, among 12 others, representing the union of Anne with Edmund Stafford. The chasuble is reproduced in Brown *et al* 2016, 246–8. There is no record of Miles’ arms ever being used by anyone in the de Bohun family prior to Eleanor.

9. The marriage had been arranged by King William II of England. The bride brought with her several lands in Wiltshire, comprising most notably the honour of Trowbridge: Dugdale 1977, I, 179.

10. Walker 1957, 68, 72–3; Walker 2004, 482.

11. Vincent 2015. When Miles of Gloucester’s eldest son and heir, Roger of Gloucester, died in 1155, Henry II did not invest Roger’s brother and heir, Walter, as earl, in retaliation for Roger’s



Fig 1. Seals of Thomas of Woodstock. Reproduced from Sandford 1707.

facing right. He is armed with a sword, shield and helmet – a classic warrior pose that was to recur on the seals of several of his descendants. The rider's shield displays a coat of arms that has a single bend and one lion rampant on either side, distinguishing Henry as a de Bohun and showing that by c 1200 family identity had already become inextricably linked with a knight's seal.¹² This is the only instance in which the de Bohun arms are recorded with single lions rampant, and Nicholas Vincent has speculated that perhaps this is merely the result of the engraver's inability to represent six lioncels in the very small space occupied by the shield.¹³ Matthew Paris's depiction of the coat of arms of Henry de Bohun in his *Historia Anglorum*, painted between 1250 and 1259, shows a single white bend between six lions rampant.¹⁴ This design also appears in the earliest surviving seal impression of the seal used by Henry's son and heir, Humphrey IV (d. 1275), dated 1238 see (fig 4).¹⁵ However, it is possible, particularly in light of other known variations of the de Bohun coat of arms discussed below, that Henry's earliest shield design consisted of a single bend with a lion rampant on each side. Henry's mother was Margaret of Scotland (c 1144–1201), daughter of

conflicts with the king during his lifetime: Crouch 2004, 528. When King John gave Henry de Bohun the earldom of Hereford in 1200, Henry had to agree to forfeit any claims under the charter granted by Henry II to Roger of Gloucester: Gibbs 1910–59, VI, 454 n. (h), 458 n. (a).

12. Vincent 2015. The original charter is in Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania. However, a copy was made by Sir William Dugdale in 1638 and copies of the original charter and seal are in the Gloucestershire Record Office. Gloucester, Gloucestershire Archives, D3360/1.

13. *Ibid.*, 4.

14. BL, Royal MS 14 C VII, fol 106; Tremlett *et al* 1967, 19.

15. TNA, PRO, DL 27/10.

Henry of Scotland, Earl of Northumberland (d. 1152), and sister of King William the Lion (c 1142–1214).¹⁶ The seal of William's son, Alexander II (d. 1249), consisted of a single lion rampant with a border surrounded by fleur-de-lys.¹⁷ Henry's early adoption of a single lion may thus have been meant to represent his maternal royal descent. Throughout much of his life, Henry had a strong probability of becoming a contender to the throne of Scotland. Alexander, the only heir of his uncle William, was not born until 1198.¹⁸ William's only surviving brother, David (1152–1219), Earl of Huntingdon, was heir apparent to the Scottish crown until Alexander's birth, but he had only one surviving son, John (d. 1237), who was not born until 1206.¹⁹ In this context, it is notable that Henry de Bohun was the first heir in the de Bohun family not to be named Humphrey. Instead, he was either named after King Henry II of England, to whom his father owed so much, or he may have been named after his grandfather, Henry of Scotland.²⁰ In any case, it is clear that sometime after he became earl, in 1200, Henry de Bohun changed his shield design to add six lioncels. This change may have been spurred by his new earldom.

Henry de Bohun's early shield may also have departed from that of his ancestors, who probably used a coat of arms showing two central adjoining bends with three lioncels on each side. These arms are not recorded in either seal impressions or rolls of arms, but they appear in two objects associated with the de Bohun family that are currently held in private collections: a Viking broadsword and a heraldic device that was probably mounted to the pommel of a saddle.²¹ The broadsword, with a blade dating to the mid-eleventh century, shows this coat of arms etched on a copper shield on both sides of a pommel added at a later date (fig 2).²² The saddle device consists of a central metallic stem with two protruding arms (fig 3). At the end of each arm hangs a shield faced with the same unknown arms that appear in the sword pommel. At its base is a swan and at the top hangs a pennant faced on each side with the later de Bohun coat of arms with a bend cotised. The date of these objects is not known, but this unusual coat of arms does not appear in historical records of any kind, suggesting that it either pre-dates the coat of arms used by Henry de Bohun (d. 1220), or it was very short-lived.²³ If, as is likely, the two adjoining bends in the coat of arms were adopted from the arms of Miles of Gloucester, keeping the two bends on his shield but bringing them together to make room for the six Salisbury lioncels, then the arms must have been adopted sometime after the marriage of Humphrey II and Margaret of Gloucester, which took place between 1135 and 1143.²⁴ The exact time at which this coat

16. She was the widow of Conan IV, Duke of Brittany (d. 1171).

17. Tremlett *et al* 1967, 32.

18. Scott 2004, 61.

19. Stringer 2004, 285.

20. It is possible that Henry de Bohun's name was the result of having an elder brother named Humphrey who died young, but there is no record of this. Henry's maternal aunt, Ada, married to Floris III, Count of Holland (d. 1190), also named her second son William (d. 1222), an unusual name in her husband's family.

