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INTERNET HERALDRY

Advantages, Shortcomings and Unused Potential

Jack Carlson

In 1996, the Cambridge University Heraldic & Genealogical Society declared that 'genealogy and heraldry have both caught up with the latest computer technology' and that heraldists would soon prefer the internet to books: searchable heraldic databases and free, high-quality electronic articles and encyclopedias on the subject were imminent.¹

Over the past thirteen years the internet's capabilities have likely surpassed what CUH&GS could have imagined. At the same time, it seems, the reality of heraldry's online presence falls somewhat short of the society's expectations. Nearly a decade and a half on, then, how do people interested in heraldry make use of the internet? The question is broad, especially given the range of people and institutions involved with heraldry, from heraldic authorities and artists to bucket shops and bloggers. This article seeks to provide a brief survey of the websites and types of websites relevant to heraldry. Much more could be said about any one of the categories discussed here, or indeed about any of the websites themselves: the intention, however, is not to provide a thorough review of every heraldry site, but rather to develop through a frank round-up of the most significant heraldry-related websites a sense of the purpose, audience, advantages, shortcomings, and unused potential of heraldry websites.

Heraldic authorities online

The framework of the College of Arms website has changed little in the past decade, but the site's contents have been improved and expanded to include, among other features, a bibliography of the current officers of arms, an online channel for selling its publication, *The Armorial of Haiti*, and, most notably, a quarterly newsletter. The site has always provided a simple description of the college's work, a very basic introduction to heraldry, and a Frequently Asked Questions section, designed largely, it seems, to cut down on the number of emails the college receives saying 'My name is Smith; what's my family crest?' The establishment of the newsletter in 2004 was therefore a major step in providing richer and more dynamic information to the public. The newsletter's success, however, has rather come at the expense of the site's 'What's New' and 'Recent Grants of Arms' sections. The newsletter has essentially subsumed both of these functions although the latter two sections linger on the site in a state of relative neglect; a new visitor to the site might well click first on 'What's New' or 'Recent Grants' and mistakenly think that very little is new or that grants

¹ László Kóczy, 'Family history, heraldry and the Internet', *The Escutcheon* 1.3 (1996), available at http://www.societies.cam.ac.uk/cuhags/escutch/1995-96/ar_fhlin.htm.

were last made two years ago; the College would do well then to make its excellent newsletter more prominent and do away with these other sections altogether.²

The Court of the Lord Lyon takes a similar approach in its website, aiming chiefly to dispel misconceptions and to provide the most basic information on Scottish heraldry, the work of the Court, and how one may apply for a grant. The Court also provides online news updates, though with neither the color nor the frequency of the College of Arms newsletters; the Court also publishes a very brief online annual summary of its activity (which nearly always begins with the statement that it was a 'busy year'), though this was last published for 2007. Although there is a Public Register of arms maintained by the Court, the Court website makes it seem that the register is not online but only searchable at the Court itself (for a fee).³ This is surprising, as a significant portion of the Public Register is in fact available and searchable online through *ScotlandsPeople* (again, for a fee). The online portion, which includes all entries 1672-1907, is hosted by the government genealogical data website.⁴ On its 'Links' page, the Lyon Court lists *ScotlandsPeople* under the 'Genealogy' section, but nowhere on the Court's site is this useful function noted; and all of its pages on the Public Register itself refer only to the option of in-person inspection in Edinburgh.⁵

As good as the College of Arms is at publishing 'a very small selection' of its new grants (and pedigrees recorded) each quarter, it is no match for the Canadian Heraldic Authority.⁶ The authority's site, actually a section of the Governor General's site, hosts an online edition of The Public Register of Arms, Flags and Badges of Canada.⁷ The Register records all grants, confirmations and registrations of the Canadian Heraldic Authority since its establishment. The online edition is an outstanding model of what the internet can do for heraldry, currently containing blazons, rationales, record information, and even illustrations for all of Volume IV and the beginnings of Volumes III and V. The Authority have done such a good job with the online register, one cannot help but believe it when they say they will soon have the other volumes online *in toto*.⁸ Not only is all of this information online, but the database is searchable by a wide range of categories including the 'recipient's' name, the type of grant, the principal charge, the relevant province, even the calligrapher or painter who worked on the letters patent. Naturally the internet, besides bringing all of this to the public for free, enables one to search by multiple criteria simultaneously: English officers of arms must envy the way that not just their Canadian counterparts but any member of the public can, in a matter of seconds, conduct a search for badges featuring dogs granted to males in Quebec between, say, 2000 and 2003. When it comes to harnessing the internet's unique capabilities

² <http://www.college-of-arms.gov.uk/>.

