

Third Series Vol. V part 1.

No. 217

Spring 2009

ISSN 0010-003X

Price £12.00

THE COAT OF ARMS

an heraldic journal published twice yearly by The Heraldry Society



THE COAT OF ARMS

The journal of the Heraldry Society



Third series

Volume V

2009

Part 1

Number 217 in the original series started in 1952

The Coat of Arms is published twice a year by The Heraldry Society, whose registered office is 53 High Street, Burnham, Slough SL1 7JX. The Society was registered in England in 1956 as registered charity no. 241456.

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HERALDS IN THE NEW *DNB*

Part III

C. J. Jay

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|---|---|
| Anstis, John (1669-1744), Garter, <i>by</i> Adrian Ailes | Le Neve, Peter (1661-1729), Norroy, <i>by</i> Thomas Woodcock |
| Anstis, John (1708-54), Garter, <i>by</i> Adrian Ailes | Lodge, Edmund (1756-1839), Clarenceux, <i>by</i> Lucy Peltz |
| Beltz, George Frederick (1774-1871), Lancaster, <i>by</i> Thomas Woodcock | Oldys, William (1696-1761), Norroy, <i>by</i> Paul Baines |
| Bigland, Ralph (1712-84), Garter, <i>by</i> P. L. Dickinson | Nayler, Sir George (baptized 1764, d. 1831), Garter, <i>by</i> Thomas Woodcock |
| Brooke, John Charles (1748-94), Somerset, <i>by</i> D. V. White | Pine, John (1690-1756), Bluemantle, <i>by</i> Susan Sloman |
| Browne, Thomas (1702-80), Garter, <i>by</i> Thompson Cooper, <i>rev.</i> J. A. Marchand | Pingo, Benjamin (d. 1794), York, <i>by</i> Christopher Eimer |
| Edmondson, Joseph (baptized 1732, d. 1786), Mowbray, <i>by</i> Adrian Ailes | Toms, Peter (baptized 1726, d. 1777), Portcullis, <i>by</i> Martin Postle |
| Heard, Sir Isaac (1730-1822), Garter, <i>by</i> D. V. White | Townley, Sir Charles (1713-74), Garter, <i>by</i> Thompson Cooper, <i>rev.</i> J. A. Marchand |
| Ives, John (1751-76), Suffolk, <i>by</i> C. E. A. Cheesman | Vanbrugh, Sir John (1664-1726), Clarenceux, <i>by</i> Kelly Downes |
| Leake, Stephen Martin (1702-73), Garter, <i>by</i> C. E. A. Cheesman | Warburton, John (1682-1759), Somerset, <i>by</i> Thomas Woodcock |

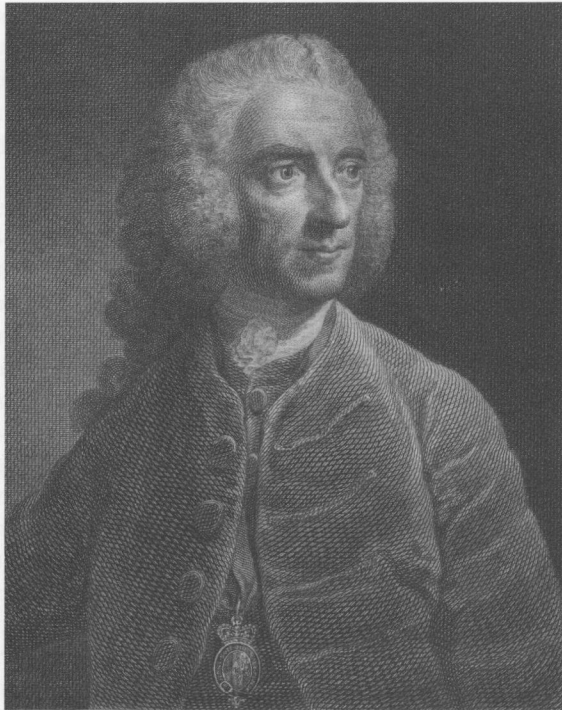
A project such as the new *DNB* defies intelligent criticism. Its strengths are necessarily also its weaknesses. How can such a vast number of persons be covered without reducing the lives of those persons into a series of facts stripped of much of their significance? And yet, how could the new *DNB* be a useful reference source if it enlarged upon those facts, and drifted into expansive biography? These questions do not lend themselves to resolution. The new *DNB* is, of course, a compromise: it walks a majestic tightrope between a bare-bones-chronology and a collection of monographs. It achieves what it sets out to achieve; it fails where it must inevitably fail, and where other books and records are the more appropriate resource.

