

Third Series Vol. VII Part 1

No. 221

Spring 2011

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 VII

**2011**

Part 1

*Number 221 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.

*Founding Editor*

†John Brooke-Little, C.V.O., M.A., F.H.S.

*Honorary Editors*

C. E. A. Cheesman, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A., Richmond Herald

M. P. D. O'Donoghue, M.A., Bluemantle Pursuivant

*Editorial Committee*

Adrian Ailes, M.A., D.PHIL., F.S.A., F.H.S.

Jackson W. Armstrong, B.A., M.PHIL., PH.D.

Noel Cox, LL.M., M.THEOL., PH.D., M.A., F.R.HIST.S.

Andrew Hanham, B.A., PH.D.

*Advertizing Manager*

John Tunesi of Liongam

PLATE 1



Sword pommel from Burgh-next-Aylsham. Scale 1:1. *See page 1.*

# FIVE MEDIEVAL ARMORIAL SWORD POMMELS FROM NORFOLK

Steven Ashley

At least thirty-six medieval sword pommels have been discovered in Norfolk,<sup>1</sup> most since the advent of metal-detecting and the recording of metal-detected finds, for Norfolk that is from the mid-1970s, but including at least three earlier finds.<sup>2</sup> Of five armorial pommels, described and illustrated herein, two display personal arms, while the other three carry versions of royal arms.

## The pommels

1. Copper alloy disc-pommel from Burgh-next-Aylsham.<sup>3</sup> With cast and enamelled decoration of a lozengy shield on one face and on the other face a shield bearing a lion rampant. Traces of 'red enamel' survive. Unfortunately some of the detail in the record made in 1991 is ambiguous so it is not possible to give full blazons for the arms. The images are taken from a scanned Polaroid photograph. Diameter c. 49 mm. See **Plate 1**.

2. Fragment of a copper alloy hollow cast wheel-pommel from Colney.<sup>4</sup> Part of one face and the distorted side survives. The face bears the engraved flattened convex

<sup>1</sup> These include the following types: two disc, sixteen wheel, five spherical/globular, three lobed, three scent-stopper, two cocked-hat, one concave-sided oval and four unknown: Norfolk Historic Environment Record (hereafter HER), Gressenhall, Norfolk.

<sup>2</sup> These include a falchion with a wheel-pommel with incised decoration, dredged up from the river 'at Thorpe,' Norwich (HER 9645) and a sword with an undecorated wheel pommel 'found in the meadows at Lakenham mill, one mile south of our city'; S. Woodward 'Ancient swords found near Norwich', *Archaeologia* 27 (1838), pp. 435-7 (HER 14758). The third of these earlier finds is the excavated ferruginous stained 'ghost' of an otherwise decomposed sword in a very unusual accompanied burial which lay three metres to the north of the north door of the nave of late eleventh- or early twelfth-century Chapel of Bishop Herbert de Losinga at North Elmham (HER 1014). Other objects found with the burial included a probably circular shield and a possible helmet, all apparently placed on the lid of the coffin at the time of burial. The pommel was of the cocked-hat type; S. Rigold 'The Anglian Cathedral of North Elmham', *Medieval Archaeology* 6/7 (1962-3), pp. 92 -5, fig. 34.

<sup>3</sup> HER 28657.

<sup>4</sup> HER 24833.

upper end of an early form of shield with rounded corners.<sup>5</sup> Part of the device carried on the shield survives, comprising the ends of three radiating arms each crossed by a short transverse bar, one with two additional nicks on one side. The disposition of the radiating arms suggests that they were part of an eight-armed escarbuncle. >45 mm x >15 mm. Metal 1–2 mm thick. See **Figure 1**.

**3.** Incomplete copper alloy hollow-cast chamfered circular wheel-pommel from Beighton.<sup>6</sup> One face and fragments of the sides survive; with parts of the upper and larger lower rectangular slots for the iron tang of the sword. The surviving face is engraved with the arms of Castile and Leon: *Quarterly 1 and 4 a castle, 2 and 3 a lion rampant*.<sup>7</sup> Diameter c. 43 mm. Metal 2–3 mm thick. See **Figure 1**.