³ <http://www.lyon-court.com/lordlyon/230.html>.

⁴ <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/content/help/index.aspx?r=554&1283>.

⁵ <http://www.lyon-court.com/>.

⁶ <http://www.gg.ca/heraldry-today/canadian-heraldic-authority>.

⁷ <http://archive.gg.ca/heraldry/pub-reg/main.asp?lang=e>.

⁸ http://archive.gg.ca/heraldry/pub-reg/faq_e.asp.

to organize data in an accessible manner and to impart meaningful information to a broad audience, no other heraldic website can rival that of the Canadian Heraldic Authority. The online register is an example that will hopefully be imitated by other heraldry authorities, for their own benefit as much as for that of the public. It might also usefully influence the websites of heraldry societies and other organizations.

The closest site to this Canadian model is that of the State Herald of Sweden, hosted on the State Archive's domain. Aside from providing general information on Sweden's national flag, arms and other symbols, the website offers a searchable database of Swedish civic heraldry; the search function is admittedly not as elaborate as the Canadian Heraldic Authority's, and of course the Swedish State Herald's database does not include personal arms.⁹

The Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland has gone to the trouble of putting a lot of material online (and, apparently is in the process of adding more), but has not made the material nearly as useful as it might be. It is unclear what stage the project is in, but the Office is in the process of creating and uploading modern paintings of every coat of arms granted between 1936 and 1980 and organizing these paintings by the name of the grantee. Unfortunately the register, though it can be browsed alphabetically, is not searchable and the paintings are not accompanied by blazons or by details of the grantee beyond the name.¹⁰

The website of the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry includes a database of American military arms and insignia with blazons and illustrations; this at least has a single field search capability and, in any case, is organized in a clear enough manner that improvements in the search function are probably not necessary, as they most certainly are for the Irish registry.¹¹

Catching up with the Canadian Heraldic Authority would be a tall order for the College of Arms or the Chief Herald of Ireland's Office, on account of the number of grants these authorities have made and continue to make and, I daresay, the daunting number of man-hours and amount of technical knowledge that such a project would require. But perhaps by reaching out to heraldry societies and limiting the scope of such a project (to only new grants, for example), these authorities might find a way to begin.

Heraldry societies online

While nearly every major heraldry society has some presence on the web, most heraldry society websites limit their content to society-specific information, without considering, it seems, that they could use the internet for other of their purposes (beyond simply having a foothold in the internet); indeed, while many heraldry societies' missions include (and even focus on) public education, expanding interest in heraldry, promoting legitimate heraldry and encouraging heraldic research, few have made a serious commitment to the internet's potential role in achieving those goals.

⁹ <http://www.statensarkiv.se/default.aspx?id=1207&refid=1165>.

¹⁰ <http://www.nli.ie/en/heraldry-introduction.aspx>.

¹¹ <http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/>.

The website of the Heraldry Society (U.K.) is a classic example. The society exists 'to increase and extend interest in and knowledge of heraldry.'¹² And indeed, the society has much to offer in terms of scholarly resources and public education materials; but virtually none of it is online. The society's site is good for what it is: a locus for basic and up-to-date information about the Heraldry Society. But a click on 'Education/Research' under the 'Resources' tab simply offers information about the libraries to which society members have access.¹³ Similarly, the site offers information about the society's image collection (including a list of its contents), but the collection is not online. There may, of course, be copyright problems with putting the collection online (Heraldry Society council member Patrick Cracroft-Brennan has evidently pushed for the online publication of the collection, but also notes the copyright issues).¹⁴ But surely the society could better pursue its self-proclaimed *raison d'être* by offering some resources to non-members and offering those resources online. These features could be as simple as an in-depth heraldic glossary (the society website currently includes a twenty-one word 'glossary', largely composed of tinctures, under its FAQ section);¹⁵ more ambitious projects might include online educational videos (*à la* Videojug, see below) or even working with College of Arms to publish new grants in an online register similar to the Canadian Heraldic Authority's. The one item which the society has put online is *The Heraldry Gazette* (up to December, 2008);¹⁶ as Martin Goldstraw has pointed out, however, for members who, for geographic reasons, are unable to attend the society's events, the *Gazette* is essentially what they receive in return for their membership fees. Placing recent issues of the *Gazette* online in a public area (there is no members' or password-protected section of the site) might be a perverse move for the society.¹⁷

