HERALDS AND HERALDRY IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

by Adrian Ailes [1]

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the talk presented by Dr Ailes at the 2013 Annual General Meeting of the FMG. He explains the wide scope of heraldic material available in the British National Archives. Starting with medieval times he expounds the continuity in his subject matter, continuing right through to the present day.

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The National Archives (UK) in Kew, Surrey, holds probably the greatest collection of untapped source material in the United Kingdom for the history of heralds and heraldry. Its public records stretch back over nine hundred years, well before the dawn of heraldry in the second quarter of the twelfth century.

So where does one start when faced with over 100 miles of documents and no single record class devoted to the subject? Normally it would be best to begin with the online Catalogue ('Discovery'), but that brings up over 1800 results if you put the key word 'herald' into the search engine and many of those refer to subjects ranging from the *herald* atomic reactor and the good ship HMS *Herald*, to those well-known rags the *New York Herald* and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Seals

A more reliable approach is to start with The National Archives' vast collection of seals. When the Victorian medievalist and genealogist John Horace Round wrote his seminal article on the introduction of armorial bearings into England he based his arguments on the equestrian seal of Gilbert de Clare, earl of Hertford, which he found in the then Public Record Office (fig. 1).[2] This depicts the earl as a fully armoured knight on horseback, and can be dated to the 1140s. Round demonstrated that Gilbert's shield depicts faint traces of chevrons – upside down 'V's. These chevrons make it one of the earliest known true coats of arms in this country, since these same arms were passed down through the Clare family making them hereditary and, therefore, not just random haphazard shield decoration as we see, for example, on the Bayeux Tapestry. Towards the end of the same century men began to replace the equestrian portraits on their seals with a simple shield of their arms – by now in many ways their *alter ego*. An early example of such an armorial seal is that of Ranulf earl of Chester dating to *c.*1200.[3]

Perhaps the most famous heraldic seals in The National Archives are the two, almost identical, sets once attached to copies of the Barons' Letter to the pope. In this letter, dated 1301, the English barons refused to admit the pope's jurisdiction in the thorny matter of Scots independence.[4] The obverse of the double-sided seal of Ralph de Monthermer taken from the letter portrays him on horseback with

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2 DL 27/47. John Horace Round, "The Introduction of Armorial Bearings into England," *Archaeological Journal* 51 (1894): 43-48. All documents cited are in The National Archives unless otherwise stated.

3 DL 27/235.

4 E 26/1 and 2 and see Deputy Keepers Report VIII, Appendix II, 185-8.

armorial shield, crest, and horse caparison, whilst the reverse depicts his shield of arms – an eagle displayed. Two wyverns fill the spaces on either side of the shield; it has been thought that such practice gave rise to the use of heraldic supporters, such as the lion and the unicorn on the present royal arms.

The National Archives also holds heraldic seals of women, bishops, merchants and towns dating to the middle ages. A particularly fine example is the beautiful seal dating to about 1300 of Elizabeth, daughter of Edward I, displaying the *lion rampant* arms of her husband, the count of Holland, and the *three lions passant guardant* of her father (fig. 2).[5] Another is the very fine seal of Elizabeth de Say dating to 1450. She was the widow of Sir John Montgomery. Her shield is 'impaled', in other words her husband's arms and her arms are shown side by side on the same shield. The 'supporters' on either side of the shield are crocodiles with knotted tails.[6] Hereford was one of the first civic authorities in England to use an armorial seal. Its *three lions passant guardant* coat can be seen on a seal of the bailiffs of the city dating to 1391-2.[7] The counterseal of William Fraser, bishop of St Andrews, dating to the end of the thirteenth century, which shows St Andrew on his cross, the bishop himself, and two shields each charged with six Fraser cinquefoils is the earliest known example of a bishop in Britain using personal arms on his episcopal seal of dignity.[8]

It is important to remember that many people used the seals of others to validate their documents when they did not have their own seal with them. An example is the seal (depicting three rabbits) attached to a receipt dated 28 April 1304 drawn up by John de Segrave; it is, in fact, that of his *valettus* (esquire) borrowed for the occasion.[9]

There are three ways of looking up heraldic seals in The National Archives. The first is the card index in the Map and Large Document Room on the second floor. Although it only contains references and descriptions to about 10% of the seal collections, many of the important heraldic seals have been included, and all the heraldry from these cards is in the new *Dictionary of British Arms,* which covers the period up to 1530. The card index has recently been digitised and should shortly be available online.