21. These objects were displayed at Christie's in London as lots 134 and 135 of an auction in August 2014: Christie's 2014, 70–1.

22. The sword has a 707mm double-edged fullered blade dated to the mid-11th century with a runic inscription clearly visible within one fuller. Two other swords with the same inscription have been discovered. Peirce 2002, 134–7; Christie's 2014, 70.

23. The device is dated to the 13th/14th centuries. It is possible that the items are not authentic, but, if so, there is no apparent reason why an unknown coat of arms would have been included to represent the de Bohun earls of Hereford.

24. Walker 2004, 481; White 2004, 442.



Fig 2. Sword pommel with early de Bohun coat of arms (private ownership).

of arms was adopted is a matter of speculation, but it is most likely that the arms were used by either Humphrey II (d. 1165) after his marriage, and/or his son, Humphrey III (d. 1181).²⁵ The inclusion of a swan and a banner with the later de Bohun coat of arms in the saddle device indicates that this particular object was commissioned by a later earl, probably Humphrey VII (d. 1322), as discussed below.

25. This implies that the earls of Salisbury used six lioncels before 1196: see Sandford 1707, 114. But see Gibbs 1910–59, XI, app G 133–42. This also implies that either Humphrey III (d. 1181) or his son Henry later changed the de Bohun shield to a single bend.

(a)



(b)



Fig 3. Heraldic saddle device with a banner and two shields engraved with different de Bohun coats of arms (private ownership).

Henry de Bohun's son and heir, Humphrey IV (d. 1275), lived a long life. He was earl of Hereford for fifty-five years after his father's death in 1220, and in 1236 he inherited the additional title of earl of Essex from his mother, Maud fitz Peter (Mandeville), after her family failed in the male line.²⁶ During his lifetime, he changed the design of the de Bohun coat of arms, as evidenced by the surviving seal impressions of three of his seals. The first of these comes from a small, round, 40mm seal which identifies its owner as 'Hunfridi de Buhun' and depicts the same arms used by his father: three lioncels on each side of a single bend (fig 4).²⁷ His son, Humphrey V (d. 1265), who pre-deceased him, used the same arms during his lifetime, differencing them with fleur-de-lys on the bend.²⁸

26. Maud was the daughter of Geoffrey fitz Peter and Beatrix de Say, granddaughter of Beatrix de Mandeville, who was the sister of Geoffrey de Mandeville, 1st Earl of Essex (d. 1144). In 1200, Geoffrey fitz Peter had been made earl of Essex by King John in right of his wife, Beatrix, despite the rival claim of her cousin, Geoffrey de Say: West 2004, 772. Maud inherited the earldom after her last brother died in 1226.

27. The impression is dated to 1238: TNA, PRO, DL 27/10; Birch 1887–90, II, 518; Ellis 1981, II, 13 and pl 5. See also TNA, PRO, DL 25/1642/1343. The legend in the seals has a reversed 'N'. These arms are described as 'azure, a bend argent between six lions rampant or' in Matthew Paris's *Liber Additamentorum*, painted in or before 1244: BL, Cotton MS Nero D 1, fol 171v; Tremlett *et al* 1967, 5, 38. It is the earliest de Bohun coat of arms recorded in manuscript form.

28. Birch 1887–90, II, 518 (dated 1260).



Fig 4. Impression of seal of Humphrey IV. TNA, PRO, DL 27/10. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

However, other seals associated with Humphrey IV show that during his lifetime he replaced the single bend in his coat of arms with a bend cotised. This happened most likely as a result of his inheritance of the earldom of Essex from his mother in 1236, the bend cotised being adopted to represent his two earldoms while also serving as a reminder of his family's heritable claim to the constableness of England. The change can first be seen in surviving impressions of the earl's equestrian seal. It was a large, round, 63mm seal, with a legend identifying the owner as 'Humfridi de Boun Comitiss Herfordie et Esssie' (fig 5).²⁹ The seal impressions show the earl on horseback, galloping

29. This seal was in use by 1242: TNA, PRO, DL 27/11; Birch 1887–90, II, 252; Loyd and Stenton 1950, 222–3; Ellis 1981, II, 13 and pl 5.

(a)



(b)



Fig 5. Obverse and reverse (counterseal) impressions of equestrian seal of Humphrey iv. TNA, PRO, DL 27/11. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

to the right. He wears chain mail, a surcoat and a flat-topped helmet, and holds a drawn sword on his right hand and a shield on his left. The shield displays the earl's coat of arms, mirrored in the counterseal.³⁰ From the image in the counterseal, it is possible to know that the coat of arms has a bend cotised. The horse has a braided mane, and below the horse is a twisting bifurcated tree in full bloom, probably symbolising his two earldoms, with a slightly larger trunk pointing upwards and touching the underside of the horse, and another trunk growing towards the right. On either side of the counterseal's de Bohun arms is a small shield of arms quarterly, representing the coat of arms used by Geoffrey de Mandeville, 1st Earl of Essex (d. 1144), from whom the earldom descended.³¹

