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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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of Ireland' was constituted in 1541 from the old lordship of Ireland by a heavily managed Anglo-Irish parliament for Henry VIII. Plainly this no longer exists in its historic form. A change in approach would not seem inappropriate, therefore, given the essential mutability of the royal shield across the centuries, and its capacity to respond to political realities as much as strict heraldic forms. Admittedly the arms of France stayed put for about three centuries too long after the loss of Calais, until the nineteenth-century monarchy at last decided to be sensible about its French claim, but perhaps another re-imagining of the purpose of the royal shield might be in order? After all, the arms of the duchy and electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg and its accompanying titles from the Holy Roman Empire were incorporated into the British shield design and coin inscriptions with no apparent problems, so the status of kingdom is anyway not a necessary factor here. The publicity for the new designs proclaims that the form of the shield has 'remained virtually unchanged since the reign of Queen Victoria', which does not address whether this is actually a good thing for such a potentially flexible and useful symbol.

It is perhaps unlikely that designer Matthew Dent's crisp, clean, stylistically somewhat retro creation will have a longevity comparable to Christopher Ironside's designs for the previous decimal reverses, but we will still have a long time to get used to them, as they gradually percolate into currency. For anyone with an interest in the processes of coin design, present and past, the British Museum and Royal Mint are producing an exhibition 'Designing change: coins of Elizabeth II' to run at the museum from September 2008 to March 2009.

*Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum*

**The origin of the label and the maunch.** *Paul A Fox writes:* In a paper on the origins of cadency, published in the last number of this journal, I stated that the label began as a ribbon with pendant strips which was worn around the neck, and possibly sometimes around the helm (*CoA* 3rd ser. 4 (2008), pp. 21-8, at 21). Subsequent research has determined that there are some twelfth-century literary references which shed further light on the matter. There are references to the tying of thin leather straps to the back of a knight's helmet at tournaments, designed to fan out behind when riding at speed: see David Crouch, *Tournament* (London 2005), p. 139. That such streamers might have pendant strips in the manner of a label appears to be borne out by two illustrations from Guillim's *Display of Heraldry* (first edn., London 1611, p. 39). He provides two examples which at first sight appeared quite puzzling, of labels borne on shields bendwise, as they might have appeared when the wind was not particularly strong.

Of the two examples, one (**Figure 5a**, over) is definitely very early, the seal of William son of William de Curli of Budbrooke, Langley and Norton Curley in Warwickshire. William de Curli senior in 1205 bought back his brother John's Warwick estates from King John for a hundred marks and a palfrey, after his brother had sided against the king and returned to his ancestral lands in Normandy: *VCH Warwicks* vol. 3, pp. 65-8; W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1st edn., London

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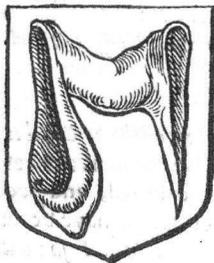
1656), p. 501. William junior was dead by 1253 when the patrimony was divided between his two daughters. The shield thus ceased to be used and was relegated to the status of an historical curiosity.

Guillim's other example (Figure 5b) comes from Germany, but he copied it from a monument in St Mary's church, Oxford. The monument must have been brand new when he saw it because

it commemorated Daniel von Morrien, eldest son of Wilhelm von Morrien of Lüdingshausen in Westphalia, who died in September 1599, age 21. Guillim's book was published in 1611. In it he illustrated the shield as being *Ar. a label of three points bendwise sa.*, but he omitted the mullet gules in sinister chief which was later recorded by Anthony Wood: *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford* vol. 3 (Oxford Hist. Soc. vol. 37: Oxford 1899), pp. 113f. These arms were certainly in use in the fourteenth century, when they were recorded in the *Armorial Bellenville*. The family were hereditary marshals of the Prince Bishops of Münster, whom they had served as knights from the early thirteenth century, and it is therefore probable that the arms of Morrien saw their origin at much the same time as those of Curli. The label is seen to best advantage when flying out horizontally, and it is natural that this would be the preferred method of displaying it, but the bendwise version helps to explain its true origins as a piece of tournament equipment.

When the label was later adopted as a cadency mark, it certainly began to be used around the neck, as is clear from fourteenth-century illustrations of the Black Prince.

Another twelfth-century literary allusion mentions knights attaching their ladies' sleeves to the helmet, to produce a different type of streamer; cf. Crouch, loc. cit. (referring to the 'Romance of Thebes', ll. 6752-6). As with the label this gave rise to an heraldic charge which was in use by the beginning of the thirteenth century, *manche* being French for a sleeve. Early examples of the use of the maunch are *Ar. a maunch gu.* for Ralph de Tony (d. 1239) in the Matthew Paris shields, and from Glover's roll *Gu. a maunch erm.* for Reynaud de Mohun, lord of Dunster (d. 1258), *Vair a maunch gules* for Piers de Mauley (d. 1279) and *Or a maunch gu.* for Henry de



Hastings (d. 1269: see Figure 6), while Walford's roll gives us *Az. a maunch erm.* for Bartholomew de Creke of Suffolk (d. c.1250): all these can be found in *Aspilogia* 2. Note that in all these examples the sleeve is either gules or ermine. The maunch is a singularly English heraldic device which was seldom used on the other side of La Manche.

Figure 6: Arms of Hastings. Guillim, op. cit., p. 295.

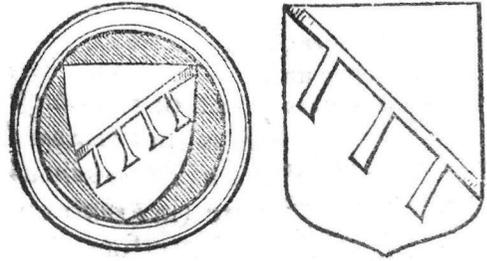


Figure 5: left (a), seal of William de Curli; right (b), arms of Wilhelm von Morrien. Guillim, *Display of Heraldry* (1611), p. 39.