



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

TWO COATS OF ARMS FROM KENT IN LONDON.

BY F. C. ELLISTON-ERWOOD, F.S.A.

I. A ROYAL COAT OF ARMS FROM SHOOTERS HILL.

[*Prefatory Note.*—Much of the matter in this first section was collected by the late Colonel A. H. Bagnold, C.B., C.M.G., R.E., of Shooters Hill, and was published by him in the local church magazine. The ephemeral nature of these publications is such that very few of his papers on Shooters Hill can still be available. Owing to the kindness and generosity of his family, the great bulk of his notes on the district was handed to me with permission to use as I saw fit. The subject is of more than local interest, and worthy, I hope, of a place in *Archæologia Cantiana*.]

ROYAL Coats of Arms in churches are, of course, of common occurrence and the volumes of *Arch. Cant.* contain many references to, and descriptions of, them. But to find an early example in the tap room of a humble wayside inn is, I think, a matter of so unusual a character, that some details are worthy of record. For such was the locus of the coat of arms here illustrated (Plate I). It was found in the tap room of the old Bull Inn, the last surviving fragment of the well-known and extensive hotel that formerly stood on the top of Shooters Hill. This tap survived till 1882 when it was destroyed to make room for the more modern hotel that is built on an adjacent site. Before this, however, in 1880, the old coat of arms had been removed to the offices of the North Kent Brewery, Plumstead, where it is now preserved, with an inscription to the effect that it was presented to the Bull Inn *circa* 1689 by William of Orange (William III).

Shooters Hill, which rises to 446 O.D., is the highest part of Kent near London, and not till the North Downs are reached is there land of greater elevation. It was a formidable obstacle on the main road from London to Dover, even though the road had been cut down some feet by the Turnpike Trust as is clearly shown in the illustrations of the old buildings (Plate II); and the steep gradient, the ill-constructed and, especially in winter, muddy track made the passage of horse-drawn vehicles a matter of some difficulty. There is evidence that alternative routes through Eltham or Greenwich were in greater favour at this season of the year because of their drier and more level character and it is a worthy comment on modern things that, with the advent of the much more powerful motor car, the hill was by-passed!

The road, variously known as the "Roman Road", the "Dover Road" or the "Watling Street" is in fact more correctly termed



PLATE I. COAT OF ARMS OF WILLIAM III (c. 1700), FROM THE OLD
BULL INN, SHOOTERS HILL,

now preserved in the offices of the North Kent Brewery, Plumstead.

(Approx. $\frac{1}{3}$ linear.)



THE BULL HOTEL, SHOOTERS HILL. 1826.

From a drawing by George Scharf.



THE BULL HOTEL, SHOOTERS HILL. 1857.

From a drawing by — Mitchell.

Both sketches show the amount of the summit of the Hill cut away.

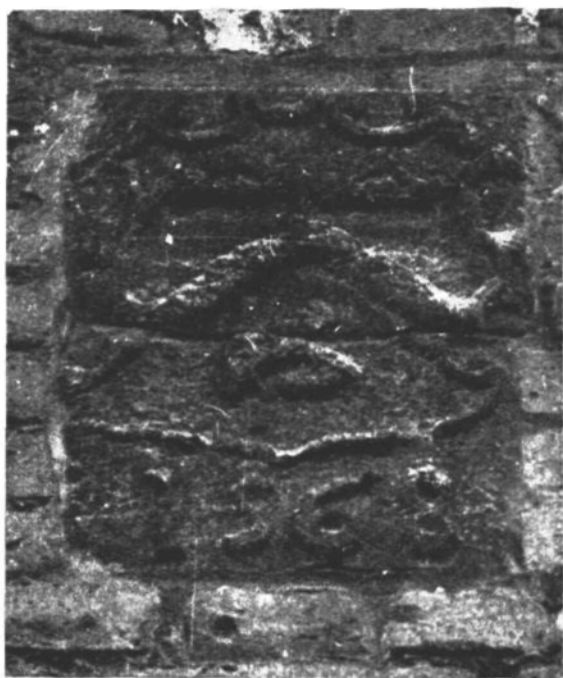


PLATE III. TATTERSHALL ARMS, FROM THE REMAINING
BUILDINGS OF WELL HALL, ELTHAM.

(Note the photograph is much foreshortened from top to bottom ;
see Fig. 1 in text.)

"Casing Street" (Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, Vol. I, No. 346, p. 483) and our literature and history contain numerous references to personages, real and fictitious, *en route* between its termini. Charles Dickens is perhaps the best source for a description of the road as it was, and over which he many times travelled, often on foot, and the opening pages of the *Tale of Two Cities* give a vivid and realistic picture of what must have been the experience of hundreds of travellers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; while the oracular utterances of "Mr. F's Aunt", "There's milestones on the Dover Road", are not to be forgotten.