**4a.** Incomplete copper alloy hollow-cast chamfered octagonal wheel-pommel from Pentney.<sup>8</sup> One face and fragments of the sides survive, also part of the lower rectangular slot to accommodate the iron tang of the sword. The surviving face is engraved with a simplified, almost ‘shorthand’, version of the arms of England: *Three lions passant guardant in pale*. Original dimensions approximately 45 mm x 45 mm. Metal 1–2.5 mm thick.<sup>9</sup> See **Figure 1**.

**4b.** Fragment of a copper alloy hollow cast chamfered octagonal wheel-pommel, a small part of one face and fragments of the sides survive. The surviving face has part of two engraved lines within a border, and the chamfer on the side has fragmentary remains of a possible inscription. This was found in the same field as no. **4a**, and is part of the same pommel, but the two do not join. >24 mm x >20 mm. Metal 1.25 mm thick. See **Figure 1**.

**5.** Incomplete copper alloy hollow-cast wheel-pommel, found near Thetford.<sup>10</sup> Over half survives with one face extant, and is cracked across the smaller upper slot for the tang. Part of the opposite side has been flattened by hammering and is broken through the large lower slot. The break continues in an uneven and roughly circular manner where the face is missing. The side of the pommel has a wide raised concave-sided radial band with a broad median groove between four engraved lines. The surviving face is decorated with a rather naïve engraved depiction of a coat of arms within a pair

<sup>5</sup> Classed as ‘Norman convex’ by George Grazebrook in *The Dates of Various-shaped Shields: with coincident dates and examples* (Liverpool 1890), pp. 17f., and plate 1, no. 4. An example of this form of shield can be seen, bearing an elaborate escarbuncle, on the monumental effigy of William, Count of Flanders, son of Robert, Duke of Normandy (d. 1127), illustrated in Olivarius Vredius (Olivier de Wrée), *Sigilla Comitum Flandriae et Inscriptiones Diplomatum* (Bruges 1639), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> HER 39941.

<sup>7</sup> An engraved triple-towered castle, probably for Castile, appears on both faces of a pommel found in Kent (Portable Antiquities Scheme database LON-5D8CF3, at [http://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/old\\_findID/LON-5D8CF3/](http://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/old_findID/LON-5D8CF3/)).

<sup>8</sup> HER 16583.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately a very close parallel to this pommel bearing a remarkably similar version of the arms of England was sold on ebay in October 2007 by a dealer in antiquities in Diss, Norfolk without any record being made of its find-spot.

<sup>10</sup> HER 55042.