The second means of reference to seals in The National Archives is the two published *Catalogues of Seals in the Public Record Office: Personal Seals* compiled in 1978 and 1981 by Roger Ellis, and his single volume on *Monastic Seals* published in 1986. These cover the seals in the S (for seals) series of Ancient Deeds. Amongst those listed is the splendid seal (1242) of Roger de Quincy, earl of Winchester, on which he battles with a ramping lion. Roger bears a wyvern on his helmet – an early depiction of a sculptured crest (fig. 3).[10]

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5 SC 13/F151.

6 E 327/620.

7 E 329/350.

8 SC 13/C50.

9 E 101/10/18/part 2/169. Such borrowing is often mentioned in the sealing clause of the document.

10 DL 27/203; P 1916 in the Ellis catalogue.

Fig. 1 Seal of Gilbert de Clare, earl of Hertford, c. 1146 (DL 27/47)



Fig. 2 Seal of Elizabeth, countess of Holland, c. 1300 (SC 13/F151)



Fig. 3 Seal of Roger de Quincy, earl of Winchester, c. 1243 (DL 27/203).



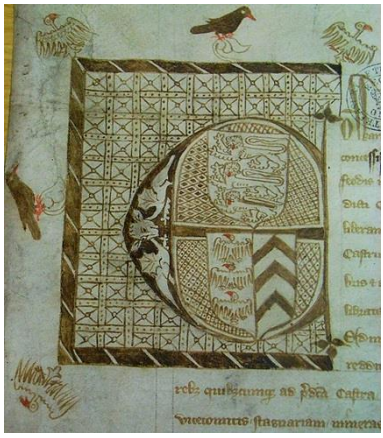
Fig. 4 Grant of arms to Bernard Angevin. Gascon Roll, 1445 (C 61/133B).



Fig. 5 Sketch of Edward I of England and Philip IV of France. Exchequer Memoranda Roll, 1297 (E 368/69).



Fig. 6 Edward II creates Gaveston, earl of Cornwall. Exchequer, Treasury of Receipt, Ancient Deeds, 1307 (E 41/460).



The third method is the search facility accessible via the online Seals Research Guide available on The National Archives website.[11] This searches a database of 2,500 seals in the Duchy of Lancaster deeds in DL 25 and 26 and provides free images of those seals. Thus, you can search for 'lion', or 'fleur de lis' or 'eagle', an individual or place, and refine by date. A print out of the database is available in the Map Room.

Seals really deserve a talk in their own right. Medieval examples depicting heraldry can range from the magnificent double-sided great seal of John de Warenne earl of Surrey and Strathearn, dating to 1346, to the much smaller but equally important seal belonging to the lowly *valettus* or esquire, Roger de Merdisfen in 1303.[12] The latter is noticeable since it provides our first example of a man of sub-knightly rank using a coat of arms. The arms depicted – three bars each charged with a small bird or 'martlet' – are based on those of his lord, Aymer de Valence. They are, therefore, also an early example of the heraldic practice of 'differencing', whereby a coat of arms was deliberately designed to resemble another coat of arms, in order to reflect a family, feudal, or similar relationship.