From a critical perspective, the most interesting facet of the new *DNB* is unchanged from that of the last. If we look back on the archetypes of mini-biography (I am thinking particularly of John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*), what strikes us most in comparison with the *DNB* is the presence of a single narrative – and I use that word advisedly – voice. They are anecdotal rather than factual, and they see the plethora of lives they cover through a single pair of eyes. The *DNB* does not have one pair of eyes, it has thousands. Sometimes those eyes are interested in the purely factual, and sometimes they are also interested in the narrative and the anecdotal. Here again, in the multitude of perspectives, we have a strength masquerading as a weakness (or *vice versa*). The mode of the *DNB*'s creation is a strength, in that it allows each

entry to be written by a genuine expert on his subject. But, necessarily, it is also a weakness, in that the focus of each entry is dictated by the particular interests of one of any number of writers, whose interests in the subject may or may not be coincident with those of the reader. The effect of ‘shatter[ing] the prism’ (David Gelber in *CoA* 3rd ser. 2 (2006)) through which heralds are so often seen, viz. the history of the College, has its down-side.

While this is an obvious criticism, it is a particularly pertinent one from the point of view of an heraldic enthusiast, given that many of the heralds in the *DNB* (although perhaps fewer in the Hanoverian period than in previous ones) were not career heralds, but carried on other professions outside of the College of Arms, for which they are better known, and in which fields the writers of their entries are instead expert. To take the obvious example of Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), then, the lengthy entry is written by Kerry Downes, who has published a number of books on architecture. In spite of the fact that the entry touches on the full range of Vanbrugh’s interests, I must admit that when I finished it I felt a little dissatisfied. Reading with my heraldic hat on, the entry contains no more information about Vanbrugh’s career at the College than can be gleaned from the entries of his brother officers (indeed, other entries are somewhat more informative on the subject). And, with my English Literature graduate’s hat on, I found the entry somewhat shallow and unilluminating on the subject of Vanbrugh’s work as a dramatist, where Downes’ expansive treatment of Vanbrugh’s architecture is illuminating and erudite. It might be argued that, in shattering one prism through which heralds have historically been seen, a thousand shards have been created, with the effect that an ordered spectrum of knowledge does not emerge from a browse through the lives of the Hanoverian heralds, but rather some patches of brilliant light, and others of impenetrable darkness. This, of course, is a quite different weakness to the College-centric portrayals we find in other reference books, for instance Anthony Wagner’s *Heralds of England*.

One of those patches of brilliant light is the insight into the connexion between the College of Arms and politics (particularly as motivated by religion) to be found in the entry for John Anstis (1669-1744). Anstis seems to have been closely involved with Tory politics from early on in his career: in 1701, at the age of 31 and being of only two years call, he was ordered by the House of Commons to draw up articles of impeachment against the former Whig ministers Lords Portland, Somers, Halifax, and Orford. At the same time, Anstis began work on a defence of the jurisdiction of the Earl Marshal. From these researches, a number of treatises emerged on the rights and powers of the Earl Marshal, and, in the process, Anstis was able to advise Lady Howard, the mother of the 8th Duke of Norfolk (a minor), to put his own name forward for the position of Garter principal king of arms. Over the course of the next few years, Anstis was elected into Parliament, and, in 1714, he obtained a reversion of the office of Garter. The politicisation of appointments at the College during this period is a major theme of the Anstis entry, climaxing with the battle between Anstis (Tory camp) and Vanbrugh (Whig camp) for the top job. While Vanbrugh was to be appointed in 1715, the matter was not finally resolved until a protracted legal battle recognised Anstis as Garter in May 1718. An explanation of this series of event from the Vanbrugh/Whig perspective is conspicuously missing from the Vanbrugh entry.



Right: Stephen Martin Leake.
Detail of engraving by T.
Milton, c. 1803, from oils by
Robert Edge Pine, c. 1754.

Nevertheless, many of the entries do create a clearer picture for the reader of how the College of Arms operated during the Hanoverian period. For instance, a number of the entries draw attention to the power struggles present in the College. I have already alluded, impliedly, to the attacks on the office of the Earl Marshal which Anstis was drafted in to rebut – the Earl Marshal's authority was being undermined both from above, from the Crown, and below, from the Deputy Earl Marshal. Perhaps more harmful, in respect of the work of the College, were the attempts by successive Garters to secure reversions for their sons, or to appoint their sons to offices at the College. Anstis, for example, secured a reversion for his son (also John Anstis). More surprisingly, Stephen Martin Leake (1702-1773), who was a critic of such practices, engineered what Clive Cheesman describes as 'the oddest appointment of his or any other age', in appointing his thirteen-year-old son to the office of Chester herald in 1752. While we may sympathise with the view that the boy could do no worse than Leake's brother officers, the appointment is an outward sign of the fact that, throughout the Hanoverian period, officerships were often treated simply as stipends or honours – methods of consolidating and displaying power – and an interest in heraldry was considered a desirable bonus, but not essential attribute, in a herald.

It is easy to assume that the responsibilities of the College of Arms and its officers have remain essentially unchanged since the College's foundation, and to accept unquestioningly the fact that, for instance, the Visitations ended and the recording of Grants began as if these were simply points in time, rather than seismic shifts in the powers and roles of the heralds. The role of the herald is usually considered in terms

of conservation, rather than innovation and invention. The careers of Anstis, Leake and Sir George Nayler (baptized 1764, d. 1831), however, allow the writers of their entries to challenge conventional wisdom, and show that heralds were redefining their own roles well into the Hanoverian period. For example, Anstis interested Walpole in a plan to create the Order of the Bath in 1725. Although this may ostensibly have been a revival of a mediaeval order, in reality Anstis was inventing a new wrung in the present honours system.