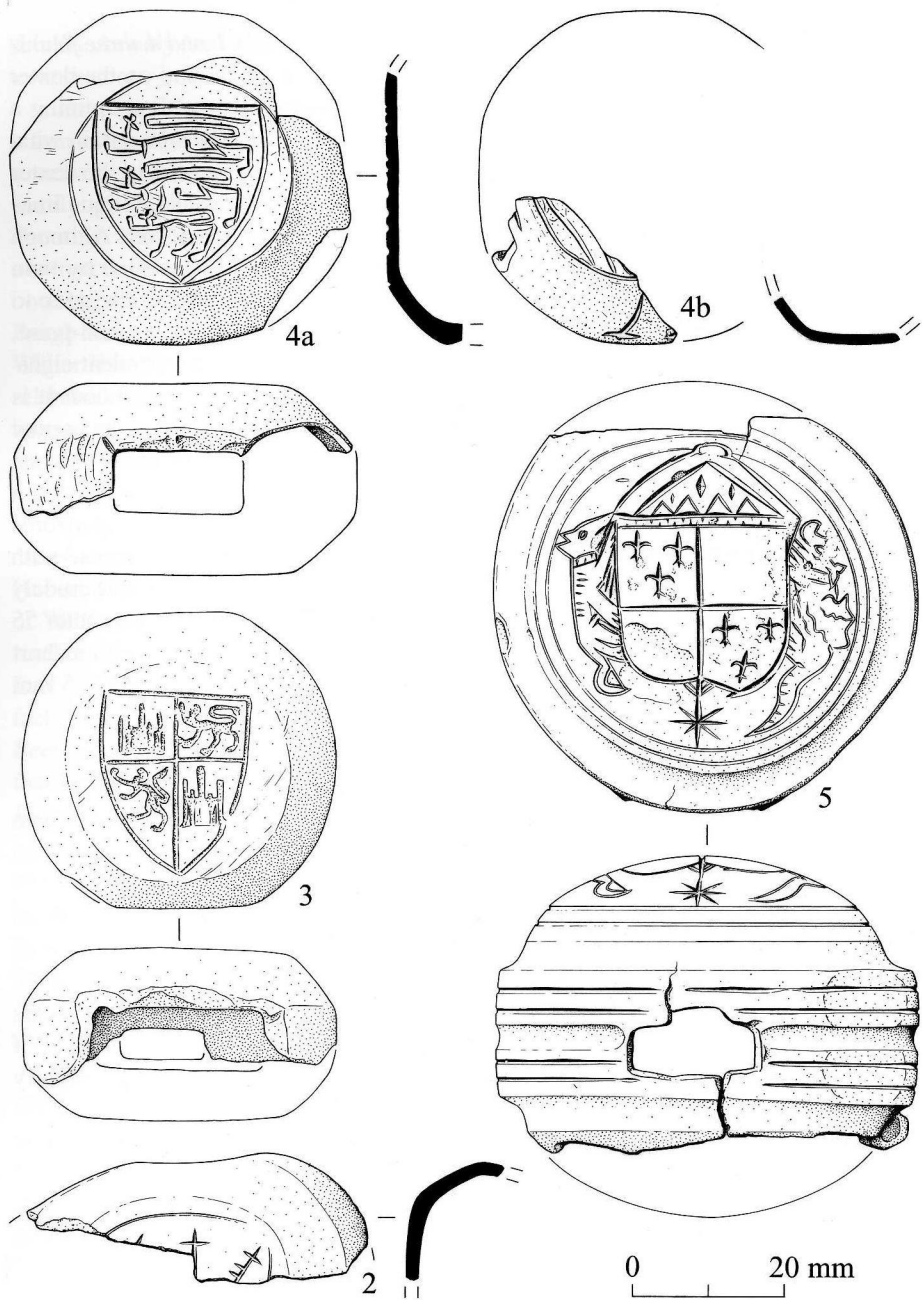


Figure 1: Sword pommels from: 2 Colney; 3 Beighton; 4a and 4b Pentney and 5 'Thetford'.  
Scale 1:1.

of concentric bordering lines. The arms depicted are *Quarterly 1 and 4 three fleurs-de-lys [2 and 3 blank]* between two supporters: a collared greyhound on the dexter and a dragon on the sinister. The shield has an engraved horizontal line defining a narrow border at the upper edge containing short vertical nicks. It is uncertain what this border decoration, executed in a similar manner to that on the collar of the dexter supporter, is intended to represent. Above the upper edge of the shield oblique lines form four triangular points which may represent a crude crown or coronet. Although 'supported' the shield also appears to be suspended by a strap represented by twin lines in a chevron-like arrangement, slightly expanded and rounded at the apex to indicate a nail or similar fixing. The base of the shield is indented at its mid-point, beneath which can be seen twin lines forming a short chevron with a pendent eight-pointed star. This may represent a ribbon suspending an order of knighthood. It is unusual that the base of the arms is at the upper end of the pommel, i.e. at the narrow perforation for the end of the missing iron tang, and would therefore be inverted when the sword was resting in its scabbard. Most armorial pommels show arms the right way up when worn on the sword belt.<sup>11</sup> The exceptions to this are official swords intended to be borne in procession with the point uppermost, 'bearing-swords,' with the arms usually (though not invariably) oriented accordingly. However, this crudely engraved pommel is unlikely to have belonged to a ceremonial sword. Diameter 55 mm. Lower perforation 25 mm x c. 11 mm, smaller upper perforation with a short rectangular expansion at the mid-point on one side 15 mm x 9 mm. Metal 2-5 mm thick. See **Figure 1**.

## Discussion

The five sword pommels illustrated herein span a period of approximately three hundred years and demonstrate the remarkably conservative evolution of these two long-lived and related types.