Medieval Chancery

Although the main series of Chancery rolls – the close, patent and charter rolls – dating from the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth – are not specifically heraldic records, they do contain much heraldic information; it just needs wheedling out. You can, for example, find several references to heralds by scouring the indexes to the splendid run of published calendars. The Chancery rolls furnish us with several notable examples of royal and private grants of arms and crests. For example, the charter roll for the ninth year of the reign of Edward III records that in 1335 the king, 'out of affection', granted his own eagle crest to his favourite, William de Montagu, and the same crest can be seen on Montagu's new seal.[13]

In another example, this time from the Chancery patent rolls, Richard II grants arms in 1389 to his liege man, John de Kyngeston, who had been challenged to a duel by a Frenchman but was unable to accept because he was of inferior status and lacked a coat of arms. This is the earliest known surviving grant of a newly devised coat in this country.[14]

The patent rolls also provide examples of private grants of arms. This might occur when alienations were granted in order to perpetuate the family name and arms which might otherwise have been lost through an heiress or lack of heirs. In 1314 and 1317 Edmund Lord Deincourt, realising that his name and arms would be lost from memory in the person of his grandaughter, Isabella, received from the king a licence (hence the copy on the patent roll) to alienate his lands, properties and advowsons, which he held from the Crown, to whomsoever he wished, but that person to bear his surname and arms after his death.[15]

The patent rolls, incidentally, also include copies of the letters patent incorporating the College of Arms in 1484 and 1555, most of the royal commissions authorising

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11 http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/seals.htm (accessed February 2014).

12 E 42/244; E 213/13 and compare seal of Aymer de Valence E 42/68.

13 C 53/122 m. 3; *Calendar of Charter Rolls 4*, 348, 349; E 43/493.

14 C 66/328 m. 37; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1388-92*, 172. For the authorising warrant: C 81/505 no. 5280.

15 C 66/141 m. 21, C 66/147 m.13; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1314-17*, 89, 651-52.

heralds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to go on county visitations when they recorded the arms, status, and pedigrees of the local gentry, as well as copies of letters patent creating officers of arms right down to the present day.

The Chancery close rolls likewise contain various snippets of heraldic information, including Henry V's attempt in 1417 to clamp down on the unauthorized wearing of coats of arms.[16] Again private grants of arms crop up. In 1383 Sir John de Lillebon granted and quitclaimed to William Fifyde, his heirs and assigns the arms and crest now in his possession that had previously belonged to the late Sir Hugh de Boucy.[17] And in 1427 the esquire Hamlet (or Hamelet) Smethwick in a release granted arms to his cousin Sir John Atwood of Worcester.[18] Like many private deeds this too was centrally enrolled on the close rolls as a permanent record.

Fifteenth-century Gascon rolls and Treaty rolls of the early modern period contain copies of royal grants of arms to important foreigners, including ambassadors. The enrolled grant of arms (or technically of nobility to which new arms were attached) dated 1445 to Bernard Angevin, a member of Henry VI's council in Bordeaux, includes a fine painting of the new arms, crest, mantling, and angel supporters (fig. 4).[19]

Drafts of royal grants of arms can be found in the Chancery warrants that authorised the letters patent subsequently issued under the great seal. In a few cases they contain illustrations of the arms to be granted so that the same arms could be accurately reproduced on the grant itself (as given to the grantee) and on the Chancery enrolment.[20] The warrants for Henry VI's grants of arms in 1449 to his two educational foundations, King's College Cambridge, and Eton, are however, still attached to the charter roll on which they were later enrolled.[21]

Medieval Exchequer

One might not expect to find the record of the king's financial office, the medieval Exchequer, to yield much heraldic fruit, but it is surprising what is there. Even doodles in the margins of Exchequer rolls can reveal some interesting heraldry. A sketch in the margin of a memoranda roll of 1297 depicts Edward I and Philip IV of France 'eyeballing' each other, rather like boxers before a big match. The text alongside refers to just such a standoff – a truce in the war over Gascony. Both men are clearly identifiable by their heraldic devices place above them – a *lion passant guardant* for England and a *fleur de lis* for France (fig. 5).[22]

Sadly such visual material is rare; a better place to find heraldry amongst the Exchequer records is in the household and wardrobe accounts of the king. Here, for example, we find payment in 1284-85 to Robert King of Heralds, at a time when the heralds in the royal household were listed in the financial records under minstrels.[23] Expenses for plate, jewels, livery, cloth and so forth listed in the

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16 C 54/267 m. 15d; *Calendar of Close Rolls 1413-19,* 433.

