CHAPTER III

THE SEAL, THE MOTTO AND THE COAT OF ARMS

(HERALDIC DEVICE)
At the first meeting of the Senate in March 1912 Mr. J. Kirwan moved and Mr. Walker, the Minister for Education, seconded that a Committee consisting of the Chancellor, Mrs. Moss and Dr. Batty be appointed to obtain and submit designs for a Seal. This Committee reported to the next meeting of the Senate and their report was received together with designs but the adoption was postponed to enable Senators to form their opinions on the matter. These were apparently not too favourable for at the meeting in May 1912, after deciding to pay the prize of £5/5/- to the winner, Mr. F. Wilson moved and Dr. Smith seconded that the designers be asked to submit an amended design showing the Swan at rest.

It was inevitable that a Swan should form the most important feature of the design, but the bird was drawn according to the principles of Heraldry and was a very stiff and unnatural looking fowl. I believe he was a Swan rampant. Perhaps he or she was a Swan Couchant, I do not know.

It was argued that a modern Australian University should discard the trammels of the Science of Heraldry and have a Swan on its Seal which would reproduce as far as may be the grace and beauty of the many black Swans which at that time could be seen on the beach at Crawley, and on the road to Perth. The sticklers for Heraldry maintained that we must observe convention, that if we did not our Seal would not be recognised as properly designed by the King's Herald and other fearsome results would follow. Their views prevailed (Senate, May 1912) with the result that instead of having on our Seal a natural looking Swan we have one which looks like a broody duck with legs too long, neck too short and its
body out of shape.

While the selection of a design for the Seal was proceeding steps were also taken to select a suitable Motto. Fortunately, early in the proceedings, it was decided on the motion by the Pro-Chancellor, (Andrews and Roberts) that the Motto should be in English. A number were submitted and by a committee were reduced to two - "Therefore get wisdom" and "Seek Wisdom." On a final vote "Seek Wisdom" was selected by six votes to four (Senate, July 1912), but so strong was feeling that Mrs. Moss immediately on the vote being taken made an attempt to re-open the whole question. This was of course denied her and an excellent Motto was tacked on to a ridiculous bird in the Seal. Unfortunately all the designs and mottos submitted in the competitions have been lost.

The adoption of an English motto falsified the prophecy of Mr. Underwood uttered during the debate on the University Bill. Said he - "When we put a sign over this building (University) after it is finished it will be in a language not ten members of the House will be able to read." Mr. Moran interjected - "And it will not be in good Latin either."

About 1926 a wealthy Victorian, Mr. Edward Stevens, decided to fill in the great south window of Wilson Hall, Melbourne University with stained glass to a design elaborated by himself and a committee of friends and executed by the artist, Napier Walker. The heraldic devices of the six Australian Universities and of the colleges within the University of Melbourne occupy the ten spaces at the top of the window. When working out the design application was made in March 1928 to the W.A. University for its "Heraldic Device." The W.A. University had to confess that it did not have such an asset.
So Rodney Alsop was asked to make enquiries in Melbourne as to colouring and redesigning of the University Crest which it was asserted was at that time based upon the University Seal, the design to be submitted for approval and use for similar purposes as a Coat of Arms.

During the next month Mr. Alsop (December 1928) forwarded his design together with some sketches of Swans submitted by the Executive of Centenary Celebrations. The Senate decided to leave the matter with the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor with power to spend up to 25 guineas. Mr. Alsop's design gave rise to a repetition of much of the discussions which had taken place over the designs for the Seal in 1912-13. It seemed difficult to get a draughtsman to see a Black Swan as it really is and not as a White Swan or Duck. The peculiar poise of the head and long, straight neck, the essence of grace, seemed to escape them. They persisted in reproducing the conventional Z shaped carriage of the neck which characterises the White Swan but is rarely assumed by the Black Swan. Much the same difficulty in breaking with convention occurred with the early painters of Australian scenery. A critic has told that when he examined a number of early sketches and paintings of Australian scenery he felt there was something wrong with them but could not say what. Finally he saw that the trees (purporting to be Gums) in the landscapes were not the Gum trees he had learned to draw but modifications of the Elms and Oaks the early artists had drawn in England during their training there.

The difficulty in securing an acceptable Swan is shown by two wires from Alsop on 10th March, 1928 - "I have sent amended sketch ..., as worked out in conjunction with Mr. Wilson Dobbs." Two days later he wired - "Since posting armorial Bearings have found better Swan will
Finally the Vice-Chancellor reported to the Senate (March 1930) that in pursuance of the authority given to Dr. Saw (Chancellor) and himself in 1928 they had arranged with Mr. George Kruger Gray of London to design a new University Coat of Arms. The design had been received and with it a highly technical Heraldic description. The description in Mr. Gray's letter is as follows:

Heraldic Description or Blazon.

**Arms** Party chevronwise sable and gold, in the chief two books open having buckles, straps and edges of gold and in the foot a swan all sable.

**Motto** Seek Wisdom.

This heraldic blazon (says Mr. Gray) is written as the Mediaeval Heralds would have written it, and not as the modern Heralds in their late jargon. This assurance from such an authority that their University is from the Heraldic point of view O.K. will give great satisfaction to all West Australians.