The Heraldry Society of Scotland seems to be somewhat better in using the internet as an instrument by which it might achieve its goals ('promoting the study of heraldry and encouraging its correct use')¹⁸ and not simply as an advertising space for the society. A series of illustrated articles¹⁹ by members provide a wealth of useful (and correct) information on heraldry to the site's visitors, without giving its newsletter away for free. Its online image collection²⁰ is also a good resource, and there is a members' forum. It nevertheless seems that, like the Heraldry Society, the HSS could do more.²¹

The Royal Heraldry Society of Canada provides a good deal of information on both Canadian heraldry in general and the society itself. Basic information on

¹² <http://www.theheraldrysociety.com/>.

¹³ <http://www.theheraldrysociety.com/resources/edu.htm>.

¹⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2330330768&topic=9411>.

¹⁵ <http://www.theheraldrysociety.com/resources/faq5.htm>.

¹⁶ http://www.theheraldrysociety.com/publications/h_g.htm.

¹⁷ <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2330330768&topic=9411>.

¹⁸ <http://www.heraldry-scotland.co.uk/index.htm>.

¹⁹ <http://www.heraldry-scotland.co.uk/scotsherald.html>.

²⁰ <http://www.heraldry-scotland.co.uk/images.html>.

²¹ <http://www.heraldry-scotland.co.uk/>.

heraldry is also 'outsourced' by the society to recommended books and linked websites. Like several other societies, the RHSC's site includes a forum, discussed below. It is noteworthy that by having a blog (see below), the RHSC is able to devote its main site wholly to static information.²²

The American Heraldry Society must deal with some further challenges; it has no heraldic authority with which to collaborate and none on which it can depend to explain American heraldry on its own website.²³ Out of necessity then, the American Heraldry Society presents 'key documents' on heraldry in the United States and a set of 'guidelines for heraldic practice' on its site; it also offers a series of fascinating, illustrated articles analogous to those uploaded by the Heraldry Society of Scotland. The American College of Heraldry faces the same challenges, of course, though it is itself a quasi-authority.²⁴ Its stated purpose is focused on public education, though it pursues this mission only in a limited fashion on its website: a list of the 'commonly recognized meanings' of heraldic tinctures and charges could have been left off for a more useful and possibly simpler heraldic glossary. The College has uploaded a small selection of articles from its hard-copy newsletter; these are good, and promote the newsletter well. The approach is also a compromise which the Heraldry Society (U.K.) may want to consider given the problems with uploading entire issues of *The Heraldry Gazette* (see above).

Two other categories of Heraldry Society websites must be mentioned: those of county and local heraldry societies, and those of other types of heraldry societies, whose purposes do not include expanding interest in and understanding of heraldry. In the first group, there is the Middlesex Heraldry Society,²⁵ the Chiltern Heraldry Group,²⁶ the Cheshire Heraldry Society,²⁷ and Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society.²⁸ These are, for the most part, all up-to-date sites, each with a current programme of recent and upcoming events. In the second group are the White Lion Society,²⁹ the College of Arms Foundation,³⁰ and The Society of Heraldic Arts.³¹ None of the sites in either of these groups should be expected to contribute significantly to large-scale public education or to the creation of comprehensive heraldic data resources, as these societies have other priorities. A foothold in the internet is sufficient for many of these smaller societies, but the websites of more general heraldry societies, whose goals do often include outreach and education efforts, should be more ambitious.