17 C 54/224 m.41d; *Calendar of Close Rolls 1381-85,* 383-84.

18 C 54/278 m. 20d; *Calendar of Close Rolls 1422-29,* 378.

19 C 61/133B.

20 For example, Henry VI's grants of arms to Roger and Thomas Keys (C 81/1454 no. 15) and Nicholas Cloos (C 81/1479 no. 41).

21 C 53/53/190 m. 43; *Calendar of Charter Rolls* **4**, 106.

22 E 368/69 m. 54.

23 E 101/351/26 m. 2.

Household and Wardrobe Accounts often include details of the heraldic decoration involved.

Another excellent source for information on the heralds in the Exchequer records is the issue or pell rolls containing payments made out of crown revenues. A useful introduction to these is the three books by Frederick Devon entitled *Issues of the Exchequer*, since they provide miscellaneous examples translated from the Latin. An example is the entry in the eleventh year of the reign of Henry VI, where payment is made to Gloucester Herald who had been robbed whilst on a mission to France.[24] All these payments had first to be authorised and the initial warrants for their issues are helpfully listed for the Middle Ages in *List and Index Volume Supplementary Series no. IX*.

Some of the most important and most personal records of the Crown, such as treaties and Domesday Book, were kept in the treasuries of the Exchequer for safe keeping. Such works were sometimes decorated with heraldry, as with Edward II's charter of 1307 creating his favourite, Piers Gaveston, earl of Cornwall (fig. 6). The opening initial features the royal arms and a shield of Gaveston impaling the chevrons of the Clare family (Gaveston's future wife).[25] Even some of the chests holding the documents were emblazoned with heraldry, including the Bruce chest dating to 1360/61 which held records relating to the ransom of David II of Scotland (fig. 7).[26]

The National Archives holds only two medieval rolls of arms – that is rolls or books containing illustrations or descriptions of arms. Both are in large illuminated volumes of miscellaneous records originally kept in the office of the duchy of Lancaster. The first is the *Great Cowcher Book* of the duchy dating to about 1402.[27] It is decorated with sixteen beautifully executed banners of the arms of the honours of the duchy. The second, the *Furness Cowcher Book*, dating to about a decade later, contains eighty-four shields of benefactors' arms.[28]

Before leaving the Middle Ages mention should be made of the legal records of the period. Heralds do occasionally appear in the Chancery and Exchequer courts, but by far the most important, heraldically speaking, is the court of chivalry. The most famous case to take place in this court was that between Richard Scrope and Robert Grosvenor, which began in 1385, over who had the better right to these very simple arms: *azure a bend or* (blue with a gold bend). One of the witnesses called to give evidence was the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, whose deposition is dated 15 October 1386.[29]

The records of another court, the High Court of Admiralty, contain the oaths made by officers of arms at their creation. These date to around the mid-fifteenth century. That of a new king of arms (the most senior rank of heralds) states that he must know and register the arms and pedigrees of those in his province – a clear precursor to the heralds' visitations mentioned earlier. The oaths can be found in the Black Book of the Admiralty (fig. 8).[30]

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[24] Frederick Devon, *Issues of the Exchequer: from King Henry III to King Henry VI inclusive* (1837), 419; E 403/706 m. 8.

[25] E 41/460.

[26] E 27/9 and *cf* the contemporary Calais chest E 27/8.

[27] DL 42/2.

[28] DL 42/3.

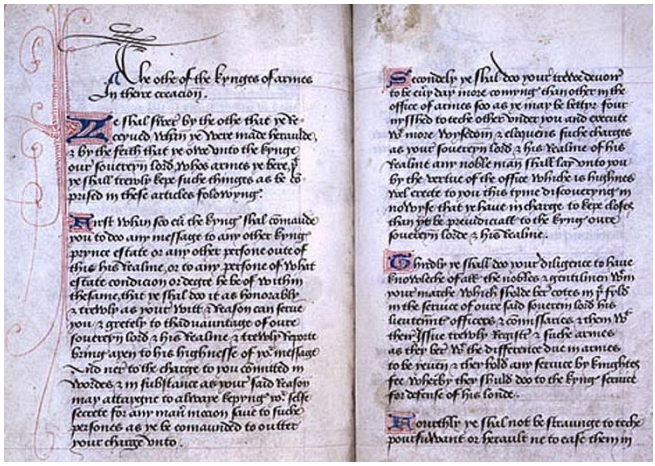
[29] C 47/6/2, m. 33.

