

# THE COAT OF ARMS

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**The Heraldry Society** is an educational charity. Its purpose is to promote greater understanding and appreciation of heraldry and its related subjects. The society organises lectures, study days, congresses, dinners and other social activities. It offers a course in heraldry leading to examination for a diploma. It publishes a range of source material at modest cost. Members receive the *Coat of Arms* and the quarterly *Heraldry Gazette*.

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Arms and banner of John Reginald Marriott impaling Rostron by John Ferguson 1969.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Stephen Friar (ed.): *The Heraldic Art of John Ferguson*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press/Heraldry Society, 2018. 96 pp. ISBN 978-0-904858-05-1. £30.

The first time I became acquainted with the heraldic art of John Ferguson was through his illustrations to the book *Basic Heraldry* from 1993. I remember how I struggled to comprehend that these illustrations had been made by a human hand. The very delicate graduated shadowing and a very secure outline are something that characterizes the art of John Ferguson. The helmets that he illustrates are second to none in the rendering of the metal and the three-dimensional effect, and he is tremendously good at painting letters in mottos and in seals. Now a book about him and his heraldic art has been published, edited by Stephen Friar who also authored *Basic Heraldry*. The book contains an introduction, a short chapter by Ferguson himself about his technique and methods, and then a selection of works by Ferguson. On each spread there is a short text about the displayed work on the left side, and the artwork itself is shown on the right page. This gives good space for the artwork enabling the details to be studied. In total there are 44 spreads of his artwork, one in monochrome, the rest in colour.

John Ferguson was born in 1925, went to Wimbledon School of Art, and studied graphic design there before being admitted to The Royal College of Art. His studies were interrupted by military service during World War II, and were not finally completed until 1950. He then started working at an advertising agency, before he in 1959 began working as a freelance heraldic artist. At the same time he became a senior lecturer in graphic design at West Surrey College of Art. Ferguson also taught heraldic art at the courses in heraldic art and calligraphy run by Anthony Wood and Dan Escott at Reigate School of Art. In 1987 John Ferguson was one of the founders of The Society of Heraldic Arts.

The book's artwork includes examples of personal heraldry, institutional heraldry, armorial illustrations for books and exhibitions, and effigial figures. What strikes me is how secure Ferguson's style was from his earliest works. Not all the paintings shown in the book are dated, but the earliest dated work was created in 1963, and the latest in 2012. They are all characterized by the style that Ferguson developed early in his career; the very clear, strong outline and the graduation of colour which is so difficult to obtain with gouache paint. It is probably Ferguson's graphic education and knowledge from the graphic field that has contributed to the style which has characterized his work for half a century. He was finally compelled to lay down his brush a few years ago on account of his age and infirmity.

It would have been nice to have known the criteria for choosing these examples for the book as we have here only a small selection of his works. A comprehensive list of his works would have added value to the text. Personally, I could have wished that the chapter where Ferguson talks about his art and techniques had been much enlarged. It is utterly fascinating to learn about such things, and it is rare that heraldic artists write about their techniques. Anthony Wood did it in his *Heraldic Art & Design* (1996) and Timothy Noad wrote a chapter about his work in Patricia Lovett's *Calligraphy, Illumination & Heraldry* (2000). While there are other examples, such insights remain rare. Ferguson

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describes among other things how he achieves the delicate gradation of colours, which is one of the things he does best. This is a beautiful book and I can highly recommend it. It is not often that books about heraldic artists are published in their own lifetime.

*Ronny Andersen*



The achievement of Baron Desborough of Taplow by John Ferguson, 1975