Humphrey VI (d. 1298) succeeded his grandfather to the family's earldoms and estates. He was not the first de Bohun to be earl of Hereford and Essex, but he was the first de Bohun to make Essex his home and to be buried at Walden Abbey, in Essex, the traditional Mandeville burial house, instead of Llanthony Priory, in Monmouthshire, where his ancestors had been buried.³² His coat of arms as earl, described in several rolls of arms from the reign of Edward I, appears to have been the same as his grandfather's.³³ Unfortunately, there is only one surviving record of his seal design, and it comes from a seal impression in a document dated 1275, the year of his grandfather's death. It is therefore not possible to know whether he adopted new heraldic symbols during his lifetime. The seal impression shows that his equestrian seal at the time he became earl had a diameter of 63mm and was similar to that of his grandfather, but displayed subtle differences revealing his personal taste and sense of identity (fig 6).³⁴ The shield held by the rider is smaller and wider and turned slightly more to the front, so that the coat of arms is in full view. The horse is wearing a trapper patterned with the same coat of arms, giving it further predominance. There is no bifurcated tree under the horse. The counterseal, measuring 30mm, shows only the de Bohun coat of arms. Overall, the seal design is simpler and chooses to emphasise the de Bohun coat of arms, without any explicit reference to the Mandevilles or any other badges or symbols. We cannot know why the earl chose to simplify his seal, but what is clear is that he was proud of being a de Bohun and that he viewed this simple fact as the essence of his identity. By 1275 the family's earldoms were intrinsically linked with the de Bohun family name, and there was no need to remind others of their origin. His son, however, had different views.

Humphrey VI's eldest son and heir, Humphrey VII, succeeded to the family's titles in 1298 and adopted a very different style from that of his father. The heraldry displayed in his seals and personal possessions includes many references to the family's past, probably

30. The counterseal was a more personal seal, usually quite small, impressed at the back of the wax impression of a larger seal to corroborate the owner's principal seal on the front. However, sometimes the back of a two-sided seal is referred to as the counterseal, as is the case with Humphrey IV's and Humphrey VII's seal: Harvey and McGuinness 1996, 9.
31. The Mandeville coat of arms was quarterly *or* and *gules*: Tremlett *et al* 1967, 17; reproduced in Blair 1943, pl 6 (k).
32. Waugh 2004, 443. For a discussion of the de Bohun family's piety and their places of burial, see Diaz Pascual 2017, 149–89, app F.
33. That is, *azure*, a bend *argent* cotised and between six lions *rampant or*. His arms appear with a diapered bend *argent* cotised in the earliest roll of arms from the reign of Edward I (the Herald's Roll, c 1279) but not in later ones, indicating that he may have used it as a mark of cadency before becoming earl: Brault 1997, 1, 89; but see 1997, 1, 179, 205 and 406, where the diapering is not mentioned.
34. TNA, PRO, E 42/65; Ellis 1981, 1, 8 and pl 3, 4. The counterseal is also in TNA, PRO, DL 25/1444 and DL 25/27 (but it is unclear if the seal in these two documents is the counterseal of Humphrey VI or the same design used as one of the secreta of his son and heir, Humphrey VII).

(a)



(b)



Fig 6. Obverse and reverse (counterseal) impressions of seal of Humphrey vi. TNA, PRO, E 42/65. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.



Fig 7. Seals of Humphrey VII: (a) and (b) obverse and reverse (counterseal) impressions of equestrian seal (TNA, PRO DL 27/42); (c) facsimile impression of private seal showing a tree with five slipped leaves sprouting from the top and sides of the shield; (d) impression of private seal with trefoils (TNA, PRO, DL 25/1543). Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster (a, b and d), and by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London (c).

reflecting his desire to draw attention to his lineage and create or reinforce symbols that would ensure family memory. Impressions of four of his seals have survived: one large equestrian seal measuring 70mm and three smaller seals, two of these identified as private seals or 'secreta', measuring 29mm (fig 7). All of the smaller seals had simple designs featuring the same de Bohun coat of arms used by his father, with slight variations. The simplest, used to authenticate his will in 1319, had no decoration other than a beaded

border.³⁵ Another seal, dated 1300, had a tree with five slipped leaves sprouting from the top replicated on each side of the coat of arms, with beaded borders.³⁶ The third seal, widely used by the earl throughout his life, had three slipped ‘trefoils’ sprouting from all three sides of the central shield.³⁷ The trees in the second seal may have been purely decorative. If they had a particular meaning, it is now difficult to decipher. The trefoils, however, were a badge adopted by the earl, as they can also be seen in his equestrian seal.

Interesting as his smaller seals are, it is the earl’s more prestigious two-sided equestrian seal, measuring 70mm, that tells us most about what was important to him and how he wished to be perceived.³⁸ Although similar to the equestrian seals of his ancestors, Humphrey VII added certain variations reflecting both the fashion of the time and his own unique sense of identity. The seal identifies him as Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Constable of England. The earldom of Essex is relegated to the counterseal, probably owing to lack of space. The rider and the horse are both wearing fan plumes on their heads, over the helmet and trapping, respectively. The horse’s trapper is adorned with the de Bohun coat of arms, but the trapper is longer than in Humphrey VI’s seal and includes folds, denoting movement. The shield held by the earl is also larger, clearly displaying the six de Bohun lioncels with a bend cotised, and the entire image spills into the surrounding legend, the letters intersecting the rider’s sword, the fan plumes and the horse’s hooves and tail. The effect of all of these changes is to add considerable glamour to the seal image, and bring into relief the importance and power of the rider. Compared to the earliest de Bohun equestrian seal, the difference is striking. Yet not all of these changes were the result of personal preference by the 4th Earl of Hereford. There are a number of seal impressions belonging to the earl’s contemporaries that bear striking resemblances to the earl’s seal, reflecting the fact that seal designers followed fashionable trends.³⁹

