

Third Series Vol. VI part 1.

No. 219

Spring 2010

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 VI

2010

Part 1

Number 219 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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THE HEARTH TAX AND THE PRE-GREAT FIRE HOME OF THE HERALDS

Adrian Ailes

The 1663 hearth tax list for Derby Place, London, home of the English heralds since the mid-1560s, has been discovered in The National Archives, Kew. Derby Place (or House) perished in the Great Fire three years later in September 1666 (see **Figure 1**).¹ The hearth tax (or 'chimney money') was introduced by Charles II in 1662 as an annual payment due of two shillings for every hearth. It was collected in two equal installments every year, one at Lady Day (25 March) and the other at Michaelmas (29 September), beginning with the Michaelmas 1662 collection. It was levied on the occupier of the house rather than the owner who only had to pay if the premises were empty. Because those assessed are often listed in order of seniority or social hierarchy, and because (generally speaking) more hearths suggest greater wealth, the hearth tax provides one of the best indicators of relative economic and social standing for England and Wales in the third quarter of the seventeenth century.² We know that officers of arms such as William Dugdale, Elias Ashmole, and later Gregory King, consulted the hearth tax lists to discover who the local gentry and potential gentry were in preparation for their heraldic visitations.³

The assessment (National Archives reference: E 179/147/625 m.18d) for the east precinct of the parish of St Benet, Paul's Wharf, London, relates to the collections due at Michaelmas 1662 and Lady Day 1663, and was probably drawn up in May 1663; this is confirmed by the presence of George Owen, York Herald, who resigned in July of that year. The assessment lists the officers of arms by seniority with Sir Edward Walker, Garter King of Arms, first with eight hearths (his rooms would have

¹ I am grateful to Dr Jonathan Mackman for having brought this document to my attention. Dr Mackman is currently helping prepare the London hearth tax returns of 1666 and 1662-63 for publication by the Centre for Hearth Tax Research at Roehampton University.

² See especially Christopher Husbands, 'Hearths, Wealth and Occupations: an exploration of the hearth tax in the later seventeenth century', in *Surveying the People: the interpretation and use of document sources for the study of population in the later seventeenth century*, edd. Kevin Schurer and Tom Arkell (Oxford, 1992), pp. 65-77.

³ Adrian Ailes, 'Elias Ashmole's "Heraldicall Visitation" of Berkshire 1665-66' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 2008), pp. 78-116; P. L. Dickinson, 'The Heralds' Visitation of Gloucestershire 1682-83', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 117 (1999), pp. 11-33; Philip Styles, 'The Heralds' Visitation of Warwickshire, 1682-83', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* 71 (1953), pp. 96-134; and *The Visitation of the County of Huntingdon 1684*, ed. John Bedells, corr. Janet Grant and Thomas Woodcock (Harl. Soc. pubns. new series 13. London 2000), pp. 14, 34-9.

THE COAT OF ARMS

Thomas A. A. A.	iii	vi
James A. A. A.	viii	vii
John A. A. A.	ii	iii
William A. A. A.	iii	ii
George A. A. A.	iii	vi
John A. A. A.	i	ii
Thomas A. A. A.	i	ii
William A. A. A.	iii	vi
Thomas A. A. A.	ii	iii
John A. A. A.	ii	iii
Thomas A. A. A.	iii	vi
John A. A. A.	o	o
The Hall	i	ii
The House	i	ii
The Kitchen	i	ii
The Office	i	ii

Figure 1: National Archives E179/147/625 m.18d. Hearth Tax return for the College of Arms, 1663.

included those for the Earl Marshal), followed by his parliamentary predecessor as Garter, Edward Bysshe, now demoted to Clarenceux King of Arms, with two hearths, and the great antiquarian, William Dugdale, Norroy King of Arms, with three hearths. Only the two pre-civil war heralds, George Owen, York Herald, and William Ryley, Lancaster Herald, and Ashmole (appointed Windsor Herald in 1660 with special precedence after Owen and Ryley), occupy chambers with three hearths each. The St George brothers, Thomas and Henry, respectively Somerset Herald and Richmond Herald, each have two hearths. John Wingfield, Owen's son-in-law and Portcullis Pursuivant, and Thomas Lee, Chester Herald, have one hearth each. Henry Dethick, Rouge Croix Pursuivant and grandson of Sir William Dethick, the notorious sixteenth-century Garter, occupies a room which has either no hearths or whose hearths have been deliberately stopped up to avoid payment. There is one hearth in each of the following rooms: hall, lodge, kitchen and office. The library is not listed; perhaps a fireplace was considered too much of a hazard amongst the records. Francis

Sandford, Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, and Robert Chaloner, Bluemantle Pursuivant, do not appear to have lodgings though this was not unprecedented.⁴

The number of hearths in Derby Place reflects the hierarchy of its inhabitants both in terms of status (beginning with the kings of arms and senior heralds) and relative wealth (the number of their hearths). Assuming that on average there was one hearth per room listed then Derby Place comprised at least thirty-two rooms in 1663.⁵ The hearth tax list for nearby Pudding Lane taken in 1666 (E 179/252/32 pt 4, fo. 6) records that one Thomas Farriner, a baker to the king, occupies premises with five hearths and one oven. It was an ominous indication of the conflagration that was to take place shortly afterwards and which destroyed the heralds' old home.

⁴ In 1624 Rouge Croix and Portcullis Pursuivants did not have rooms (Godfrey & Wagner, *CA*, pp. 8-9).

⁵ The House had about twenty-five chambers when given to the Heralds' Office, since when officers of arms are known to have made several additions (Godfrey & Wagner, *CA*, pp. 5, 9).

Appendix: National Archives E 179/147/625 m.18d

Heralds Office		
Sir Edward Walker	8 [hearth]	16s
Edward Bush	2	4s
William Dugdale	3	6s
George Owen	3	6s
John Winckfeild	1	2s
Thomas Lee	1	2s
William Ryly	3	6s
Thomas St George	2	4s
Henry St George	2	4s
Elias Ashmole	3	6s
Henry Dethicke	0	0
The Hall	1	2s
The Lodge	1	2s
The Kitchen	1	2s
The Office	1	2s