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Arms of the Dean and Chapter of Bristol

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THE ARMS OF THE DEAN AND CHAPTER OF BRISTOL

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OF recent years it seems to have been assumed that the arms of the Dean and Chapter of Bristol are the same as those of the See, *viz.*: sable, three ducal crowns in pale or. These were the arms of the monastery of St. Augustine (of which the church became in 1542 the cathedral of the new diocese of Bristol). They appear in the 14th century glass in the top of the southeast window in the eastern Lady Chapel, though the ground there is azure.¹ The late Francis Were, by a singular anachronism, describes these as of the See, which did not exist until 1542. They used also to appear on a shield (of which further mention will be made) in the spandril of a doorway, removed in the latter part of the 19th century, entering the Elder Lady Chapel in the westernmost bay on the north side. This door was made by Abbot Somerset (1526-33), and in one of the spandrils were placed his arms, impaled with those of the monastery, *viz.*: the three crowns impaling Somerset, a saltire between 3 fleurs de lis with a portcullis in chief.²

At the Dissolution of the monastery, the abbey church became in 1542 the cathedral of the new diocese of Bristol, and the three crowns were passed on as the arms of the See. They have been used continuously since then by the

¹ Coloured plates in Leversage and Taylor's *History of Bristol Cathedral* 1877, and in Lysons, *Gloucestershire Antiquities*, 1804, plate xciv.

² This actual shield is probably the one now to be seen (though much erased) on the side of the staircase leading to the new chapter vestry; it was found some years ago outside the Elder Lady Chapel.

bishops of Bristol, and numerous instances of their use appear on their tombs, etc., in the cathedral.

The arms of the Dean and Chapter do not seem to be so easy to determine. It would however be contrary to apparently universal custom that they should be identical with those of the See.

1. For the period between 1542 and 1624 there does not appear to be any evidence of the arms then in use. But in 1624 the Dean and Chapter altered the design on the obverse of their seal. The seal of 1542 showed a representation of the Trinity. The new design of 1624 was arranged to display two shields separated by a globe: above, were the arms of the See; below, the Somerset arms (as blazoned earlier, save for the addition of a rose charged on the centre of the saltire).³ In the riots of 1831 this seal was lost (though later recovered), but another was made immediately. The same general design was followed—the arms of the See above (the three crowns now 'ducal'), and the Somerset arms (without the rose on the saltire) below—and this is the seal now in use.



Seal of the Dean and Chapter of Bristol

³ The three crowns in the arms of the See were 'arched' *i.e.* 'royal', not 'ducal'. See Barrett, *History of Bristol*, p. 283. Hall Warren, 'Ecclesiastical seals of Bristol', *Procs. Clifton A. Club*, 1893-6, III, 5 ff. and the impression in the chapter vestry. The rose on the saltire is not visible on this impression, which is a very poor one.

Thus the evidence of the seals is continuous in favour of the use of the Somerset arms by the Dean and Chapter, at least in conjunction with the three crowns.

2. The use of the Somerset arms alone as the genuine arms of the Dean and Chapter has been asserted by the Heralds' College, ever since the Heralds' visitation of Gloucestershire in 1682-3,⁴ the actual date of the visitation at Bristol being given as 4 August 1682. Enquiries from the Heralds' College in 1932 are equally definite in denying to the Dean and Chapter any right to use the three crowns ' which belong exclusively to the See ', and allowing them, on the evidence of 1682, the Somerset arms.

3. A note may be inserted here on Barrett's remarks in his *History of Bristol*, 1789. He there describes the seal of the Dean and Chapter, and gives on his plate of the cathedral an illustration showing the two sets of arms (the See and Somerset) impaled.⁵ He has been rightly criticized by Were for assigning such a coat to the Dean and Chapter—there is no authority for the impaling of the two to form their arms. He may have copied the design from the shield of Abbot Somerset then in existence above the door into the Elder Lady Chapel, described above.

