Ever since books were first printed in the 15th century, it has been common practice for collectors and libraries to make some mark of ownership. This might be simply the name of the owner written on the inside cover of the book or even on the title-page, but eventually the favored convention became the bookplate – a label with a distinctive design.

The earliest known examples are from Germany. One, circa 1480, bears a woodcut representing a shield of arms supported by an angel; it was pasted in a book presented to the Carthusian monastery of Buxheim by Brother Hildebrand Brandenburg of Biberach. Between 1503 and 1516 the great Albrecht Dürer engraved several book-plates. Soon, fashion for book-plates spread from Germany to France and Britain. British examples date from about 1574.

The armorial style of design dominated book-plates for a couple of centuries, when books were expensive. Then lighter and more diverse motifs became popular during periods of cheaper printing. After its heyday, the armorial style was added to by landscapes, views of libraries (real and imaginary), allegorical pictures, piles of books and mottoes or quotations.

In 1934 Mayo Clinic Librarian, Miss Frida Pliefke, began a collection of medically themed bookplates. She wrote to hundreds of libraries and received in return a fine assortment of beautiful bookplates. The W. Bruce Fye History of Medicine Library collection comprises over 800 bookplates and this exhibit displays just a sampling of this unique collection.
Bibliography:

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
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