[30] HCA 12/1.

Fig. 7 Bruce Ransom Chest, 1360/61 (E 27/9).



Fig. 8 Creation oath of a king of arms. Black Book of the Admiralty, mid-15th century (HCA 12/1).



The othe of the kynges of armes in theire creacion.

Ye shal sweare by the othe that ye made whan ye were made herauld, & by the feith that ye owe vnto the kynge our souereyn lord, whos armes ye bere, that ye shall trewly kepe suche thinges as be purposed in these articles folowyng.

Firste whan so eu the kyng shal comaunde you to doo any message to any other kyng prynce of state or any other persone oute of this his realme, or to any persone of what estate condicion or degree he be of within the same, that ye shal doo it as honorably & trewly as your witt & reason can serue you, & gretely to the auauntage of oure souereyn lord & his realme & trewly report hime ayen to his highnesse of yo^r message & nat to the charge to you committed in woordes, & in substance as your said reason may attayne to attayne kepyng yo^r self secrete for any man maner sute to suche persones as ye be comaunded to outtre your charge vnto.

Secondely ye shal doo your trewe deuoir to be euy day more comyng than other in the office of armes soo as ye may be better your self to rede other vnder you and execute yo^r more worshepfully & elaquently suche charges as your souereyn lord & his realme of his realme any noble man shall lay vnto you by the vertue of the office whiche to hughnes wil create to you this tyme discouering in no wyse that ye haue in charge to kepe close than may be preiudiciall to the kyng our souereyn lorde & his realme.

Thirdely ye shall doo your diligence to haue knowlege of all the nobles & gentilmen wm your marche which shalde be cotte in yo^r field in the seruice of oure said souereyn lord his lieutenant officers & commissaries whom yo^r then shal trewly enquire & suche armes as they be wt the difference due to armes to be vsed & ther fold any seruice by knightes fee whereby they shuld doo to the kyng seruice for defense of his londe.

Fourthly ye shal not be straunge to rede your auisement or counsaile ne to ease them in

Fig. 9 Arms of the Protectorate. State Papers Ireland, c. 1656 (SP 63/281).



Tudors and Stuarts

The Tudors and Stuarts witnessed the rise of an astonishing new set of records – the state papers. These in essence were the letters (usually incoming) and papers of the secretaries of state – the chief executive ministers of the Crown in England and Wales. They cover just about every aspect of domestic and foreign policy including a surprising number of references to the heralds and heraldry. Again, the best place to start searching is with the published calendars, and they can also be searched on the British History Online and State Papers Online websites.[31]

Unfortunately there is only space to quote three heraldic examples from this extraordinary hotchpotch of material. The first refers to the very real concern of William Cecil, Elizabeth I's secretary of state, at the overt use by Mary Queen of Scots of the royal arms of England. This was seen by many as a clear indication of her dynastic ambitions towards the English throne.[32] The second is taken from the private papers of Sir Joseph Williamson, keeper of the state papers from 1661 to 1702. He bequeathed a number of important heraldic documents to the State Paper Office including fifteen original Tudor and Stuart grants of arms,[33] a book of knighthood translated from the French by Thomas Wall, Windsor Herald to Henry VIII,[34] and a collection of heraldic and genealogical notes that once belonged to the herald William Ryley, who died in 1667.[35] The third heraldic example is from the state papers for Ireland and is taken from Oliver Cromwell's Irish accounts for 1649-1656. It contains a rare contemporary coloured depiction of the arms of the Protectorate – a strange mixture of royalist and republican heraldry with Cromwell's family arms (a white lion on a black shield) prominently placed at the centre (fig. 9).[36]

It is also worth mentioning that some funeral certificates, where heralds presided at interments, for Charles I's reign can also be found in the state papers.[37]