4. There is one existing piece of evidence. These Somerset arms still appear in the cathedral church on the wooden door leading from the south choir aisle into the eastern Lady Chapel. The door seems to be of comparatively modern, possibly early 19th century, date. This shield is referred to by several writers on the heraldry

⁴ ' This is a draught of the Common Seale and armes belonging to the Corporation of the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Bristoll '. Visitation of the County of Gloucester 1682-3, edited by T. Fitzroy-Fenwick and W. C. Metcalfe (Exeter, 1884), p. 213 and illustration of the seal of 1831.

⁵ In the description, he makes the saltire ' charged with ' the 3 fleurs de lis, etc., but the plate gives it correctly.

or antiquities of the cathedral, and is accepted by them as the arms of the Dean and Chapter. Woodward⁶ describes them as 'Abbot Somerset'—which is correct, in that the arms are the same—but in a later note⁷ he recognizes that the Somerset arms are those 'of the Deanery'. Hall Warren, writing in 1899, mentions on the door the 'shield adopted by the Chapter in 1624', which he for some reason characterizes as 'foolish'.⁸ Were (1902) describes it simply as 'Dean and Chapter'.⁹

5. Another piece of evidence, still more interesting from its date, is now destroyed. At the alterations of the choir in 1860, a new stone screen was erected across the eastern arch of the crossing, and on its eastern side were the two shields, (south) the arms of the See, (north) the Somerset arms.¹⁰ These can have been of no significance unless they are evidence of the continued tradition of their use as the arms of the Dean and Chapter.

6. A few years later an investigation occurs in the pages of *Notes and Queries*. In the issue of 16 January 1875, p. 44, is a list of the 'Arms of the Deaneries' by Mackenzie E. C. Walcott. Those assigned to Bristol are the Somerset arms (without the rose on the saltire), and the authority there given is Add. mss. Brit. Mus. 6331. One slight mistake (the 'portcullis' is described as a 'woolcomb') is corrected by Woodward (30 January 1875), and this was the cause of his share in the discussion.

There thus seems to be a continuous tradition at least since 1624 of the use by the Dean and Chapter of the

⁶ 'Heraldry of Bristol Cathedral'. *Herald and Genealogist*, 1867, iv, 289-309.

⁷ *Notes and Queries*, 30 January 1875, p. 94.

⁸ 'Choir of Bristol Cathedral'. *Procs. Clifton A. Club*, iv, 220-35, 290-2.

⁹ *Trans. B.G.A.S.* xxv, 106.

¹⁰ See Woodward, *Notes and Queries*, 30 January 1875 and old photographs of the cathedral.

Somerset arms. Hall Warren (paper on the Choir of the Cathedral, quoted above) suggests that they were only then adopted, and this is possible. But at least in 1682¹¹ their use alone (*i.e.* apart from any relation to the three crowns, as on the seal) seems to be unquestioned. Some of the quite recent confusion seems to have arisen out of an enquiry in October 1914, when the three crowns were verified as those of the 'See and Cathedral Church of Bristol'. This is undoubtedly correct as regards the See, but according to the Heralds' College (correspondence in June 1932) 'the arms of the Cathedral Church are invariably those of the Dean & Chapter'.¹²

One curious piece of apparently contrary evidence appears on the trusses or corbels dated 1629, which supported the old organ on the screen erected in 1542. (These now lie on either side of the entrance to the sacristy by the Berkeley chapel). On them are various arms, including those of Bishop Wright (Bishop in 1629) impaling those of the See, and those of the Dean of the time, Edward Chetwynd (1617-39)—shown also below his tablet close by—which also impale the three crowns. This (as Were¹³ says) violates the right of the bishop, and this had led Woodward in 1867 to read them as the arms of Bishop Mansel, 1808! But it is the more curious, as it was actually in Dean Chetwynd's time that the new seal of 1624 was made which showed the Somerset arms as well as the three crowns. No other instance appears in the cathedral of a dean impaling any arms with his own.

There is a somewhat similar but less excusable error in the arms of Archdeacon Thorp in the screenwork of 1860—at the eastern end of the north choir-stalls—where

¹¹ Visitation of county of Gloucester, 1682-3.

¹² Fox-Davies, *Book of Public Arms*, 1915, p. 114 gives the arms of the See, or a possible variation of them, as the arms of the Dean of Bristol, though he appears uncertain, and states such arms to be 'of no authority'.

