

Curator's Choice

This Bottle Belonged to...?

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Old Baltimore (18HA30) was the first county seat of Baltimore County in the 17th century, and the site is currently located on the U.S. Army Garrison Aberdeen Proving Ground. In the late 1990s archaeology conducted by R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates at the Old Baltimore site resulted in the discovery of a bottle seal with an elaborate coat of arms (Figure 1).



Figure 2: 18th-century sealed wine bottles on display in visible storage at the Corning Museum of Glass.

Bottles made of thick dark green glass were adopted in the 17th century to help store, serve, and ship wine. Some bottles were “sealed” by having a personal identifier such as initials, a full name, a coat of arms, or a merchant mark impressed into a blob of hot glass affixed to the bottle (Figure 2). This mark of ownership was symbolic of status, but also helpful when bottles were shipped long distances. Plain bottles were cheaper, but personalization was on trend for those who could afford it. For this bottle seal, the coat of arms and family crest are clear, but archaeologists and historians have yet to determine what family they represent.

Excavations at Old Baltimore focused on a residence occupied by James and Susan Phillips and their children James, Anthony, Margaret, and Martha. James Phillips came to own the property in 1678 by marrying Susan Orchard, widow of the previous owner William Orchard.

James Phillips was born in Sedgeley, Staffordshire England in 1642 to Anthony and Joyce Parks Phillips. Emigration to Maryland apparently helped him make his fortune, because when he died in 1689, he was one of the wealthiest men in Baltimore County with an estate worth £426. Five unnamed enslaved individuals and an unnamed English woman who was an indentured servant appeared in Phillips’ probate inventory as part of the household. The estate was divided among the children, with the bulk going to James Phillips (II), especially after Anthony Phillips died in 1699.

Most of the artifacts recovered at Old Baltimore likely represent the domestic life and work of the Phillips family, slaves, and servants, but they also hosted a lot of visitors. The Phillips’ home was a public house or “ordinary” that lodged people passing through on the Bush River ferry or convening at Baltimore Town for court sessions. Phillips held an ordinary license by 1683, meaning that he was required to provide food, beverages, and sleeping accommodations at prices fixed by legislation. So many people stayed with the Phillips family that by the time James (I)

