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EDITING ROLLS OF ARMS

Some reflections on basic principles

John A. Goodall

Ludovic Fécamp (ed.), *La Visitation héraldique du Pays de Caux*. Documents d'héraldique médiéval 4. Paris: Editions du Léopard d'Or, 2002. 222 pp, with numerous black and white illustrations. ISBN 2-86377-171-X. €30.

Bruce A. McAndrew (ed.), *The Balliol roll*. Boston: The Committee on Heraldry of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002. xii + 82 pp, with one colour and eight black and white illustrations. \$20.

The recent appearance of two rolls of arms, hitherto unprinted, is welcome but both raise questions about the manner of editing such documents and the degree to which commentary should be incorporated with the text. Medieval rolls of arms can be viewed as falling into two categories: 'originals', the rare autograph texts and contemporary or near contemporary copies; and 'lost originals', where the texts are known only from later copies mainly of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sometimes these exist in a single copy which can only be treated in the same way as an original, but more often there are several copies sometimes with substantial additions, and these require a different treatment to those discussed here. I will be returning to this problem in the introduction to *Aspilogia* 4.

In the first place the manuscript needs to be described correctly and the relationship of the armorial to other contents noted. The text, with any illustrations, should be transcribed as in the exemplar, any apparent errors being noted but not silently corrected. The standard rules for diplomatic transcripts should be followed for the abbreviated words, preserving the spelling of the manuscript, if it can be established. The most commonly used edition of the Great Roll by Nicolas, for example, expanded the common Christian name as *William* although in the manuscript we find *Willame* written in full (e.g. no. 299). Put at its simplest the aim of the editor should be to enable the reader to have as clear an understanding of the manuscript as is possible without seeing the original or a facsimile. If there is more than one version then their relationship should be established – a stemma can be helpful in making this clear – and if necessary both transcribed. Normally the post-medieval copies of such originals do not need to be taken into account as they often tell us more about the limitations of the transcribers than the original they were copying. There are, however, instances where they, too, need to be collated. The text of the original, as in the Boroughbridge Roll for example, may have been rendered almost wholly illegible due to the use in the past of reagents to 'revive' faded ink. Copies can also enable membranes at the beginning and end of the roll to be recovered, as is the case with Cooke's Ordinary, or help in providing a *terminus ante quem* for damage and consequent restoration as occurs in the Great Roll.

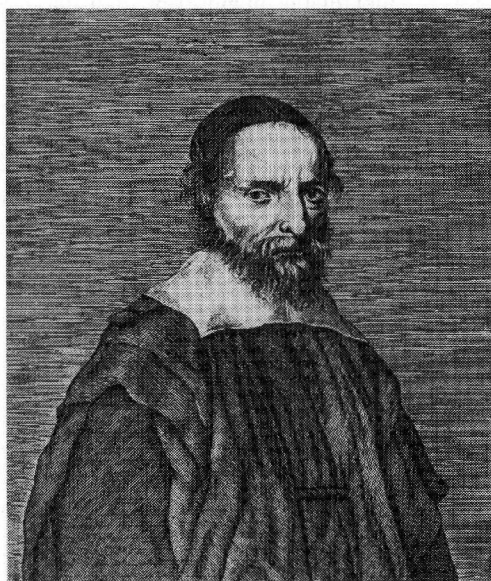
Although the rolls of arms are important – normally they are the only source for the colours of the arms with their bearer's names – the primary evidence for the use

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of arms by an individual is his named seal; those 'secret' seals with non-nominal inscriptions can, like stained glass or unnamed arms in manuscripts, only be regarded as secondary evidence, since the identity of the user has to be established by other means. The appearance of the arms on seals and in the earlier rolls should also be noted – using the accepted sigla this need not be very obtrusive – and it is probably desirable to include at least those later rolls which contain substantial sections of the roll being edited. For example several of the coats in Glover's roll, including some of the additions in versions III and IV, were copied in Grimaldi's roll c. 1350; while whole sections of the Great roll were copied (probably from Version II) in Bradfer-Lawrence's roll parts iv 73-114 and v A.2-29, 1-283, and two records of heraldic lessons in Strangways and the related Patrick's Book also have substantial extracts from it. The various armorials edited by Paul Adam-Even in *Archives héraldiques suisses* and *Archivium heraldicum* are models which should be required reading by anyone contemplating editing a roll of arms.

Turning to the two books under consideration I feel there are a number of points which need to be made about their mode of presentation.

The first of the two is an edition of part of CA Ms M19, specifically the highly illuminated visitation of the Pays de Caux in Normandy which occupies fos. 1 to 24 (see **Plate 7**). The edition is based in part on microfilm copies made some years ago and in part on a partial copy made in the seventeenth century by a Monsieur Malherbe and now preserved in the Bibliothèque Municipale at Rouen. Malherbe transcribed his copy from one made by the polymath Fabri de Peiresc, to whom Camden had lent the original manuscript in 1618. In the published text the first six folios are omitted, despite the fact that fo. 1 begins with a general survey of the volume, its importance marked by the use of a three line initial with ivy leaf scrolls on



Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637).