So it will not be considered strange that this coat of arms (which, to anticipate matters, is that of William III), was the *fons et origo* of numerous tales and legends, all tending to connect it with some more or less illustrious traveller, and in particular, with a foreign prince who married an English Queen. The current version, when I was a boy, was that the Prince Consort (as he shortly became) journeying by road to London for his marriage to Queen Victoria, in 1840, stopped at the Bull Inn for refreshment, and, being faint from the strain and fatigue of the long hard voyage, was only saved from falling by the timely aid of an ancient inhabitant standing near. The arms had been presented in memory of this event, though why the inn was the recipient and not the ancient, the tale sayeth not.

Obviously this is not a true story, for, even if princes are in the habit of distributing escutcheons of arms to wayside inns as they progress through the country, it may be presumed they would make oblation of their own arms and not those of a prince long since deceased. It was some years later that these armorial bearings were critically examined, when the discovery was made that they were or were intended for the heraldic insignia of William of Orange as William III, reigning alone. A trivial matter as this did not deter the legend maker, for now we are told that William stopped at the Bull in 1697 (there is some indecision as to the date) on his way from Margate to Greenwich, after the signing of the Peace of Ryswick in that year, and the arms were presented in memory of that event.

But it will be better if the arms themselves are described: they are of definitely poor workmanship (note particularly the various animals and the lettering) carved in a coarse-grained wood (elm?) and affixed to a backboard of oak and framed, the whole being about twelve inches square. They are painted in oil colour and were either incorrectly coloured from the beginning or subsequent repaintings at the hands of unskilful and/or ignorant workmen have made much confusion.

The heraldry may be thus described:

Quarterly, on a circular shield enclosed in the Ribbon of the Garter

I. Gules, three leopards passant (? regardant) Or. England.

- II. Or, a Lion rampant, Gules, within a double tressure, Gules
Scotland
- III. Azure, a Harp, Or. Ireland
- IV. Gules (error for Azure) three Fleurs des Lis, Or. France
- Inescutcheon. Or, semé with Hearts (should be Billets) Azure
(should be Or) a Lion rampant, Azure. Nassau
- Crest. A Lion passant regardant on a Helmet Crowned, Or
with Mantling Or and Argent.
- Supporters. A Lion rampant gardant Or, Langed (tongue
missing) Gules. A Unicorn rampant Argent, collared and
chained Or.
- Garter and Motto. Azure, Letters and Border, Or.

There can be little doubt that these arms are intended for those of William III after the death of his wife and would therefore date 1694-1702, though I believe that Queen Anne used these same arms till the Union, 1707. There might, too, be an element of doubt over the inescutcheon, where there is evidently confusion between the arms of Nassau (a golden rampant lion on a blue field sown with golden billets) and Luneburg (a similar lion but blue on a gold field sown with red hearts), but Luneburg only appears on early Hanoverian arms and not then in an escutcheon. The billets (or hearts or roundels or bezants or whatever they are intended to be) are not carved on the arms, but merely painted on by the decorator, and because of their small size, and the lack of knowledge on the part of the workman, have led to this difficulty of interpretation, but the fact that such a well-known detail as the blue ground of the French lily is rendered red, is in itself sufficient proof of ignorance and carelessness.

The arms have, since rediscovery, been cleaned, repaired and correctly painted.

Now the questions arise, "How did these arms get into the inn?" and "Where was their original home?" for it is quite evident that there can be little or no truth in the local legends which grew up round them. The ease with which the tale was varied to suit amended information is in itself sufficient to mark down the story as apocryphal. It will by this time have been apparent to all readers familiar with such things that these arms are exactly of the type frequently found in churches as emblems of the Royal Supremacy, but if that was their origin (and I suspect it was) I can at this time give no further information with regard to any particular church or even hint at a time of removal.

There is possibly the slightest of slight clues. The birthplace of the present parish church of Shooters Hill was the old Bull Hotel. The Rev. Thomas Dallin, the first incumbent, was a local resident and a considerable freeholder of much of the land comprising the Hill, including the Bull Hotel, and when the said hotel ceased to be a place

of call for coaches or a popular resort for the gentlemen of the Woolwich Garrison and their permanent or transitory ladies, he took over the greater part of the buildings, including its famous Assembly Rooms, as a School for Young Gentlemen, and then, in 1850, the Assembly Room was fitted up as a Chapel, where services were held till the present parish church was built in 1856. There does not seem to be, however, any description or picture of this temporary church that might show its fittings though much of the decoration was removed as unsuitable, but there does seem to be a remote possibility that, among the things collected or given to make this room more ecclesiastical in appearance, this old coat of arms may have been among them.

This does not answer any of the questions propounded above, nor does it even affirm that these arms were so used, but it does offer a better explanation for Royal Arms being found where they are not normal, than the local legends. But of the making of guesses there is no end, and much speculation is a weariness to the flesh. All I can claim to have done is to place on record an interesting example of a familiar class.