Most remarkable is Humphrey VII’s counterseal. At the centre, and occupying most of the available space, is a large de Bohun coat of arms hanging from a strap carried by a large swan with its wings folded. On either side of the shield are two smaller quarterly shields, referring to his Mandeville descent, and from the top of each of these shields springs a ‘slipped trefoil’. The singularity of this design cannot be overstated. It is especially clear when the seal is compared to the ninety-six seals appended to the barons’ letter to the pope dated 12 February 1300, representing most of the English nobility at the time.⁴⁰ A great majority of these have common themes. Apart from the similarities in the equestrian images, almost a third of the counterseals contain wyverns on the sides of the shields or above them, and the next most popular animal is the lion. Twenty-seven seals have shields suspended from the central trunk of trifurcated boughs, and nearly all of the seals have either a star or a cross on the legend, above the coat of arms. Very few seals have any meaningful, unique personal symbols outside the coat of arms. The counterseal on Humphrey VII’s equestrian seal, by contrast, has three.

35. TNA, PRO, DL 27/14 and C 148/150; Birch 1887–90, II, 519; Ellis 1981, I, 8.

36. Birch 1887–90, II, 518.

37. Impressions of this seal date from 1307 to 1320: TNA, PRO, DL 25/1541, DL 25/1543, DL 25/1363 and DL 25/2029; Birch 1887–90, II, 518.

38. Impressions of this seal date from 1301: TNA, PRO, DL 27/42 and E 26; Birch 1887–90, II, 252–3; Ellis 1981, II, 13–14 and pl 6. The seal is reproduced in Walden 1984, xxvii.

39. See Walden 1984, xxvi–xxxvi, 3, 5, 9, 16, 21. All of the seal owners were, like Humphrey VII, signatories to the barons’ letter to the pope dated 12 Feb 1300.

40. See Walden 1984.

The first is the swan. It is not clear if the earl was the first in his family to use this symbol, as the only surviving evidence of his father's seal design is, as discussed above, the seal impression dated twenty-four years prior to his death.⁴¹ However, Humphrey VII used the swan as a badge throughout his life. It appears in combination with leopards, presumably representing his wife Elizabeth Plantagenet's royal lineage, in an account of goods in the king's possession after the forfeiture of the earl's goods in 1322. The account lists, among many other items, a 'colponat' with gold leopards and silver swans, an alb and stole embroidered with gold leopards and silver swans, and other items combining the arms of Hereford and England.⁴² In his will, written in 1319, the earl bequeathed to his son and heir his two most precious possessions: his armour, and a bed of green powdered with white swans.⁴³ At Walden Abbey, where some of his most precious possessions were stored for safekeeping, he left 'eighteen green tapestries and bench-covers powdered with swans'.⁴⁴ The swan was meant as a powerful symbol identifying the de Bohun family as descendants of Godfrey de Bouillon, conqueror and first ruler of Jerusalem. Godfrey was said to be a direct descendant of the Swan Knight, a mythical warrior identified in a popular legend that probably originated in oral tradition before the twelfth century.⁴⁵ There can be little doubt that the earl meant his family to be associated with the legend, since he named his sixth son 'Aeneas', the middle English version of the Swan Knight's name, Helyas.⁴⁶ He was not the first earl to borrow a name from legend to glorify his family with illustrious ancestors. In the thirteenth century William Beauchamp, 9th Earl of Warwick (d. 1298), had named his eldest son Guy in order to associate his new comital house with the legendary Guy of Warwick.⁴⁷ The de Bohuns further encouraged the association of the family's lineage and identity with Godfrey de Bouillon through visual and written reminders of the legendary hero's life and noble deeds. At Pleshey castle, one of the largest, most luxurious tapestries on display represented the story of Godfrey of Bouillon and his capture of Jerusalem, and the library contained a copy of the history of Godfrey de Bouillon.⁴⁸

It is not known why Humphrey VII chose to adopt the swan as his family's badge, but it is most likely that he did so in order to enhance his family's prestige and ensure its

41. The swan badge was used as a mark of identity in the seals of two of the earl's male relatives: his first cousin, Oliver de Bohun, and the grandson of Humphrey IV, John de Bohun (d. 1328). Taken together, the seals of all three men place the use of the swan by male members of the de Bohun family between the years 1302 and 1335: TNA, PRO, DL 25/1590/1294 and DL 25/1812. Oliver was most likely the son of Humphrey VI's brother, Gilbert de Bohun, but Gilbert did not use a swan in his seal. See TNA, PRO, DL 25/1752/1437. This is further evidence that Humphrey VII was the first de Bohun earl to adopt this symbol.
42. Account of John de Flete, keeper of the privy wardrobe from 1324 to 1341: BL, MS 60584, fols 4v, 19; partly transcribed in Siddons 2009, I, 166.
43. TNA, PRO, DL 27/14; Turner 1846, 346.
44. TNA, PRO, DL 25/29; Turner 1846, 346; Bigelow 1896, 432; Ward 2008, 169.
45. The earliest references to the legend date from the end of the 12th century, when William, Archbishop of Tyre (d. c. 1190), wrote a history of the Crusades stating that a majority of people believed that Godfrey of Bouillon was descended from the Knight of the Swan: Jaffray 2010, 3–6.
46. Two pictorial rolls of John Rous completed in the 1480s, with the purpose of glorifying the Beauchamp family, refer to the Knight of the Swan as 'Eneas': Gransden 1982, II, 323–4.
47. Sinclair 2003, 14. The Beauchamps also claimed descent from the Swan Knight: see Wagner 1959.
48. TNA, PRO, E 136/77/4; transcribed in Dillon and Hope 1897, 288, 303. The tapestry was valued at £45. Only two tapestries in the same inventory compare in size and value, and they both refer to the story of Charlemagne.