Online databases and reference resources for heraldry

Several independent websites have cropped up to offer the kind of heraldic reference resources which heraldic authorities and societies might pursue in the future.

²² <http://www.heraldry.ca/>.

²³ <http://www.americanheraldry.org/>.

²⁴ <http://www.americancollegeofheraldry.org/>.

²⁵ <http://www.middlesex-heraldry.org.uk/>.

²⁶ <http://www.chiltern-heraldry.org.uk/>.

²⁷ <http://cheshire-heraldry.org.uk/society/>.

²⁸ <http://www.lfhhs.org.uk/>.

²⁹ <http://www.whitelionsociety.co.uk/>.

³⁰ <http://www.coaf.us/>.

³¹ <http://www.heraldic-arts.com/>.

François Velde's website, *heraldica.org*, has a wide scope and is easy to use. Its illustrated heraldic glossary is searchable in six languages, and may be used picture-to-word (by browsing illustrated plates by category) as well as word-to-picture. There are a few notably absent entries, however, including 'griffin', 'thunderbolt', and 'segreant' for which a search yields no results. Other extensive (if not illustrated) heraldic glossaries are available free on commercial sites;³² the illustrations and the two-way search capability distinguish this glossary. *Heraldica.org* also includes an assortment of simple heraldry articles on topics from academic heraldry and national heraldry to heraldry in Shakespeare. The site is a rich resource for beginning heraldry students.³³

Heraldry of the World is also a one-man independent online resource. Ralf Hartemink, who runs the site, has a far more limited focus, however, aiming only to create and maintain an illustrated international database of civic heraldry from the national to the local level. The site claims to be 'the largest heraldry site on the net, with 53,326 coats of arms' online at the time of writing. The site has a wealth of information and illustrations, compiled by the author over years, although it would be helpful to know more information and the sources of illustrations for the arms of places farther afield.³⁴

Independently compiled, searchable databases are as rare as those created and maintained by heraldic authorities. Rietstap's *Armorial Général* is searchable online by both blazon and family name at *Blazon Search*. While it may have been a formidable task to put this monumental work online, the fruits of that labour are not free for the public, but instead one must purchase a subscription to access the records.³⁵

Another armorial, searchable by name, blazon and date is entirely free and easy to use. Unfortunately it is also an armorial of fictional arms, those of SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) members. Perhaps the SCA database's format can provide a useful template for future efforts to compile real arms in online databases. Until then, it is ironic but fitting that this is one of the few 'resources' to utilize the internet's search and directory functions.

Commercial heraldry websites

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, many of the websites yielded in a Google search for 'heraldry' are commercial. Even before the internet age, heraldry 'bucket shops' existed, attempting to dupe potential customers into buying depictions of 'their' arms. These shops operated on the pretence that coats of arms are associated with surnames rather than individuals, and the arms they supplied to purchasers were either associated with someone else (living or historical) with the customer's surname or else completely fictional. Just as the internet has the potential to help advance legitimate objectives (public education, searchable databases, scholarly resources), it has also been very useful for these 'bucket shops' on several fronts.

³² <http://www.digiserve.com/heraldry/pimbley.htm>; <http://www.heraldryclipart.com/heraldry-dictionary.html>.

³³ <http://heraldica.org/>.

³⁴ <http://www.ngw.nl/>.

³⁵ <http://www.blazonsearch.com/>.

Of course, the internet has given these shops access to a far broader market, and has probably helped them target those with a casual interest in heraldry (as a Google search for 'heraldry' or 'coat of arms' turns up many of these sites). Moreover, it has equipped them with valuable tools for attracting and conducting business. There are sites like www.5dollarcoatsofarms.com (yes, this is a real website), which promises your 'coat of arms/family crest...delivered within 24 hours' to your email. Some companies blur together fact and fiction to make themselves seem like the 'good guys' in the business, in one place explaining that arms belong to individuals not surnames and the difference between a coat of arms and a crest, and in another place egregiously flouting this same information.³⁶ Other bucket sites masquerade as sources of legitimate heraldic information,³⁷ as 'free' bucket-shop style surname directories³⁸ or as informed blogs.³⁹ Still other sites use the internet to allow customers to create their own (not necessarily heraldic) 'arms' and then purchase a range of products bearing this graphic.⁴⁰

Heraldry in blogs

There are blogs (or 'web logs') devoted to heraldry and blogs with a more tangential interest in heraldry. As a medium, blogging has its own advantages and limitations; many are 'personal blogs', diaries of a sort, and the posts are thus often connected to where the blogger is, what he or she is reading, and what happens to be capturing his or her attention at the time of writing; and usually that is the full extent of a personal blog's coherence or *raison d'être*. But blogs do have one clear advantage, namely their ability to share news that one might not be able to find anywhere else (heraldry news, for example).