II. A COAT OF ARMS AT WELL HALL, ELTHAM.

Travellers by train on the Bexley Heath branch of the Southern Railway cannot help but notice the beautiful garden, intersected here and there with fine old red brick walls, all clearly visible from Well Hall Station. These grounds and the well-restored buildings beyond give their name to the district and station and they preserve all there was to preserve of the home of William Roper, a member of a famous Kent family and his even more famous wife and daughter of Sir Thomas More, Margaret Roper. It is not the purpose of this note to dwell on the history of these buildings and their site, for that has already been done by the present writer (*Well Hall, the story of its House and Grounds*, published by the Woolwich Borough Council, 1936). Rather it is to draw attention to a rather unusual feature and the erroneous conclusions drawn from it.

On the north side of the only remaining building, high up on the wall is a very weathered coat of arms, carved in stone (or rather on two stones) and bearing the date 1568. A photograph of these arms is given (Plate III), but as it is very difficult to get a good picture I have added a measured drawing made some years ago (Fig. 1). By the aid of these two illustrations the heraldry of the stone is clear.

Hitherto the significance of these arms has been overlooked. They were taken (both by the present writer in his ignorance and others in the plenitude of their knowledge) to be the arms of the Roper family, and the date was accepted as the date of the erection of the building: see for instance *R.C.H.M. England*, London Vol. V (East London), p. 108ff, and a letter in *The Times*, November 16th, 1931, from the late

P. M. Johnston, F.S.A. Both these deductions are erroneous. The arms are those of the family of Tattershall and the date on the shield is probably half a century after the erection of the building. Heraldically they may be described thus :



MEASURED DRAWING OF TATTERSHALL ARMS,
 $\frac{1}{2}$ linear (with details restored).

(Sable) a Cheveron (azure) between three Tigers statant regardant coward (?) at a mirror on the ground (?) handled (?).

They are therefore another representation of those particular punning arms that were described by our member Mr. G. C. Druce, F.S.A., in *Arch. Cant.*, XXVIII, p. 363ff.

There is reasonable excuse for the misreading of these arms, as the three tigers are almost formless masses (in my reconstruction I have adhered to the outline but added details from other sources), though, knowing what the charges should be, it is possible to detect something of the shape of a crouching animal. The tinctures are naturally absent. The shield is not of a formal type but of a more fanciful outline, made up of scrolls and reminiscent of the cartouches in Elizabethan maps; the date, 1568, is clear beyond question.

Now, as I have mentioned above, these arms were not only assumed by some to be those of Roper, but also to give the date of the erection of the building, but this I think cannot be. The builder beyond doubt was William Roper, son-in-law of Sir Thomas More, and his initials W.R. appear in cut brick on one of the finials of the gable. William's *floruit* was 1495-1577. He inherited Well Hall on the death of his father, John Roper, in 1524 and there was not another owner with these initials till 1597, which is much too late for this building. William Roper married Margaret More in 1525, the year following his succession to the property, and this fact, together with the existing architectural details, make it more than likely that the whole was erected in view of his approaching marriage and that its date is *c.* 1525. The given date, 1568, falls, it is true, within this Roper's lifetime, but if this is to be taken as the date of building, why should he insert into the walls of his house the coat of arms of someone else? True also it is that he was descended from this ancient family of Tattershall and they had been earlier owners of the estates, but their association with Well Hall ceased about 1450, a century or more before the date on the stone, his grandmother being the last of the Tattershalls to be resident here. It is suggested that William Roper may have intended to decorate the front of the building with coats of arms of his forbears, but then surely some trace of shields of arms of Chichele, Kene, Roper, Knollys and More should be found, but this is not so. This is the only coat of arms extant.

More important, however, is the clear evidence that these arms are an insertion into an already existing wall. It is apparent from the photograph that the two stones forming the coat are not in correct alignment and a close examination shows that the mortar surrounding the stone is of a different character to that used in the body of the wall and also that some bricks were removed and replaced by others of a different type.

What is the explanation of it all? Again I cannot say, but speculation is easy. Possibly William Roper or his descendants had antiquarian leanings, and finding these arms, perhaps on the site of a former house of the Tattershalls, brought them home and built them into the wall to confuse antiquaries of a later age, but whatever may be the reason for their preservation here, to use them for dating the building is,

I think, to fly in the face of other more precise evidence, especially when the information given above is taken into consideration.

It is, of course, possible that these arms, lacking as they do their distinctive tinctures, may be those of one of the families that bore the same charges. Such a one is the Sibill of Eynesford coat, the one dealt with by Mr. Druce (*loc. cit.*) and still to be seen in the spandril of a sixteenth century fireplace. The date of the Well Hall arms (1568) is approximately coincident with the end of the Sibill occupation of Little Mote, Eynesford. It may only be coincident, but Thomas Sibill held land at Welhawe in Eynesford in 1488 and near here, later on, was domiciled William Roper's second son Anthony, known as "of Farningham". He is buried in Farningham Church.