The *Little Booke* of Signatures.

This booklet aims to provide you with assistance in developing a period-style signature that suits you.

The earliest personal signatures appear in Europe around the 6th Century, and even then it took another thousand years before they overtook using seals, rings or tokens, x or cross signs, or even complex drawn symbols as personal identifiers. Knowing what is appropriate for you is a nice way to add to your persona.

Please note that the sample letters herein are from electronic sources and may not perfectly mirror period text; some have been developed from specific period manuscripts, with simplifications. Remember, period hands, and especially autographs, could vary greatly too.

So consider this a starting point....

If you want to take it further to full authenticity, take a look at letters and other communications written during your period and see how people signed themselves. Collect as many examples as you can; identify the lettering styles likely in use and then try a range of variations until you have something you're comfortable with. As you can see, perfect letter formation is not required!

*katherine kerr,
her mark*

Signs & Sigils.

Early on, drawn signs were used to identify people. The Visigoths in Iberia used everything from simple crosses (L) to more complex signs doodling in scrolls, dots and petals. These were popular in the 10-11th Century, generally with the illiterate but sometimes with those of rank. Notaries used drawn signs (R) from 12-18C.

An intertwined SSS or SUB, stood for the term *subscripsi* (I have written). These *ruches* were used throughout the Middle Ages and on up to the 1600s in conjunction with personal names as an indication of an item having been signed. Commonly used by kings, the religious upper-ranks, scribes and heralds; still used in legal documents today.

Henry, Lord Darnley (1545-1567)   humanist hand & rude

Elizabeth Tudor (1533-1603)

Jane Grey (1537-1554)   *Jane the Quene*

Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587)

Edward VI (1537-1553)

= Þórr = Thor

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz &

Chancery or Chancellaresca.

This is a humanistic cursive or late Chancery hand, known for its use in legal, religious and royal communication from the 1420s onwards. This version is Spanish from 1570 (PF, Francisco.Lucas Briosa). Sometimes called the Italian hand to differentiate it from an earlier Chancery blackletter.

Runes.

There are many variations of runes used from around 150AD to 1500 across northern Europe & Scandinavia.

Having nice straight lines made runes useful for carving on wood, bone or stone; or inscriptions on jewellery or weapons. Runic manuscripts are rare.

Once Christianized, "Viking" scribes tended to use formal hands such as Caroline miniscule or Gothic for communications, so you don't have to use runes for this type of persona.

If you want to use a rune form of your name, some say you should convert it phoenetically (ie by sound rather than letter); others argue that as some sounds are not covered by the runic alphabet, you're better off coverting letter-for-letter. You choose.

The alphabet opposite are Anglo-Saxon/Frisian runes said to be brought to England by the Vikings and in use from the 5th to 11th century. It is a futhorc alphabet, so named from sounds of the first six letters (the letter þ, called thorn, is a voiced th as in "the"). This rune set was predated by the Elder Futhark and related runes, used by Germanic tribes from the second to eighth centuries.

Remember that there are lots of variations over time and geographical region, so you might want to choose a set of runes that takes that into account.
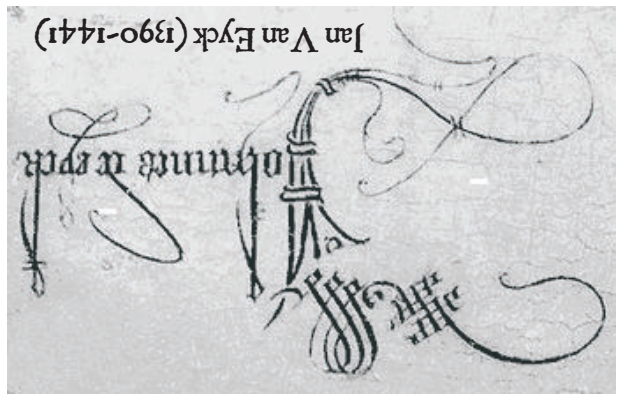
Cesare Borgia
(1475-1507)

Lucrezia Borgia (1480-1519)

Other Things to Consider.