¹³ *Trans. B.G.A.S.* xxv, 123.

his arms appear impaling those of the See, presumably because as archdeacon he was an official of the diocese. He was however not a member of the Chapter. Were rightly criticizes this, but his suggestion¹⁴ that the dexter half of the shield, 'the "baron", ought to have been dimidiated, in chief the See, in base Abbot Somerset' seems to show that he did not realize that Thorp was not one of the Chapter. This is the only—and quite unauthoritative—suggestion that a shield so divided might be used by the Dean and Chapter.

Apart from the Chetwynd instance above, there thus seems no early evidence in favour of the three crowns alone as being the arms of the Dean and Chapter. Nor, except for Barrett's fancy plate, and Were's apparently unauthorized suggestion, is there any evidence of a combination of the two sets of arms in one shield to form the arms of the Dean and Chapter.

We may sum up the evidence in favour of the Somerset arms as follows:—the successive seals of 1624 and 1831 (though these also display the three crowns); the Heralds' Visitation of 1682, which has remained the decision of Heralds' College; Barrett's somewhat confused references, which are interesting from their date (1789); the evidence of the existing wooden door, and the destroyed screen of 1860; the list in *Notes and Queries*, based on Add. mss Brit. Mus., accepted by Woodward; the more recent evidence of Hall Warren's and Were's papers. In face of all this, it is hard to believe that the use of the three crowns alone is other than a careless and corrupt tradition. It is the more curious that in the 19th century, when the three crowns were used freely on modern woodwork, book bindings, etc., the better-informed heraldic scholars maintained, as shown above, the correctness of the Somerset arms, and even on the new screen of 1860 those arms appear.

¹⁴ *Trans. B.G.A.S.* xxv, 106.

Two other points of interest may be raised. First, there is no sort of evidence to show why these Somerset arms came to be adopted by the Dean and Chapter. They were the arms of a late Tudor abbot—last but two of the monastery before the Dissolution. Woodward's comment on them is interesting—' There is about these arms so strong a Lancastrian, or Beaufort, savour that I conjectured Abbot Somerset might have been of illegitimate Beaufort descent, but this I have not been able certainly to discover '. ' The arms of the Deanery ', he adds, ' may have been derived from those of Abbot Somerset '.¹⁵

It is conjecturable that the existence of these arms side by side with those of the (newly-created) See on the spandril of the north door—really the abbey impaling Somerset—may have suggested their use. Hall Warren (see above) assumes that they were not adopted by the Dean and Chapter until their appearance on the seal of 1624.

The other point relates to the right colouring or tinctures of the Somerset arms. The Heralds' Visitation of 1682 gives no colours, which is unusual. (Richmond Herald's letter to the Dean 6 April 1932). Walcott (*Notes and Queries* 16 January 1875) gives no colour, except argent for the field. Woodward (*Notes and Queries* 30 January 1875) questions this, on the evidence of the existing shield on the wooden door in the south choir aisle, which he reads: ' azure, a saltire argent, between a portcullis in chief and 3 fleurs de lis or in flanks and base '. Were reads the same shield, azure field, saltire and all the rest argent (and so Hall Warren gives it, in his paper on the choir of the cathedral,¹⁶ professedly quoting Barrett).

The shield is not very easy to read (1932); the azure field is certain, and Woodward's colouring appears to be

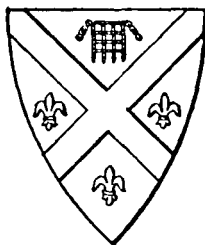
¹⁵ *Notes and Queries*, 30 January 1875, p. 94.

¹⁶ *Procs. Clifton A. Club*, IV, 220-35.

correct, and this agrees with the coloured plate in Lever-
sage and Taylor's *History of Bristol Cathedral*, 1877.

Pryce (*History of Bristol*, 1861, p. 110) adds a further refinement, describing Abbot Somerset's arms as 'azure, a saltire argent, between, in chief a portcullis or, nailed of the first, with chains pendant thereto of the third, in each flank and base a fleur de lis of gold'. He does not give his authority.

None of these readings include the rose on the saltire. We may adopt Woodward's reading as probably the correct one.



Arms of John Somerset
Abbot of Bristol 1526-33