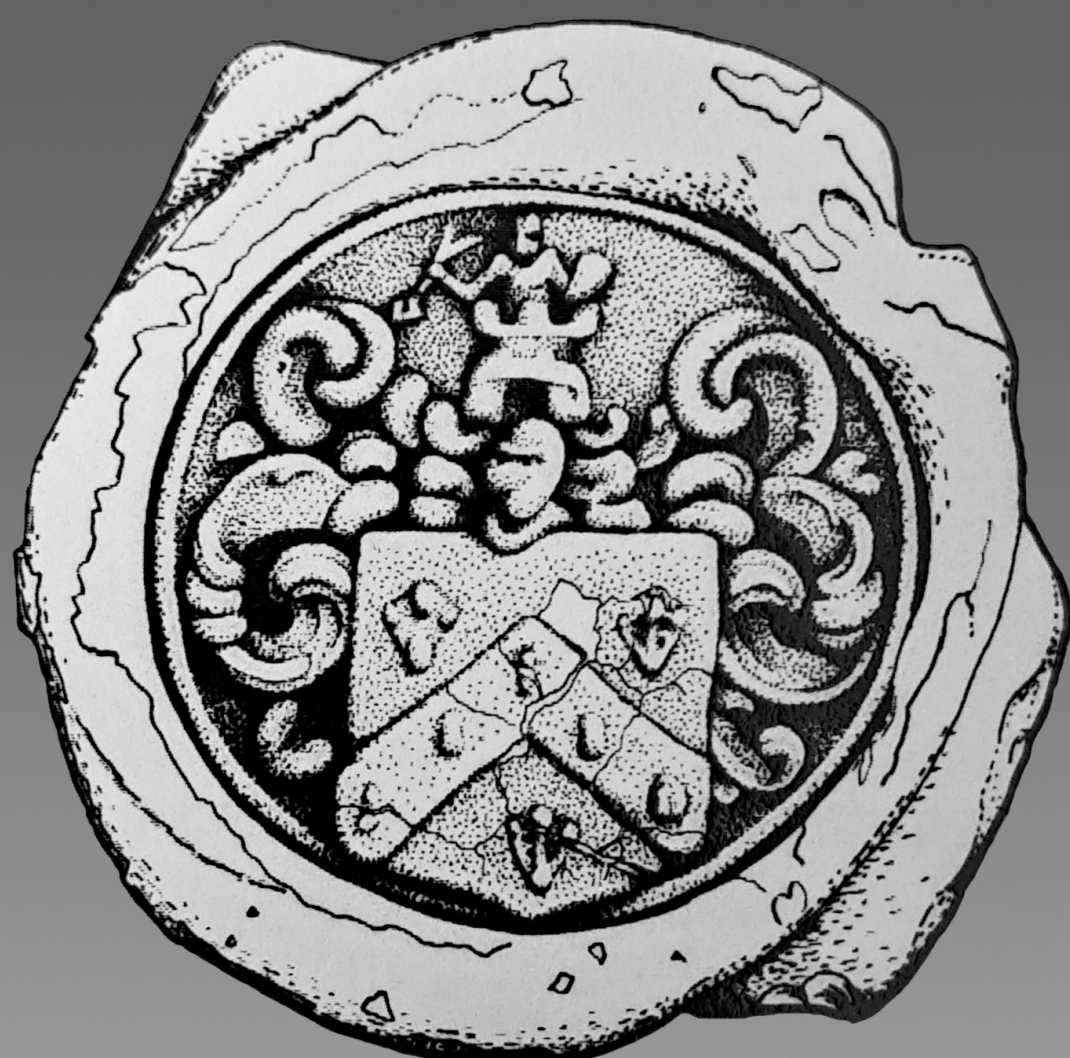


Figure 3: Drawing of the Old Baltimore bottle seal, 18HA30/180. Adapted from Davis et. al. 1999.



Figure 1: Heraldic bottle seal from Old Baltimore (18HA30/180). Courtesy U.S. Army Garrison Aberdeen Proving Ground.

died, at least 240 people owed him a total of 269,502 pounds of tobacco— the equivalent of £1,123! Nearly half of these debts were unenforceable because the debtors died insolvent or ran away.

Why is this relevant to the bottle seal? Well, I have looked for a Phillips family crest that resembles this seal with no luck, making me wonder if it is from one of the lodgers instead. Robust personalized bottles were great for shipping wine, but once the initial beverage was gone, they would be ripe for reuse. It might be handy to have one’s own marked bottle to refill from available casks when visiting the local ordinary.

The bottle seal shows a “heraldic achievement” with a shield representing a coat of arms, a left-facing helmet with the visor closed, and a crest above the helm that depicts a tower or rampart guarded by a human figure holding an arrow and a shield (Figure 3). The closest match to the coat of arms I have found is that of the surname Arnold, which has three downward pointing arrows around a chevron with an ermine pattern (Figure 4). Unfortunately, it is the crest over the helmet that helps specify the family group, and I have been unable to find any crest specific to Arnolds who emigrated to Maryland in the 17th century. Arnolds were certainly here, both in Anne Arundel County in the 17th century

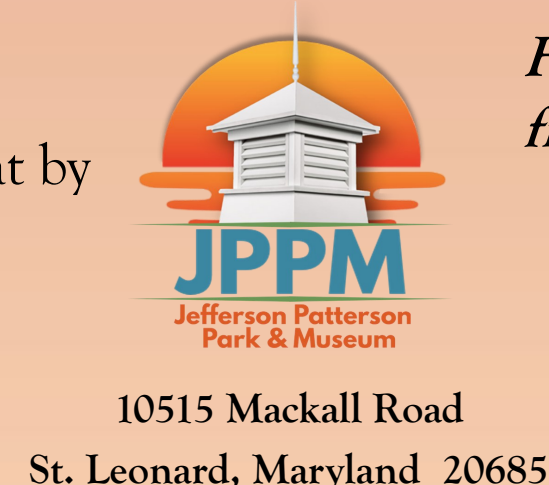
and in Baltimore County by the early 18th century, but so far, I’ve seen no evidence of their connection to Phillips family. Were Arnolds among the people who stayed at the Phillips public house? Or is the coat of arms a match for another family?

For now, this heraldic bottle seal remains a mystery. If you’ve read this far and want to try your hand at heraldic research, maybe you can crack the case! If anyone out there has seen this crest, let me know at



Figure 4: Example of an Arnold coat of arms from cafepress.com.

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Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum is part of the Maryland Historical Trust, an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning, Baltimore.



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