During the early modern period the Exchequer continued to safeguard important treaties and documents. Three are especially noteworthy for their heraldry. The first is from Henry VII's 1504 foundation indenture of his Lady Chapel in Westminster Abbey. It is richly decorated with Tudor arms and badges – unambiguous symbols of the king's dynastic claims and new found power.[38]

The second is a book of documents from 1522 relating to St George's Chapel, Windsor, the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter. In this work the revised statutes of the Order open with two paintings: the arms of Henry VIII as sovereign of the Order (St George impaling the royal arms) within the Garter, and, also surrounded by the Garter, the red and white roses, the respective badges of Henry's parents; the roses are depicted *en soleil* and joined at the stem which issues from a sunburst, a badge associated with Windsor (fig. 10).[39]

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31 http://www.british-history.ac.uk/; http://gale.cengage.co.uk/state-papers-online-15091714.aspx (accessed February 2014).

32 SP 12/7; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, 1547-80,* 144; SP 70/5 no. 393; *Calendar of State Papers France 1558-59*, 312 and see 314, 348, 416, 447, 457, 476.

33 SP/9/1/1-15.

34 SP 9/31/2.

35 SP 9/33.

36 SP 63/281.

37 SP 16/360 and SP 17.

38 E 33/1.

39 E 36/113 pp. 58-59.

Fig. 10 Sovereign's arms and the badge of the Order of the Garter. Exchequer, Treasury of Receipt, Miscellaneous Books, 1522 (E 36/113).



The third example is a superbly illuminated 1605 ratification of the Treaty of London which ended the war between England and Spain after nearly twenty years. The treaty ratification was presented to James I by Philip III of Spain whose arms are here encircled by a collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The treaty can be found amongst the Diplomatic Documents kept in the Exchequer.[40]

A new class of records to appear during this period comprised those of the Lord Chamberlain who helped looked after the affairs of the royal household, including major royal and state occasions such as christenings, wedding and funerals, events in which the heralds and heraldry very often featured. The expenses listed in the Lord Chamberlain's registers for Elizabeth I's funeral in 1603 include payments to John Parr for embroidering the 'Great Banner' and a tabard of the royal arms, and to Leonard Frier for making the royal helm and crest, a shield crowned and encircled by the Garter, and a sword. All of these were carried by the heralds in Elizabeth's funeral procession, as depicted in a contemporary illumination now in the British Library.[41]

The nobility and gentry of Tudor and Stuart Britain were keen to emphasise their pedigree, power, and position by using heraldry. One way to do this was to use multiple quarterings on their shields. This armorial ostentation is clearly evident from the seal of Henry Algernon Percy, earl of Northumberland dating to 1528. The obverse depicts a complete achievement of his arms: a shield of no less than five quarterings, helm, crest, mantling, supporters and motto.[42]

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40 E 30/1705.

41 LC 2/4/4 ff. 12v-13r; British Library Additional MS 35324 f. 36v.

42 E 329/405.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The accession of William of Orange in 1689, the Union with Scotland in 1707, the coming of the Hanoverians in 1714, and the Union with Ireland in 1801 all resulted in changes to the royal arms as depicted on government seals and official documents. This is perhaps most vividly demonstrated over time by beautifully illuminated Treasury commissions appointing Lord Commissioners, and which are now in the Treasury files.[43] Redesigns of the royal arms in anticipation of the Act of Union with Ireland were approved by the king in Council in November 1800. They are recorded in the registers of the Privy Council and duplicated in a new class of records – those of the Home Office which, along with the Foreign Office, replaced the old State Papers Office in 1782. The new designs include the earliest known official depiction of the present Union Flag. [44]

Applications for grants or augmentations of arms, and for change of names and arms, during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can also be found amongst the state papers and records of the Home Office.[45] An example is the copy of the royal licence, dated 18 July 1775, to Lord de Ferrers, granting him the right to combine the swan and ostrich feather badges of his ancestor, Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, and use them on a ducal coronet as his family crest (fig. 11).[46] Another is the draft of a royal licence drawn up by Garter King of Arms in 1867 and amended by 10 Downing Street granting to the father of the famous explorer, Captain John Speke, certain 'augmentations' (heraldic honours) to his arms including the word 'NILE' (the source of which Speke had discovered). Unusually for a man of his relatively lowly status, he was allowed heraldic supporters.[47]