What language would you have written your name in? Consider finding out what Latin form your name and.or titles would have taken. Charles could sign as Carolus; William as Gulielmus and so on.

Names could also be abbreviated: Tho or Thos for Thomas; Jas for James. And there are plenty of examples of names being signed in lower case.

And lots of examples of individual names being spelled all manner of ways, such as: Willm Shakp, William Shaksper, Wm Shakspe, William Shakspere, Willm Shakspere, William Shakspeare (all as used by the Bard himself from 1612-1616; a standardized spelling for his name wasn't settled on until the 20th century!)

Margaret
Beaufort
(1441-1509)

Charles V, France
(1338-1380)

Joan (Jehanne)
of Arc
(1412-1431)

Jan Van Eyck (1390-1441)

Blackletter/Gothic.

Popular through 1200-1500s, especially throughout France, Germany and England. Many variants under many names (eg bastarda, textura, fraktur, rotunda). The blackletter font below is based on the 15C French MS Phoebus 'Book of the Hunt' (PF, X:Beronne).

Humanist.

This humanist cursive was espoused by the likes of Italian handwriting master Ludovico Vicentino degli Arrighi (1475-1527) and very common amongst the educated from the mid-1500s on. (First set below is a free font called Ludovicos). Lots of flourishes and swashes which make it pretty but it was also considered easy to forge.
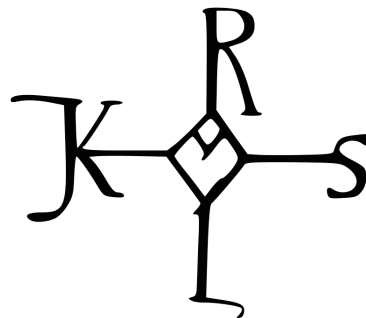
Monogrammatic signs or sigils were made up from the letters of the name or symbols of the profession of the signer. They gained popularity from the 12th Century onwards, specially with artists.
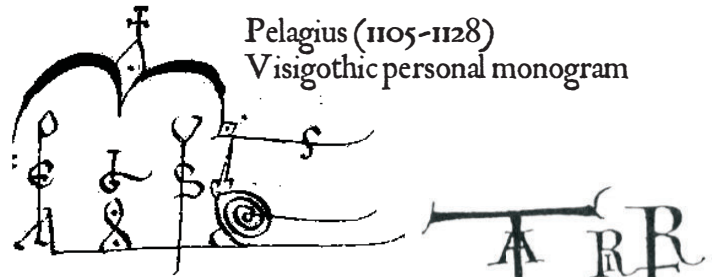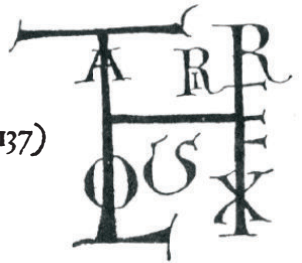
Pelagius (1105-1128)
Visigothic personal monogram

Lothar of Saxony, Rex (1075-1137)

Charlemange (742-814)
The central part is his sign manual, with the Carolus letters added by a scribe.

Albrecht Dürer
(1471-1528)

Batarde/Bastarda.

The first set below is a general Bastarda hand, taken from a Florentine document of 1337, with some German influence in the capitals (Xirwena font, PF). Bastarda is related to Gothic, and was popular in the 14-16th centuries throughout Europe, with many variations.

Henry VIII (1491-1547)

Anne Boleyn (1501-1536)

Thomas More, knight (1478-1535)

Katherine Parr, the Queen Regent (1512-1548)

Secretary Hand.

Secretary hand arose as a cursive option to make writing more legible than Gothic or Bastarda. It was popular in France and Italy in the late 14C and reached England by the 15th. Like some of the earlier cursives, it differed from the more gothic texts by its longer ascenders and descenders above and below the text line.

abcdef ghi i k l mnopqrstuuwxyz

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Richard II (1367-1400)

Henry VI (1421-1471)

Edward IV (1442-1483)

Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492)

Richard (Gloucester) III (1452-1485)

Anne Warwick (1456-1485)