remembrance at a crucial moment in his family's history.⁴⁹ By the time he became earl in 1298, the family had accumulated two earldoms. Seven years later, their distant marital links to the royal family would be cemented by the earl's marriage to Edward I's daughter, Elizabeth Plantagenet. It was the right moment to celebrate the de Bohuns' achievements and create dynastic symbols that would endure in time, and for this purpose the earl chose a powerful symbol of chivalry and piety, a symbol that marked his family as favoured by God.

Further proof of the earl's commitment to glorifying his family's noble history by displaying symbols of his ancestral lineage comes from the surviving de Bohun sword and heraldic saddle device already mentioned. The inclusion of a swan in the saddle device makes it most likely that Humphrey VII commissioned its creation to match the ancient arms etched into the pommel of his inherited ancestral sword, allowing him to display his family's ancient arms in combination with his own as a reminder of his family's noble history. Humphrey VII was a knight banneret, accounting for the banner with the later de Bohun arms found in the central stem of the saddle device.⁵⁰ He was also the first de Bohun earl known to have used the swan as a symbol. Furthermore, the inventory of the earl's goods left at Walden Abbey includes a description of four swords, 'lun des armes le dit Counte', presumably meaning a sword with his coat of arms on its pommel.⁵¹ This is likely to refer to the surviving Viking sword with the ancient coat of arms, a prized family heirloom.

The second personal symbol in the counterseal of Humphrey VII's large equestrian seal is the Mandeville coat of arms found on each side of the de Bohun shield. The position of these shields mirrors the design of his great-grandfather Humphrey IV's counterseal. Although the fourth earl's father, Humphrey VI, had not used this symbol, choosing instead to concentrate on his de Bohun identity, Humphrey VII resurrected it, making his Mandeville descent a conspicuous and intrinsic part of his identity in exactly the same way as it had been a part of his great-grandfather's identity. However, the fourth earl added a third, previously unused, symbol: the trefoil.

The origin and meaning of the trefoil is a mystery. Its placement sprouting from the Mandeville shields indicates that it was a Mandeville badge. Its meaning remains obscure, but it may have been meant as a symbol of the Trinity. Geoffrey de Mandeville, 2nd Earl of Essex (d. 1215), was buried in Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate.⁵² The cult of the Trinity, founded in Canterbury by Thomas Becket on his consecration in 1162, gained popularity among the royal and noble soldiers and courtiers in the fourteenth century, probably as a result of its adoption by Edward III's eldest son, the Black Prince, whose personal devotion to the Trinity is well known.⁵³ The sermon preached soon after the prince's death by Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester, gives us some insight into the symbolism of the

49. Humphrey VII's choice of a swan as a family symbol may have originated in the marriage of Alice de Bohun, one of the daughters of Humphrey IV, to Roger de Toni (d. 1277) sometime after 1239. For a full discussion of the swan symbol, see Diaz Pascual 2017, 46–52.

50. See Brault 1997, I, 485.

51. TNA, PRO, DL 25/29; Turner 1846, 349; Bigelow 1896, 433; Ward 2008, 169. The same inventory refers to two surcoats, four pairs of shoulder-plates and a cover for a horse, all with the arms of the earl of Hereford, as well as a quilt quartered with the arms of England and Hereford, with a curtain to match.

52. Stow 1908, I, 141.

53. The Trinity was established as a general festival by Pope John XXII in 1333. The prince was born within 15 days (the *quindene*) of Trinity Sunday. He held a great feast each year on Trinity Sunday, and at the end of his life he was buried in Canterbury Cathedral, in the Trinity Chapel beside Becket's shrine, beneath a canopy painted with the image of the Trinity: Barber 1978, 237, 240, 241.



Fig 8. Impression of the seal of John de Bohun, 5th Earl of Hereford. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1759. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Trinity. He stated that: ‘Any prince should excel his subjects in power, wisdom and goodness, just as the image of the Holy Trinity represents these, the Father being power, the Son wisdom and the Holy Spirit goodness.’⁵⁴ The trefoil does not appear in earlier de Bohun shields, but it appears in the private seal that Humphrey VII used most often, and it was adopted by the earl’s son and heir, John de Bohun (d. 1335), as well as by Humphrey IV’s grandson, John de Bohun (d. 1328), both of whom appear to have been very pious.⁵⁵

Humphrey VII died in 1322, leaving behind five sons and two daughters. His eldest son, John, succeeded to the family earldoms in 1326. John de Bohun, 5th Earl of Hereford, used an elaborate geometric design in his seal (fig 8). The central shield with a de Bohun coat of arms stood in a circle encased by six lobes and surrounded by an equilateral triangle. At the

54. *Ibid*, 235.

55. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1759; DL 25/1957. It is likely that there were also small trefoils in William de Bohun’s (d. 1360) seal and in that of his son, Humphrey IX. See below.

top and sides of the shield stood a trefoil. On each side of the triangle stood a circle containing a de Bohun coat of arms.⁵⁶ Between each of the circles were three circular indentations, forming a total of nine indentations. Other than the emphasis on triple patterns, suggestive of the Trinity, it is noteworthy that John had four de Bohun coats of arms on his seal. He chose not to use the Mandeville coat of arms or any other symbol despite the unique opportunities afforded by the design of his seal. As a result, his seal provided a powerful reminder of his pride in being a de Bohun. As the eldest male heir of a man who had died a traitor, John's first years as earl of Hereford were marred by his family's loss of lands and possessions, many of which were never recovered, as well as a forced marriage arranged by his guardian, Edward II, to the daughter of his father's enemy, the earl of Arundel. This experience may have deepened his loyalty to his blood line, and his seal clearly declares the importance of his de Bohun identity. The particular design of his seal may be evidence of John's piety, as the limited amount of information available on John de Bohun indicates that, like his brother Humphrey, he may have been exceptionally pious. We know that after surrendering the constablership of England in 1330 to his brother Edward owing to infirmity, he went on pilgrimage to Santiago.⁵⁷ In addition, unlike most de Bohun earls and family members, he was not buried at Walden Abbey or Llanthony Priory. Instead he was buried at the Cistercian abbey of Stratford Langthorne, in Essex.⁵⁸

John's brother, Humphrey VIII (d. 1361), became earl of Hereford and Essex after John's death in 1335. He may have suffered from a disability as he never married and he surrendered the office of constable to his younger brother, William, in 1338.⁵⁹ Humphrey was an exceptionally pious man, as evidenced by his will and his patronage of the Augustinian friars.⁶⁰ He was also the first de Bohun earl known to have used leopards as a personal badge and this, combined with his commission of lavishly illuminated manuscripts commemorating his parents' union, indicates that he was extremely proud of his lineage, particularly his mother's royal heritage, and that he was concerned with ensuring family memory.⁶¹ Surviving impressions of his seal show that it displayed a large de Bohun coat of arms at the centre surrounded by three circles linked to each other by ten smaller circles, each intersected by a slightly curved line in the form of an 'S', giving the overall appearance of a chain surrounding the central shield (fig 9).⁶² Unlike John's seal, the three larger circles on Humphrey's seal each contained

56. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1611, DL 25/1759 and DL 25/1928; Birch 1887–90, II, 520–1; Blair 1943, pl II (o).

57. PRO 1891–, CPR 1330–34, 14, 24.

58. It is most likely that he chose to be buried at the Cistercian abbey for pious reasons, since he did not die in battle. His will, if it existed, has not survived. An almost identical seal design was used by Mary St Pol, countess of Pembroke (c 1304–77), a woman well known for her piety and religious benefactions. Her seal is reproduced in Scott-Giles 1950, 131. Her counterseal is reproduced in Blair 1943, pl XVI (l). The same design was used by John's second wife, Margaret, and similar designs were used by some of John's contemporaries. TNA, PRO DL 25/1645; Ellis 1981, I, 96–7, pl. 4, II, 36, pl. 12, 74, pl. 22; Blair 1943, pl XI (r) and (s), pl XVI (cc).

59. PRO 1891–, CPR 1338–40, 91, 95.

60. See LL, *Reg. Islip*, fol 179; Nichols 1780, 50–1.

61. His younger siblings, Edward and Eleanor, both added lions or leopards to their seal designs: TNA, PRO, E 43/184; Loyd and Stenton 1950, 268–9; Ellis 1981, II, 13.

62. TNA, PRO, DL 27/168 and DL 27/319; Ellis 1981, II, 14 and pl 6. DL 27/319 is dated October 1343 (17 Edward III). The date on the National Archives entry is wrongly given as 16 Edward I. Given Humphrey's piety and his insistence on remembrance in his will, the 's' might have been meant to represent the word 'souviens', a meaning later associated with the Lancastrian collar of 'SS': see Purey-Cust 1910, 33.



Fig 9. Impression of seal of Humphrey VIII. TNA, PRO, DL 27/168. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

a leopard of England. Most peculiarly, the central bend on the bend cotised of his de Bohun shield was not smooth. A pattern in relief, chequered or zigzagged, ran through it.

The earl's great pride in his family's royal connections is obvious not only from his use of leopards but also from other objects owned and commissioned by him. In his will he bequeathed to the order of the Augustinian friars a black vestment with the arms of England on the borders. He also bequeathed to his only niece, Elizabeth de Bohun, recently married to Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, his bed with the arms of England.⁶³ Most importantly, the earl is known to have commissioned several illuminated manuscripts containing heraldry commemorating his parents' union.⁶⁴ They include many shields representing the de Bohun coat of arms paired with the royal arms of England pre-1340.⁶⁵ The manuscripts are large and lavishly illuminated, and may have formed part of a larger collection commissioned by him.⁶⁶ The earl, probably a recluse at Pleshey, childless, unmarried and possibly disabled, had more cause than many to celebrate his parents' union and his family's noble connections. Before he came of age, Humphrey VIII lived through the death of his mother in 1316, as well as the death of his father, as a traitor, in 1322. After a brilliant career culminating in a royal marriage, the family's titles, lands and

63. LL, *Reg. Islip*, fol 179; Nichols 1780, 47, 51; Bigelow 1896, 633, 635.

64. The heraldry also commemorates the brilliant marital alliances of his two sisters: Eleanor de Bohun, who married James Butler, 1st Earl of Ormond, in 1327, and Margaret de Bohun, who married Hugh de Courtenay (1303–77), 10th Earl of Devon, in 1325.