First, those blogs which are not devoted entirely to heraldry: most notable are Father Guy Selvester's *Shouts in the Piazza*⁴¹ and Andrew Cusack's eponymous blog.⁴² These two are personal blogs in the truest sense, covering anything and everything about which the blogger wishes to write. The former often includes items related to the ecclesiastical heraldry of the Roman Catholic Church, but sometimes also posts on heraldic topics of more general interest. The latter, also (coincidentally) interested in Catholicism, posts less frequently on heraldry; it does, however, also cover a range of topics related to heraldry (the peerage, university maces, royal pretenders, *inter alia*). One must also mention *State and Faith* by Alastair Bruce;⁴³ this SkyNews blog 'on constitutions and religion' has little or nothing to do with heraldry in the strict sense, aside from the fact that Alastair Bruce is none other than Fitzalan Pursuivant Extraordinary. And a blogging herald certainly is a *rara avis*,

³⁶ <http://www.fleurdelis.com/> and <http://www.assumearms.com/>.

³⁷ <http://www.4crests.com/herres.html>; <http://www.fleurdelis.com/coatofarms.htm>; and <http://www.swyrich.com/ica/xq/asp/qx/coats.htm>.

³⁸ <http://www.heraldry.ws/> and <http://www.freecoatsofarms.com/>.

³⁹ <http://assumearms.com/Blog/Default.aspx>.

⁴⁰ <http://www.makeyourcoatofarms.com/>.

⁴¹ <http://shoutsinthepiazza.blogspot.com/>.

⁴² <http://www.andrewcusack.com/>.

⁴³ <http://blogs.news.sky.com/stateandfaith>.

especially given that no heraldic authority and very few heraldry societies make use of blogs for their own institutions.

In what seems to be a theme, Canada leads the way in the realm of institutional blogging; *Call to Arms*, the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada's blog, is one of the few regularly updated heraldry blogs that is not a personal blog.⁴⁴ Its posts are, obviously, primarily on Canadian heraldry and, more specifically, on events related to the society. The blog complements the society's own website nicely; by putting news items and events in its blog, the society mitigates the need to update its main site with any regularity. At least in part because of this approach, the RHSC leads the way among heraldry societies in getting news and photographs on society events onto the internet.

Another blog with a local focus is Martin Goldstraw's *Cheshire Heraldry Web Journal*.⁴⁵ While this is in fact a personal rather than a society blog, it functions as a *de facto* blog for the Cheshire Heraldry Society. It does a good job of this. Advertising the society's events, the blog simultaneously features more general posts on heraldry (not all of which relate to Cheshire), some on current events of one sort or another (heraldry in the news, heraldic items at auction, new grants, heraldic presentations), some on items of historical interest.

Other one-man heraldry blogs include David Appleton's *Heraldry*,⁴⁶ Kimon Andreou's *IDTG*,⁴⁷ Stephen Plowman's *Heraldry Online*,⁴⁸ and Frekrik Brodin's *Armorial Blog*.⁴⁹ The first of these is a valuable resource: Mr Appleton dredges a range of mainstream news sources and posts all stories relevant to heraldry on his blog. Like the Cheshire blog, this one also includes many posts which have no rhyme or reason to when they are posted beyond what the blogger is reading or researching at the time; these posts (and blogs) are nevertheless valuable and are part of the territory. Kimon Andreou's heraldry blog, *IDTG*, combines scholarly quality with a good variety of subjects simple and topical enough to interest general heraldry students. Each entry is well introduced and illustrated, so that the reader is drawn in to the topic. *Heraldry Online* is somewhat less topical and less accessible for a general audience, unless the reader is already familiar with one of the families or specific subjects which the author is researching. *The Armorial Blog* isn't a blog at all in the conventional sense (a public-personal journal or current events log); rather it is a gallery of Mr Brodin's beautiful heraldic artwork.

