



The Voice

Queensferry Heritage Trust

January 2018

The committee would like to wish all members a very happy New Year.

Does Queensferry Have a Coat of Arms?



Road Sign
Fig. 1



Rosebery Hall Well-plate
Fig. 2

Obviously we do, but are the arms on the road signs (Fig. 1), and those on the Rosebery Hall well-plate (Fig. 2), really Queensferry's arms?

Coats of Arms, technically called *armorial bearings*, appeared around the time of the early Crusades. The development of armour and the great helm, which covered the knight's face, created a need for visual identification and jousting and tournaments developed the "science" of heraldry further. In 1672 an act of the Scottish Parliament required all armorial bearings to be recorded in the Lyon Register. Arms which were not registered were declared to be illegal. In Scotland, armorial bearings, and the other aspects of heraldry, come under the control of the Lord Lyon, King of Arms. The Lord Lyon has his own civil court to decide on matters of heraldic dispute and he can fine anyone for the illegal use of arms and confiscate any items displaying such arms.



As in the Lyon Register
Fig. 3



Queensferry's Seal
Fig. 4



Bute's Error
Fig. 5

Queensferry was one of the first royal burghs to record arms, c.1673 (*Fig. 3*). The arms were based on the burgh's common seal (*Fig. 4*) which has on the front a pictorial (i.e. not armorial) representation of Queen Margaret standing on a galley, holding in her right hand a sceptre topped with a fleur-de-lys, signifying justice and purity. In her left hand she holds her Gospel book, which had been dropped in a river and when later found was miraculously without blemish. The book exists and is held in Oxford's Bodleian Library.

The rear of the burgh seal is armorial, with a coat of arms displaying five birds on and around a cross – as seen on the Rosebery Hall well-plate (*Fig. 2*). Local tradition explains that when Queen Margaret first arrived at the Binks Rocks, five sea-fowls flew through the air in the form of a cross and then landed on the ship's rigging, still in that shape. In fact, the rear of the seal is far more likely to represent the arms of Queen Margaret – five martlets (swallows) surrounding a “cross fleury”, which is based on the arms of her great-uncle, Edward the Confessor (*Fig. 8*). Incidentally, to add to the confusion, the arms of Queen Margaret and Edward the Confessor are termed “assigned” as they both died before heraldry was invented.

Initially, the royal burghs agreed to record their arms in the Lyon Register but by 1694 only a quarter had done so. By 1897 a further six had registered arms but the others still had not. At this point John, 3rd Marquess of Bute, decided he would create the missing coats of arms and publish them in a book, *The Arms of the Royal and Parliamentary Burghs of Scotland*, along with the 22 arms already registered. He then sent a copy of his book to each of the royal burghs and they duly placed it in their burgh library.

The Marquess was considered to be a man of intellect and learning and he was also one of the wealthiest men in Europe (his grandfather having married not one but two heiresses and his father having developed the port of Cardiff). However, while recording the arms of the burghs in his book he got one of them wrong. *Queensferry!*

Armorial bearings are recorded, not as images, but as textual descriptions called *blazon*. The blazon for Queensferry (in modern language) starts off, “*White in a sea, blue, a galley with her sails trussed up, black*”. This means that the arms have a black ship in a blue sea all on a white shield. The Marquess, while copying Queensferry’s arms, missed out the first part (“*White in a sea*”) which leaves the blazon as, “*Blue, a galley with her sails trussed up, black*”.

Although the Marquess had accidentally removed the first part of the blazon, the remainder can still be read as a coat of arms (a black ship on a blue shield but with no sea – *Fig. 5*) but this breaks a fundamental rule of heraldry: “*colour shall not display upon colour*”. In coats of arms, there are *colours* (red, blue, green, black, purple and brown) and *metals* (yellow and white). To achieve good visual contrast, items of *metals* should be on a background of *colour*, or vice versa, and never *colour upon colour* or *metal upon metal*. The Marquess did not realise his mistake and he blamed the Lord Lyon for allowing *colour on colour*. Did the Marquess’ erroneous arms have any effect? The Queensferry Arms Hotel (now the *Orocco Pier Hotel*) adopted similar arms (*Fig. 6*) and our current road signs are based on the hotel sign. Also, countless Queensferry souvenirs, known as crestware (*Fig. 7*), and many postcards, used his incorrect arms.



Queensferry Arms Hotel
Fig. 6



Crestware Souvenir
Fig. 7



Edward the Confessor
Fig. 8

How about the Queensferry burgh council, what did they make of all this? Looking through the examples of burgh documents in Queensferry Museum, there are no examples of the council ever having used the Lyon Register arms. In 1821 the Council decided to refurbish the Vennel Church, including the addition of a newly carved display of the burgh arms “after the pattern of the Town’s seals” (now in the parish church on the Loan - *Fig. 10*). In fact, the burgh council used representations of its common seal on burgh documents and on headed notepaper right up until the council was abolished in 1975 (*Fig. 9*).



Letter head of the Royal Burgh of Queensferry (Queensferry Museum)

Fig. 9

In summary, Queensferry has the most confused and complicated arms of any of the royal burghs. The council registered the pictorial front of the burgh seal, and not the armorial rear, and then ignored the Lyon Register arms for the rest of its existence, using representations of the burgh seal instead. The Marquess of Bute published an incorrect description of the burgh’s arms, which was widely used locally and appeared on many souvenirs which were distributed worldwide. Although all burgh arms were withdrawn in 1975 when the burghs were abolished, numerous and various versions of the burgh arms and the burgh seal, all unregistered, have appeared and continue to do so (see the Ferry Fair website or the recent Queensferry Ambition town map).

After 345 years of great confusion, what should Queensferry now use for its insignia? The Queensferry and District Community Council (QDCC) applied to the Lord Lyon for arms and was granted the original burgh arms surmounted by a community council coronet (*Fig. 11*) but this can only be used by the QDCC. Looking at the numerous objects in Queensferry Museum, it can be seen that there are many ways in which Queensferry’s

insignia can be displayed. For general use, perhaps the council had the answer: use the burgh seal (*Fig. 9*) and avoid the confusion and complexities of coats of arms. Linlithgow has adopted this approach – observe its road signs next time you visit.



"Burgh Arms" in the Parish Church
Fig. 10



QDCC Arms
(© Queensferry and District Community Council)
Fig. 11

We are grateful to Frank Hay, Queensferry History Society for once again writing this very interesting article for “The Voice.” Frank has given us a number of unusual articles of Heritage interest - Christmas Ship, Statue at Dundas etc..

It would be really appreciated if other members who have information or research knowledge of Heritage Interest would like to share their findings with members.

If you have a piece you would like to share please send it to Montoisson@btinternet.com.