65. The manuscripts include National-bibliothek, MS 1826; Exeter College, MS 47; and BL, Egerton MS 3277. For a discussion of these manuscripts and their heraldry, see Dennison 1988; Sandler 2014. The pairing of the de Bohun arms with the arms of England first appears in a Sarum breviary that was created during Humphrey VII's lifetime: Longleat House, MS 10. Folio 1 of the manuscript contains an additional shield of arms that is unknown but is likely to have represented the arms of Joan de Baa (d. 1316), wife of John de Bohun (d. 1292), great-uncle of Humphrey VII. For a different interpretation, see Sandler 2008.

66. Sandler and Dennison have established that there was a workshop at Pleshey that produced illuminated manuscripts, with resident illuminators: Sandler 1985, 364–72; Dennison 1988.

wealth had been forfeited, and regained slowly through the royal service and connections of Humphrey VII's many sons. Yet the future of the family remained dark. The 6th Earl witnessed the deaths of his younger brother, Eneas (d. 1331), his eldest brother, John, and his brother Edward (d. 1334), all childless. By 1345, when the first manuscript, known as the Vienna Psalter, was commissioned, only his brother William remained alive, and William had just the one son and heir. The manuscripts would have been wonderful commemorations of the glory of the de Bohun family at its zenith, and would have ensured family memory. The de Bohun marital alliances, particularly the alliance between Humphrey VII and Edward I's daughter Elizabeth, were a source of pride that enhanced the de Bohun name and needed to be memorialised and passed on to future generations.

The patterned bend in the earl's coat of arms is difficult to explain.⁶⁷ Humphrey VIII could have used the pattern on the bend in his coat of arms prior to becoming earl of Hereford, as a mark of cadence to differentiate it from his father's coat of arms.⁶⁸ Yet custom dictated that he should have adopted his father's arms upon becoming earl. In addition, his nephew and heir, Humphrey IX, also displayed the patterned bend in his seals, indicating that this was a permanent change in the de Bohun coat of arms.⁶⁹ Perhaps the change was made in order to represent the third earldom of Northampton, bestowed on Humphrey VIII's younger brother, William de Bohun (c 1312–60), in 1337. Although Humphrey VIII was never earl of Northampton, he knew from very early on that he would be childless and that his brother William's son, Humphrey IX (d. 1373), would be his heir, uniting all three earldoms. The change to the family's coat of arms, adding a pattern on the bend, may have been meant to reflect this.⁷⁰

In 1361, William de Bohun's only son, Humphrey IX, became the 7th Earl of Hereford, 6th Earl of Essex and 2nd Earl of Northampton. Impressions of two of his seals survive, as well as several illuminated manuscripts that may have been initially commissioned by him after his uncle Humphrey's death but which appear to have been continued at a later date since they contain heraldry commemorating the later alliances of his daughters, Eleanor and Mary, to Thomas of Woodstock and Henry Bolingbroke, respectively.⁷¹ Humphrey's official seal, measuring 40mm, identified him as earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton and Constable of England, and had a central shield with the de Bohun coat of arms surrounded

67. A simple explanation is that the pattern on the bend was hatching to indicate the difference of metals in the bend cotised. This was a practice used in early seals. It can be seen in the quarters of the coat of arms in a seal impression of the seal of Geoffrey of Mandeville: Blair 1943, 9 and pl 7.
68. Humphrey VII used a label *gules* on his de Bohun coat of arms prior to becoming earl and does not appear to have used any diapering: Brault 1997, I, 406. As previously stated, the arms of his father, Humphrey VI, appear with a diapered bend argent cotised in the earliest roll of arms from the reign of Edward I (the Herald's Roll, c 1279).
69. However, the patterned bend was not incorporated into the arms of Humphrey VIII's younger brothers, William and Edward de Bohun, nor in those of Humphrey IX's wife Joan and their daughter Eleanor.
70. William used at least three seals during his lifetime, all containing a central shield with the de Bohun arms differenced by a charge of three six-pointed pierced mullets on the bend, his mark of cadency: TNA, PRO, DL 25/1625, DL 25/1961 and DL 27/304.
71. Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 38-1950; Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.4.4; Schloss Pommersfelden, MS 2934 (348). The dating of these manuscripts, and their purpose, remains uncertain. Sandler believes that these manuscripts, along with several others, were commissioned c 1380 by Joan de Bohun, Countess of Hereford (d. 1419), to commemorate the marriage of her daughter Mary with Henry Bolingbroke in 1381: Sandler 2014, 18, 213, 346–9. But see Dennison 1988 and 2003, app I. For a discussion of the different dating and interpretation of the heraldry in the de Bohun manuscripts, see Diaz Pascual 2017, 116–43.