The earliest example, the disc-pommel from Burgh-next-Aylsham, (no. 1, Ward Perkins Type V) belongs to the late twelfth-thirteenth century. A notable example of a similarly decorated disc-pommel was found in the Holy Land and is now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>12</sup> On one face it bears the enamelled arms of Peter of Dreux (c. 1190-1250) Duke of Brittany and Earl of Richmond and on the reverse a cross between scrolls or vines which may signify Christ.<sup>13</sup>

This example displays personal arms on two shields, probably representing families linked by marriage or fealty. The record is ambiguous but the lack of comment on the surface treatment of the metal (gilding, tinning or silvering) suggests that this was missing. It appears from the photograph that enamel was present on both

<sup>11</sup> See for example swords illustrated in J. B. Ward Perkins *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (London 1940, repr. 1967), fig. 3, nos. 2, 7, 8 and 18, and C. Blair 'The Conyers falchion' in J. Alexander and P. Binski (edd.), *Age of Chivalry* (London 1987), no. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Acc. No. 38.60.

<sup>13</sup> S. V. Grancsay, 'A French crusader's sword pommel', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 34.9 (Sep. 1939), pp. 211-13.

shields. As only 'red enamel' was noted in the description it is possible that this refers to both coats.

However, the combination of the arms (one shield *Lozengy*, the other bearing a lion rampant) offers some clues to the identity of the owner and the damage and uncertainty leave room for various interpretations. The lozengy field could be for the family of Tuddenham, *Lozengy Argent and Gules*,<sup>14</sup> who held land in Brandeston, about 10 km from the find-spot. Perhaps a better, and certainly more interesting alternative, is that the sword belonged to an early member of the Burgh family who bore *Lozengy Gules and Vair*.<sup>15</sup> The territorial connection with Burgh by Aylsham (or Burgh-next-Aylsham), rather than Burgh in Flegg hundred, has been attended to by Walter Rye.<sup>16</sup> In the same paper Rye also examined, to a limited extent, the tenurial relationship between Burgh and Bigod and while it is worth mentioning that Bigod bore a lion rampant<sup>17</sup> this probably has little relevance as the shield is parted per pale and that their ancient arms were *Or a cross Gules*. In any event there is no known filial relation between Burgh and Bigod.

In order to provide a link between the lozengy and lion rampant coats of arms it is necessary to examine the Burgh pedigree. This proves difficult. Dugdale tells us that Hubert de Burgh, Earl of Kent and Justiciar (d. 1243) had four wives: Joan, daughter of William de Vernum (de Reviers); Beatrix, daughter of William de Warrene, and mother of a son William by her first marriage; Isabel, daughter and coheir of William Earl of Gloucester; and, lastly, Margaret, daughter of William King of Scotland.<sup>18</sup> In fact the marriage to Joan, though contracted, did not take place, and the *Complete Peerage* mentions only, in different order, the last three of these wives. It also says that Hubert was succeeded by a son, John (knighted in 1229) whereas Dugdale says John had a brother named Hubert.

More pertinently, a manuscript once belonging to Robert Appleton of Suffolk, and owned or compiled by Robert Ryece, Reece or Rice (1555-1638) and transcribed by the Norfolk antiquary, Brampton Gurdon in c. 1677,<sup>19</sup> while only giving two wives to the Earl of Kent, agrees there were two brothers and adds that Sir Hubert de Burgh, the second son, married 'ye dau. of the Lord Mowbray'. The Mowbray family, back to the thirteenth century, bore arms, *Gules a lion rampant Argent*.<sup>20</sup> Thus, if the manuscript is correct, giving a possible link between the two shields on the pommel.

The remains of the wheel-pommel from Colney (no. 2, Ward Perkins Type VIII) are fragmentary and distorted but are likely to have originally been circular rather

<sup>14</sup> J. Corder *A Dictionary of Suffolk Arms* (Ipswich 1965), col. 400.

<sup>15</sup> Corder, *Suffolk Arms*, coll. 400-1. I am grateful to Ron Fiske for the remainder of the text regarding the arms on this pommel.

<sup>16</sup> W. Rye, 'Hubert de Burgh, the justiciary', *Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany* 2nd ser. 2 (1907), pp. 88-93.

<sup>17</sup> The lion shield was probably used for the Marshalcy of England; see *Rolls of Arms of Henry III* (*Aspilogia* 2: London 1967), p. 116.