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Lord Chamberlain continued to record payments for the heralds' participation in, and the production of, heraldry for royal and state occasions. The Lord Chamberlain's registers include payments to herald painters for various items for the state funerals of William Pitt in 1778 and Lord Nelson in 1806, Clarenceux King of Arms' expenses for escorting Queen Caroline's body to Brunswick where she was buried in 1821, and the costs of new tabards for the heralds of England, Scotland, and Ireland at coronations such as that of William IV in 1831; further payments to heralds, including their paltry salaries, can be found in the Treasury Books and Papers many of which have been published in calendars.[48]

Some splendid heraldic sketches for the decoration of Sir Charles Barry's new Houses of Parliament begun in the 1840s, can be found amongst the files of the old Ministry of Works.[49]

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43 T 40.

44 PC 2/157 f. 1; HO 38/9.

45 SP 44; HO 45; HO 142.

46 SP 44/381 pp. 407-8.

47 HO 45/8568.

48 LC 2; T 1.

49 WORK 29/2716.

Fig. 11 Copy of Royal Licence for Lord Ferrers to use badges of Thomas of Woodstock. State Papers, 1775 (SP 44/381).

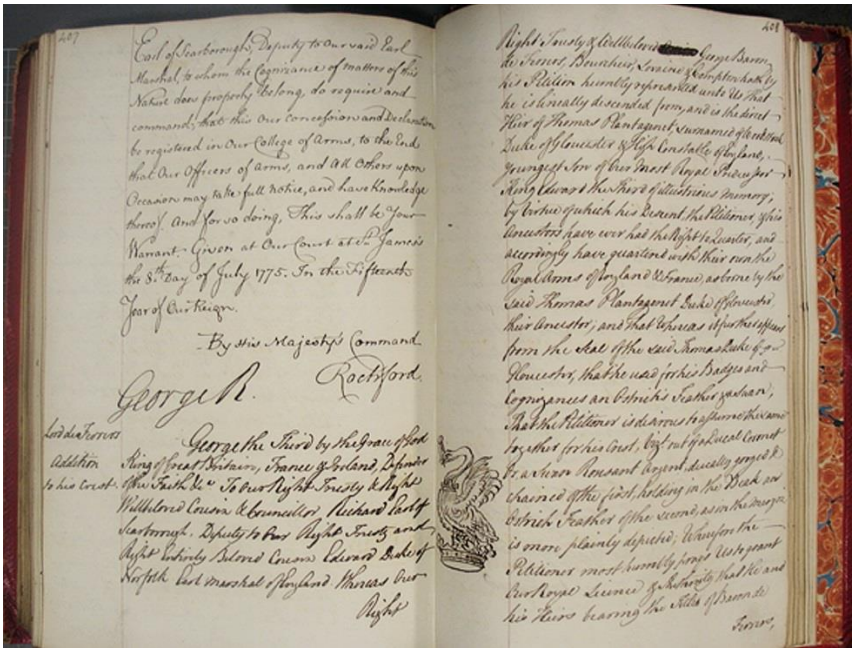


Fig. 12 Flag for Governor General of Canada. Colonial Office, 1870 (CO 325/54).



The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the rise of Britain as an imperial power, exporting its heraldry to the far-flung corners of the globe, and forcing the government at home to keep control, or at least a central record, of the arms and devices borne by its overseas possessions. Many colonial seals during this period depicted the royal arms and a local seascape or landscape, such as George III's seal for the Bahamas found in the Colonial Office papers.[50] From the late 1860s the Admiralty required governors of colonies to fly the union flag charged with the badge of their colony at its centre, and the ships of those possessions to use the same flag-badge in the fly of the blue ensign (fig. 12). Many of these flag-badges were derived from the colony's seal, as, for example, the ship design of the Bahamas.[51] Approved flags were painted into an official record held by the Colonial Office, whilst the flag-badges were regularly published by the Admiralty for identification at sea.[52]