Fig 10. Impression of the seal of Humphrey IX. TNA, PRO, E 329/422. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

by a rich decorative pattern with arches and lobes similar to his father William's last seal (fig 10).⁷² As already mentioned, there was a pattern on the bend cotised. The seal design also appears to have incorporated circles intersected by wavy 's' lines, first seen in Humphrey VIII's seal, as well as what appear to be very small trefoils sprouting towards the central shield. Two more seals attributed to Humphrey IX are evidenced by seal impressions in documents created while he was on campaign abroad. They were attached to documents authenticated while on crusade in the east.⁷³ Both seals measured 29mm and identified the owner only as earl of Northampton, and both had the de Bohun coat of arms at its centre. One appears to have had no other symbolism, other than two marks at the end of the legend representing a four-petalled flower and a wyvern (fig 11).⁷⁴ The second seal, however, had a wyvern with a curved spine and long tail lined with spikes standing on the left side of the shield, facing downwards. Above the shield, a small portion of a figure can be discerned, but it is not clear what it is, other than that it seems to also have spikes and is most likely another wyvern.⁷⁵ These seals are, with small variations to account for personal titles, arms and badges, identical to the seals of other men attached to the same documents. It is therefore most likely that the seals were created for the men's use at Torun, perhaps because they did not carry their official seals with them.⁷⁶ Further evidence of the adoption of wyverns as a de Bohun badge at this time comes from the discovery of a

72. The seal impression is dated 1361, the year he became earl. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1622, DL 27/167 and E 329/422; Ellis 1981, I, 8, pl 4.

73. The documents were sealed at Torun, in Bydgoszcz (Poland).

74. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1639/1337. It is possible that there was further decoration on the sides of the shield, but, if so, it is too faint to discern.

75. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1638/1332.

76. See TNA, PRO, DL 25/1639/1338 (Miles Stapleton), DL 25/1639/1339 (John Burley), DL 25/1639/1340, DL 25/1638/1335 (Walter de Weros), DL 25/1639/1341, DL 25/1638/1336 (Richard de Waldegrave), DL 25/1638/1334 (John Burley) and DL 25/1638/1333 (Miles Stapleton).



Fig 11. Impression of the seal of Humphrey IX. TNA, PRO, DL 25/1639/1337. Reproduced with permission from the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

fourteenth-century quatrefoil copper plaque enamelled with the de Bohun coat of arms surrounded by three winged wyverns with long, spiked tails.⁷⁷

Humphrey IX appears to have been the first de Bohun earl to use wyverns in a seal, and it is not clear why he chose them. He was not the first member of his family to do so. His uncle, Edward de Bohun (d. 1334), had also displayed them on his seal.⁷⁸ Although it is possible that both men adopted the wyvern as a symbol of the family's status as marcher lords, it is

77. This plaque, found in Kent, is held at the College of Arms and is dated to the 14th century: College of Arms 1970, 66, pl XLIX, no. 87. The main difference between these wyverns and the one seen in Humphrey IX's seal is that the wyvern in the seal appears wingless.

78. TNA, PRO, E 43/184; Ellis 1981, II, 13. Edward's seal displayed the de Bohun arms on a shield hung from ears of corn between two wyverns.

more likely that their use of the wyvern is related to the women they married.⁷⁹ Humphrey IX may have adopted the wyverns to represent the Lancastrian lineage of his wife, Joan Fitzalan (d. 1419), whose mother was Eleanor Lancaster, daughter of Henry, Earl of Lancaster (d. 1345). Another possibility is that Humphrey's use of the wyvern was related to his status as a crusader, since he was the first de Bohun to go on crusade since 1220.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

The evidence relating to the coats of arms and seals belonging to the earls of the de Bohun family sheds an important light on the ways in which noble families in England developed their heraldic identity starting in the twelfth century. From an early simple design arising from the family's noble marital alliances, the de Bohun coat of arms underwent several transformations over two and a half centuries to reflect the successive earldoms gained by the family and its increasing wealth and power. At the same time, the family's heraldry grew more unique and complex, incorporating symbols that portrayed their ancient lineage and piety. The evidence also indicates that the de Bohun earls' noble seals, while following the fashion of the times, were highly individual and reflected their owners' particular vision of their own identity. Some adopted symbols lasted only one generation, but those that were particularly powerful, like the swan adopted by Humphrey VII to indicate his blood ties to the heroic Godfrey de Bouillon, perdured in time, being taken up by subsequent generations. The de Bohun heraldry provides indisputable evidence that the development of a noble heraldic identity was inextricably tied to the concept of lineage and pride in one's noble ancestors, reflecting the marital alliances and noble titles acquired by families as they grew in power and status, and providing an essential means of ensuring family memory. Humphrey IX's death in 1373 marked the tragic end of a family dynasty that had endured unbroken in the male line for over three centuries. However, the de Bohuns' unique heraldry ensured that they would not be forgotten.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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79. Edward was married to Margaret de Ros. The seals of her father and of her grandfather, lords of Hamlake, show a wingless wyvern on either side of the Ros coat of arms: Birch 1887–90, III, 451, 452; Walden 1984, 173.
80. Wyverns appear in Henry's seal as well as the seals of his brother Thomas of Lancaster (d. 1322) and Henry's son Henry, 1st Duke of Lancaster (d. 1361): Birch 1887–90, II, 339, III, 173–4, 382–3; Blair 1943, pl 10 (f), pl 11 (e). However, the Lancastrian wyverns differ considerably from the one in Humphrey IX's seal and it is also notable that Joan de Bohun did not use wyverns on her seal, choosing instead to adopt the swan as her symbol. This may be because the wyvern was perceived as a male symbol associated with war. See TNA, PRO, DL 25/3379.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

BL British Library, London
 CPR *Calendar of the Patent Rolls*
 LL Lambeth Library, London
 PRO Public Record Office
 TNA The National Archives, Kew

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| LL, <i>Reg. Islip</i> , fol 179 | TNA, PRO, DL 25/1759 |
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| TNA, PRO, DL 25/1625 | TNA, PRO, DL 27/304 |
| TNA, PRO, DL 25/1638/1332 | TNA, PRO, DL 27/319 |
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