<sup>18</sup> W. Dugdale, *The Baronage of England* (London 1675-6), vol. 1, p. 699.

<sup>19</sup> In the possession of Ron Fiske (RCF Ms 15, p. 101).

<sup>20</sup> *Rolls of Arms of Henry III*, p. 128.

than octagonal. It is an early example of a type that evolved from the disc-pommel in the later thirteenth century and was in use throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>21</sup> The engraving shows a shield bearing a carbuncle or escarbuncle, an ancient charge derived from the *umbo* or central boss and radiating binding strips on a shield,<sup>22</sup> and may well represent a personal coat of arms.

The remaining three wheel-pommels bear royal coats of arms, displayed as signs of national, dynastic or factional allegiance.

The first of these, the wheel-pommel from Beighton (no. 3, Ward Perkins Type VIII), also belongs to the end of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The arms of Castile and Leon: *Quarterly 1 and 4 [Gules] a castle [Or], 2 and 3 [Argent] a lion rampant [Gules]* may refer to Eleanor of Castile who was married to the future Edward I in 1254 and who died in 1290. It is possible that the missing face was engraved with the arms of England, *[Gules] three lions passant guardant in pale [Or]*, for Edward when king (1272-1307). If this combination of arms was present on the complete pommel as a patriotic reference to Edward I and Eleanor his queen, it would have suggested a date for the engraving and probable manufacture of somewhere between 1272 and 1290.

An octagonal variation on the wheel-pommel, from Pentney (no. 4, Ward Perkins Type VIII Variant), is of a form that is particularly common in the later fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> The arms *[Gules] three lions passant guardant in pale [Or]* were the English royal arms c. 1198-1340, after which date the English lions were quartered with the fleurs-de-lys of France. That said, this is unlikely to mean that the pommel ante-dates 1340, as even after this date both the lions of England and the fleurs-de-lys of France continued to be used on separate shields to signify the king's claim to both kingdoms. The pommel is likely to have been decorated on both faces, and it is possible that the missing face was engraved with fleurs-de-lys.

Lastly, the wheel-pommel from 'Thetford' (no. 5, Ward Perkins Type VIII Variant), is a late and elaborate example of its type, belonging to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The engraved arms *Quarterly 1 and 4 three fleurs-de-lys [2 and 3 blank]* supported by the collared greyhound and the dragon seem to be a rather naive attempt to depict the Tudor royal arms. The three fleurs-de-lys in the first and fourth quarters are recognisably those of France modern (post c. 1405). The blank second and third quarters were presumably both intended for the three lions passant guardant of England, and left unfinished. The combination of a greyhound and a dragon was used by Henry VII as supporters for his royal arms. Although both the greyhound and the dragon have royal connections dating to well before the battle of Bosworth Field and the Tudor accession, they were in fact 'so intimately associated

<sup>21</sup> Two decorated examples of wheel-pommels are depicted on brasses from Suffolk (1302) and Norfolk (1347) respectively and illustrated in *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (London 1967), Fig. 3, 1 and 2.

<sup>22</sup> G. J. Brault, *Early Blazon* (2nd edn., Woodbridge 1997), pp. 139f.

<sup>23</sup> The two octagonal examples of wheel-pommels depicted on contemporary brasses and illustrated in *London Museum Medieval Catalogue*, Fig. 3, date to c. 1400 and 1406. Both are decorated with plain shields.

## FIVE MEDIEVAL ARMORIAL SWORD POMMELS

with Henry ... that that they may be regarded as having been introduced to the royal bestiary by him'.<sup>24</sup> They were also one of the combinations of supporters used by his son, Henry VIII. The portrayal of a shield of arms with a ribbon and its order also indicates a date in the late fifteenth or sixteenth century when this practice became more general.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> H. Stanford London, *The Queen's Beasts* (London 1953), p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> Boutell (rev. JBL), p. 193. I am most grateful to Adrian Ailes, Ron Fiske, Andrew Rogerson and Melanie Rolfe for commenting on the text of this article, and to Ben Wilson for producing a digital image of the Burgh-next-Aylsham pommel from the original Polaroid in the Norfolk HER (Plate 1). The drawings are by Jason Gibbons (nos. 2 and 5) and the writer (nos. 3, 4a and 4b).