Not all colonial badges were heraldic and some were very poorly designed, containing far too much naturalistic detail. Indeed, Victoria's reign witnessed an all-time low for heraldic art. Some of the worst examples can be seen on the 3000 or so often gaudily illuminated addresses to the queen on the occasions of her golden and diamond jubilees in 1887 and 1897, respectively. Some of the commemorative heraldry was, however, much better such as that seen on the beautiful scroll presented by the Order of St John of Jerusalem in 1897.[53]

Twentieth Century

During the twentieth century files from the Treasury Solicitor and Home Office have much to say on the vexed question of imperial jurisdiction – the seemingly interminable argument between the three heraldic authorities – the College of Arms for England and Wales, Lyon Court in Scotland, and the Office of Arms in Dublin – over their rights and responsibilities in relation to each other. The debate opened in 1907 and rumbled on for the next half century. Included are some pretty heated correspondence, especially between the College and Lyon Court. But, acrimony aside, the papers include valuable examples of precedence, excellent background histories of the three heraldic offices, and detailed explanations of their respective roles.[54]

The St Andrew Society of Scotland took part in the same debate. It also lobbied the Home Office, Scottish Office, War Office, and in particular the Royal Mint, with a series of letters and petitions for Scots heraldry to be included on coins of the realm and these can be found in the respective files. The Society eventually wore down the Mint and in 1937 and 1953 shillings depicting Scots heraldry were finally produced.[55]

The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion in its turn campaigned hard for Welsh representation on coins, and on the royal arms, royal standard and national flag. A compromise was reached in February 1911 whereby, according to the records of the Privy Council, George V authorised that the ancient arms of Gwynedd

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50 CO 5/285.

51 ADM 116/213; MT 9/183.

52 CO 325/54. See also MT 9/183.

53 PP 1/160; PP 1/328.

54 TS 27/421; HO 45/23969.

55 HO 45/7111; MINT 20/2262.

(quarterly of four lions) and the red dragon be incorporated into the armorial achievement of his son, the prince of Wales, and in March 1953 Elizabeth II approved in Council a new royal badge for the greater honour and distinction of the principality.[56]

The twentieth century was, of course, dominated by two world wars, and the War Office, Admiralty and Air Ministry files often include draft designs and formal approval of new army, navy and air force badges. These include a detailed sketch produced in 1923 of a new cap badge for the Royal Tank Corps (later the Royal Tank Regiment), and a photograph of the new hind's head badge for 15 bomber squadron signed by Edward VIII; in 1936 the squadron flew Hawker Hind aircraft.[57]

The benefits of government nationalisation after the war were much debated, but at least one result was the accession as public records of the letters patent granting arms to the Great Central Railway Company and the London and North Eastern Railway Company in 1898 and 1923 respectively.[58] It also meant that The National Archives now holds a superb 1953 coronation poster from British Rail featuring a magnificent rendition of the modern royal arms: colourful, vibrant, well-proportioned, and instantly recognisable – a classic example of good heraldry.[59] Records of the past half century include recently released Cabinet minutes on what royal cypher or arms to put on pillar boxes in 1952 without offending the Scots,[60] colonial office files on what flags to fly as the sun set on empire,[61] and heraldic designs produced by the Ministry of Works for the Investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1969.[62]

Concluding remarks

This paper has only scratched at the surface of the 800 years or so of heraldry contained within The National Archives, and for brevity has been restricted to British and colonial heraldry. Nevertheless, it gives a taste of what heraldic riches can be found stored within the nation's memory at Kew.

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56 PC 8/706; PC 2/709 f. 271.

57 WO 103/60 f. 293; AIR 2/2287.

58 RAIL 226/74; RAIL 392/142.

59 AN 14/48.

60 CAB 128/26 being cc (53) 22 item 6 (meeting of 24 March 1953) and see also cc (53) 13 and CAB 195/11.

61 For example, Singapore, CO 323/1929/4.

62 WORK 65/8.