These blogs highlight the medium's diverse uses; particularly helpful, it seems, are those blogs which help a heraldry society keep its members up to date on society news and events and those which compile heraldry stories from the mainstream news media. Models for English heraldry blogs may also be found in two Spanish-language blogs, without mentioning which a survey of heraldry blogs would be incomplete: *Heraldica de Chile*⁵⁰ and *Blog de Heráldica*.⁵¹ both are strictly devoted to heraldry,

⁴⁴ <http://canadian-heraldry.blogspot.com/>.

⁴⁶ <http://blog.appletonstudios.com/>.

⁴⁸ <http://heraldryonline.wordpress.com/>.

⁵⁰ <http://heraldicadechile.blogspot.com/>.

⁴⁵ <http://cheshire-heraldry.org.uk/weblog/>.

⁴⁷ <http://www.idtg.org/>.

⁴⁹ <http://armorialblog.wordpress.com/>.

⁵¹ <http://blogdeheraldica.blogspot.com/>.

with an easy-to-use interface and regular updates (the latter is updated with new posts daily or even multiple times each day).

Heraldry on Facebook

The myriad Facebook groups dedicated to local heraldry societies cannot all be covered here. In any case, these groups are usually very small (five members of the Bulgarian Heraldry & Vexillology Society's page, thirty-five each for the American and Serbian Heraldry Societies) and, regardless of their size (the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada boasts 78 in its group), ostensibly bring together only those who are already associated with each other anyway (i.e. by membership of a society).⁵² But there are also several general heraldry groups on Facebook. How useful are they? That is, how well do they achieve any one of several positive goals for an online heraldry group (e.g., educating a wider audience about heraldry, providing high-quality resources to those studying the subject, bringing together heraldry enthusiasts who might not otherwise communicate with each other)?

The largest of these groups (731 members) is simply named 'Heraldry Society';⁵³ it is not a Facebook group for The Heraldry Society of the UK, but instead we might interpret it as the Heraldry Society of Facebook. Its creator, however, is John Franz Mueller, a member of The Heraldry Society of the UK, and indeed, the group's main picture is a photograph of his assumed arms on a banner (!). The group's description reads 'For members of Facebook who have their own coat of arms [*sic*] or who have an interest in heraldry'. Facebook groups have much to offer users: members can discuss topics in a public forum and easily upload photos to share with a wider community. But these capabilities aren't always the forces for good they might be. As part of a 'social networking' site, the group comes with many of the same problems that fora and discussion boards suffer: commercial and off-topic posts crop up with relative frequency, and general discussion can quickly become heated exchange between a small group of people on a barely relevant issue (currently a 'debate' on the legitimacy of the self-proclaimed King of Mann, complete with links to MySpace pages and comments like 'I apologize [*sic*] for having failed to insult you sufficiently to get the point across').⁵⁴ Even the group's creator bemoans the fact 'that this Group is used by so many people to display their heraldic pretention'. The diverse assortment of uploaded images include scans of legitimate arms, pictures copied from bucket shop websites, photographs of heraldic monuments and architecture, and a large amount of quasi-heraldry. And perhaps because of Facebook's general popularity, there is an even wider range of levels of familiarity with the subject among the group's members (and indeed participants) than in heraldry-specific fora: as a result, an American high school student uploads quasi-heraldic coats of arms he designed only to be unequivocally slammed by a more 'expert' heraldist. This is hardly a good way to encourage young people to learn more about heraldry and hardly a good way for more serious heraldry scholars to spend their time.

⁵² All membership figures are correct at the time of writing.

⁵³ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2330330768>.

⁵⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/wall.php?id=2330330768>.