From Pierre Gassendi, *Viri Illustris N. C. Fabricii de Peiresc ... Vita* (3rd edn., The Hague, 1655), frontispiece.

the ground, typical of French books c. 1420, followed by a long heading, giving the bounds of the Pays de Caux introduced by a two line initial as 'la circuite Du pays de Caux'. This was omitted from the text, apparently since it was ignored by the seventeenth-century copies, and only appears in footnote 2 on p. 55. As is shown by the *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the College of Arms*, pp. 161-6, the *Circuite* is only the first section of a collection of French tracts on various aspects of chivalry and heraldry ending with a general roll of arms.

The omission of the first section with lists of various ecclesiastical foundations, their relics, their founders with their arms, and their secular jurisdictions, was an integral part of the *Circuite*, and ought to have been included; but like the heading it was omitted in the transcripts. It is probably of no small interest for local historians. Several of the priories are not mentioned in Monstier's *Neustria Pia* of 1673, which seems to be the only 'Monasticon' for the area.

The book was written by one scribe in a vernacular book hand of the early fifteenth century on vellum, but was left unfinished. After the quires with the main text had been written, leaving spaces for initials and paintings of the arms, they were passed to a rubricator whose work came to an end with fo. 79v. Each entry in the *Circuite* has a one line 'Lombardic' capitals for the initial letters in gold with coloured grounds either red or blue, and these end at fo. 59v. The arms were only painted in the *Circuite*, although there are some omissions, and the use of gold and silver leaf is unusual in heraldic manuscripts. The elaborate character of the book points to it having been commissioned by a wealthy bibliophile, rather than an ordinary herald. Its unfinished state suggests that he died before the work was completed, and that the book was subsequently sold 'as seen'. It is a pity that nothing was included in the extant programme of the decoration to indicate his identity. One notable bibliophile can be connected with the English rule in France at the beginning of the fifteenth century, John, Duke of Bedford and regent for Henry VI, who died in 1435.

The manuscript has several notes added in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in English, Latin and French – some in an English humanist hand, apparently Camden's who signed in a like hand in 1620-1 (CA Partition Book 2, fos. 252v, 265; Ms Vincent 49 first opening). It is curious that the correspondence between Clarenceux Camden and Peiresc published in 1898 is referred to but only indirectly through later books (P. Tamizey Laroque, *Lettres de Peiresc*, vii, pp. 775, 781, 785).

This is not the place for a detailed collation of the printed text with the original, but it seems clear that the text offered is not that of the College manuscript but of the seventeenth-century French transcript at Rouen, which explains the discrepancies in the texts. Apparently the copy known to have been made by Peiresc could not be traced although it may have been more reliable. I would draw attention to two important points. On p. 78 no. 5, where Fécamp reads *Pierre Le Vignereux* the College manuscript has *Lierre le Vignureux*, the illuminated capital L being unmistakable; and no. 8 has a medieval spelling of the Christian name *Guillem*, not the modern *Guillaume*.

While it is true that French genealogists are less well served than their English counterparts, who notably have the Inquisitions post mortem setting forth the heir(s) and services of tenants-in-chief, there are other sources which can be exploited. The *Recueil des historiens des Galles* contains a wealth of information about the families of the nobility, particularly those associated with the houses where the chronicles were written, and these are gathered in single volumes covering varying lengths of time. For Normandy there are also the *Rotuli Normannie*, c. 1417-39 which were published in the 1850s in the *Mémoires des Antiquaires de Normandie* 15 pp. 215 ff., and 23 pp. 7-273. It would have been preferable to have annotations based on these chronicles and rolls, and any other records of the time, rather than the lengthy biographical notices, unattributed but apparently drawn from secondary sources.

The Balliol roll is one of the shortest with only thirty six coats and the present (and only) edition has several merits. The roll is reproduced, albeit greatly reduced in size, as the frontispiece. The introduction is concise and covers all the main aspects, setting the roll in the complicated politics of the period with disputed successions to the Scottish crown.

It combines, not always happily, two very different books: the Balliol roll, and a discussion of the families, their relations with each other, and the part played by them in the intrigues of the period. It is unfortunate that these extended biographical notices led to the comparanda being placed at the end of the narrative where they can easily be overlooked. Despite the correction published in *Aspilogia* 2 (p. 269) the misnamed Bruce roll is still cited among them. The manuscript was a continental compilation and should be used with circumspection – the better known Gelre's armorial still listed Anthony Bek the bishop of Durham, who had died in 1311, some sixty years later. Quite apart from the extraordinary garbling of names which occurs it is clear that they were often based on out of date information. Perhaps more serious is the reliance on William Rae Macdonald's *Scottish Armorial Seals* of 1904 book for seals rather than Stevenson and Wood's similarly titled work of 1940. However this was printed in a very small edition and badly needs revision with more of the seals still in private hands being added to it. Given the almost total lack of rolls of arms from medieval Scotland this ought to have a high priority.