The statutes of the new order created the role of genealogist of the Order of the Bath. In addition to the usual functions one might expect, the statutes gave that genealogist the power to examine and enter pedigrees and arms of knights and esquires of the Bath. In fact, this right was not exercised until the end of the eighteenth-century, when Nayler claimed it for his own, as he attempted to recast his own role in the College. In 1794, a letter from Nayler (who was by then Lancaster Herald) to the then Garter, Sir Isaac Heard, expressing the former's intention of exercising his right was read at chapter, and was wrongly construed by the other officers as an attempt to claim the sole right to record Bath pedigrees. In the event, Nayler opened separate registers, and, with a warrant from the Duke of York (Grand Master of the order) he claimed fees for his trouble. In 1799, Nayler attempted to expand his powers further by putting forward to the Home Secretary a draft royal warrant which would command him as genealogist to record all arms and pedigrees of members of the order since its creation in 1725. This expansionism was opposed by Nayler's brother officers, and was eventually resolved by means of a compromise solution which the writer of the Nayler entry, Thomas Woodcock, states 'was supposedly agreed in the attorney-general's chambers in 1804'. Tensions concerning whose rights were being infringed by whom eventually led to Nayler bringing legal proceedings against Heard for invading his rights by soliciting business from knights of the Bath (Nayler won, but his initial award of £1,000 was reduced to 1s. on referral).

Nayler's attempts to reconfigure the prerogatives of officers at the College of Arms can, however, be regarded as of little consequence, and easily dismissed as mere personal aggrandisement, when contrasted with the attempts made by Leake to review the operating scope of the College. Leake's activities were directed at enhancing the reputation and significance of the College. They included attempts to revive the Visitations and the High Court of Chivalry. Perhaps less ambitious in its proportions, but more significant in the long term, Leake became the first Garter to introduce inheriting peers to the House of Lords, under a scheme which lasted until 1802, and is the progenitor of the present arrangement. While Leake's efforts may, almost without exception, have ended in failure, they nevertheless show a refreshing belief in the College as an organic entity capable of change and development well into the Hanoverian period.

From the point of view of an heraldic enthusiast, the most significant Hanoverian herald covered by the *DNB* must be Sir Isaac Heard (1730-1822). In his life, Heard officiated at the ceremonial funerals of six generations of the House of Hanover, and he was to hold the post of Garter for 38 years. In terms of the development of heraldry itself, Heard is infamous for being responsible for the landscape heraldry of the eighteenth-century. David White observes that Heard did in fact act in many

cases to restrain the extravagancies and pomposities suggested by grantees, including those of Nelson himself, whose simple arms were twice ‘debased’ by augmentations of honour. This is telling, and a useful reminder that landscape heraldry was not the invention of one man, but rather of eighteenth-century art. Landscape heraldry has often been lampooned by persons interested in heraldry because of the clear anachronism of its depictions, and the impossibility of its designs: surely a coat of arms must be useable in battle; surely the crest must be capable of being depicted in three dimensions on top of a helm; surely it should be capable of being easily recognised. These are concerns that did not concern Heard, and, to a certain extent, I find that I sympathise. It is clearly just as much an anachronism to pretend that a coat of arms is for use in battle as it is to fill a medieval shield with pictures of eighteenth-century warships. A coat of arms, in the eighteenth century, had become a symbol of prestige rather than a means of recognition, and it had evolved into being a work of art. Heard’s designs are arguably the least anachronistic of all those to be found in the College in that they are heraldry in sympathy with the art of the period – flamboyant, exuberant, and ever-so-slightly incongruous. It is a pity that, of all the heralds covered by the *DNB* during the Hanoverian period, it is only in the case of Heard that there is room for any discussion at all of the heraldic designs of individual heralds, and that in no instance is there reference to the competing styles that waxed and waned in the period.

In conclusion, the new *DNB* is a monumental achievement, full of interesting facts and stories, and, in its entries, it contains a history of the United Kingdom. It does not, of course, contain a history of heraldry or of the College of Arms, but to criticise it for this is not to judge it on its own terms – it is disappointing not to be given fuller details about the careers of some heralds, but it can hardly come as a surprise. In its pages it provides ample proof that it was possible to be a herald and come from any walk of life – Joseph Edmondson (baptized 1732, d. 1786) was of undeniably humble origins, and came to be an officer by way of being a coach-painter; Sir Charles Townley (1713–74), on the other hand, was born to a junior line of the old Lancashire gentry family stemming from from the place of the same name. Finally, reading the entries has exposed for me vast areas of knowledge that not only did I not know about, but I did not know that I did not know about – and, if the new *DNB* is a researcher’s first port of call, this is a greater testament to its success than anything else I can write.