There is some encouraging heraldry news on Facebook: the site has often been used to bring university students and alumni together to oppose what seems to be an increasingly popular move by university administrations: phasing out use of the university's arms for a corporate-style logo. Unfortunately these groups often refer to their respective university's arms as a 'crest', but their aspirations are commendable. Groups of this kind exist for the University of Liverpool,⁵⁵ the University of Bristol,⁵⁶ Marjon,⁵⁷ the University of Sussex (this group correctly refers to the university 'coat of arms'),⁵⁸ and the University of Waterloo (Canada).⁵⁹ You would certainly be hard pressed to find a similar outpouring of popular interest in (and indeed support for) heraldry among non-specialists elsewhere, online or off.

Heraldry in online videos

While YouTube yields little of substance in heraldry-related searches, a similar site provides an excellent model for bringing heraldry to the public through online videos. This site, Videojug, has a wonderful selection of interviews with well-known genealogist Nick Barratt and Bluemantle Pursuivant Peter O'Donoghue (see **Figure 1**).⁶⁰ In spite of a few editorial errors (*inter alia* Peter O'Donoghue is referred to as 'Blue Pursuivant' and the video series as a whole comes under the heading 'Crests and Insignia'), the videos are in fact high-quality, and the interviewees are certainly well qualified to talk about the subject. Moreover, the videos utilize the internet's unique ability to bring engaging, educational content to the general public for free. Videojug, who undertook these videos on their own, aims to post 'how-to' and educational videos on a wide range of subjects, from 'how to play the piano' to 'how to tie a tie' and, apparently, 'how to begin your heraldic research'; presumably because of advertising, it is possible for them to run a business which gives free access to educational videos. While the questions in this set of interviews were not always expertly crafted, Heraldry Societies and Heraldic Authorities should take note: high-grade online videos on heraldry could prove a worthy response to the profusion of 'bucket shop' websites, giving the man in the street some worthwhile information on heraldry without even requiring him to read words. The College of Arms has done a reasonably good job cropping up on relevant television shows with some regularity in the recent past; but as we enter the age of YouTube, the college and other heraldic institutions ought to adapt.

Conclusion

One subject which has not been covered here is that of heraldic message boards and fora. While this article has concentrated on the internet as a (potential) medium for disseminating educational and scholarly information on heraldry, further research

⁵⁵ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2261042699>.

⁵⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5427294063>.

⁵⁷ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=6240006839>.

⁵⁸ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2553845165>.

⁵⁹ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=123891536822>.

⁶⁰ <http://www.videojug.com/tag/genealogy-crests-and-insignia>.



Figure 1: Bluemantle Pursuivant of Arms speaking about heraldry on videojug.com.

might focus on online discussion fora and whether or not the public person-to-person exchanges they enable are at all useful for heraldry. Any of the subjects covered in this broad review may also be explored more deeply in a future article.

The truth of the matter is that the internet is largely a wasted resource when it comes to heraldry. While the ability to organize information in an accessible manner and to make that information searchable by multiple criteria simultaneously is as valuable for research on the subject of heraldry as on any other, heraldry has yet to harness successfully the internet's unique capabilities for such functions. The Canadian Heraldic Authority's website demonstrates what the internet has to offer, and a few other efforts are being initiated elsewhere (by *ScotlandsPeople* and *Blazon Search*). But free public access to useful, searchable heraldic information remains scarce. Instead, the most common sites on heraldry are mutant forms of the old 'bucket shops', for whom the internet has made eminently easier both the customization of products and the creation of commercial channels. No heraldic authority's website offers anything like the sort of database described above; several independent heraldry sites make an attempt to use the web in a more systematic manner, but only in projects with very limited scopes. Of course, harnessing the internet to its greatest potential when it comes to heraldry is a far more arduous task than typing in a blog post. But isn't it ironic that most heraldry societies' sites feature armorials only of their own members arms? And, *quin etiam*, that the Society for

THE COAT OF ARMS

Creative Anachronism armorial of make-believe coats of arms seems to reflect the greatest effort to date in this vein outside of the Canadian registry?

A less scholarly but no less important function for the internet is its ability to bring high-quality educational content to the general public. This is an especially important task for heraldry institutions to undertake as commercial websites seek to mislead potential customers; it shouldn't be left to a few bloggers or to Videojug. Heraldry societies and authorities need to pull themselves into the twenty-first century and utilize the internet's unique abilities for two purposes: scholarly resources and public education.