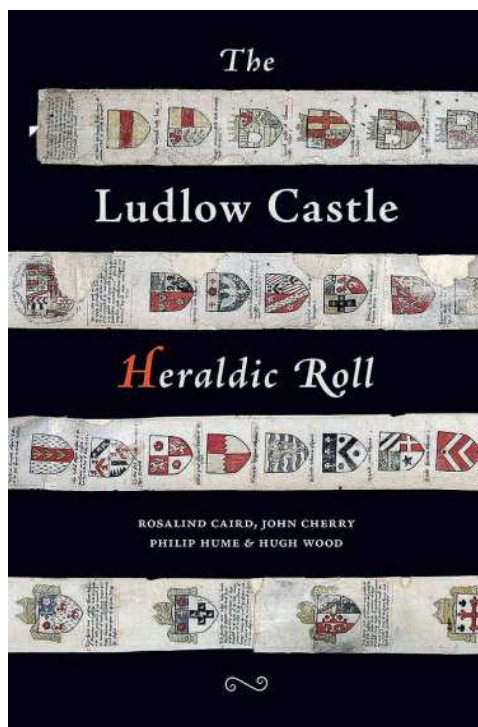


BOOK REVIEWS

Rosalind Caird, John Cherry, Philip Hume & Hugh Wood, *The Ludlow Castle Heraldic Roll*, Eardisley, Herefordshire: Logaston Press, 2019 xii+242pp, many illus. Paperback with fold-out covers. ISBN 978-1-910839-37-9. £12.95.



Not many studies of ancient heraldic manuscripts begin with a chance discovery in the Portobello Road antiques market in London; nor then relate how, by a slender thread of good fortune, it should come to the attention of exactly the right people in Ludlow – its original home – who fell upon it with a mix of praiseworthy enthusiasm and scholarship, resulting in this finely produced volume.

The roll is an unusual object too, for three reasons. First, it is not a roll recording the descent of a great family, but a lineal heraldic register of the owners of Ludlow Castle from the 11th to the late 16th century, of the Lords President of the Council of the Marches of Wales based there from its formation in the 1470s, and of the members of the Council at the time the record was made in the 1570s; all with their names below plus a few lines of biography where significant. Second, it is therefore of unusual dimensions, being 4.5 metres long but only 10 centimetres wide. The third unusual aspect is the discovery that it was in fact created as a copy of the heraldry (now lost) in the chancel of the chapel within Ludlow Castle, commissioned by Sir Henry Sidney as part of his grand re-edifying of the place during his tenure as President of the Council in the 1570s (**Figure 1**).

Word of its existence having filtered to Ludlow in 2015, the authors and others formed an action committee to raise funds not only for the roll's purchase but for the

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Figure 1: Arms of Sir Henry Sidney, 1529–86, number 12 in the roll.

considerably greater cost which they realised would be required to conserve it, for alas the mice and rats had nibbled happily all along the exposed side as it lay rolled up on some shelf for years, while its unrolling many times before or after that had caused considerable loosening and flaking of paint. Fundraising and grant applications happily met with great success, allowing not only professional conservation but also for a remarkably interesting scientific analysis of the paint and its rare compounds to be made, for a high quality working copy to be made for research use by the National Library of Wales, and finally for this exemplary book to be written, with the particular aim of being accessible to the general reader and to schools as well as to researchers. Thus, before one even considers the contents, one must start simply by saying congratulations. Likewise, it is fitting to acknowledge the publisher, Logaston Press, based in the Herefordshire countryside, whose list of publications relating to the history of the Welsh Marches has become of enormous value.

The roll has sadly lost its final part with four coats of arms but forty-two survive, beginning with eleven for Walter de Lacy (**Figure 2**), founder of the Castle, and his successors, via the Mortimers down to Queen Elizabeth. Then follow twenty-two for the Members of the Council in office in 1570 and finally nine for the successive Lords President until the roll ends four short of that date. It begins with an explanation of its purpose – that it was ‘set forth by the appointment of the right honourable the lord

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president Sir Henry Sidney knight'. It does not say that the contents are copied from the heraldic decoration he had had set up in the new chancel of the famous Round Chapel in the outer bailey of the Castle – that is the important discovery of the present authors – but it does lead to the reasonable speculation that it was made either for Sir Henry's private enjoyment or possibly for the archives of the Council. Unfortunately, the roll has no known provenance or any prior note of its existence until it turned up for sale.

Proof that it is copied from the chapel walls, and equally important, proof that the chapel walls were indeed painted as the roll now records, come from the authors' researches: firstly from later references by antiquaries and travellers but more exactly from the remarkable discovery of the commonplace book of Robert Commander, chaplain to Sir Henry, which describes the new work as 'sett oute in cullors of Arms there by the procurement of the right honorable Sir Henrye Sydney knight'. He notes the order in which the sets of arms were painted: the Castle owners in early January 1574, the Council members then in office in late January and the former successive Presidents in February. As the authors note, the effect was undoubtedly to remind visitors of St George's chapel, Windsor.

The other fortunate survival is the drawings of Rev. William Mytton, a local antiquary c.1735. By then the whole Castle was in decay and the chancel added to the ancient Round Chapel by Sir Henry (and now entirely gone) was suffering likewise. Mytton very accurately recorded both the arms and the inscriptions beneath each, confirming the exact accuracy of the work on the roll and providing additional vital information where there have been losses or in some cases fading. Good fortune like this can hardly be more satisfying.

Having covered this remarkable detective story and then an account of Sir Henry Sidney and his work on the Castle and the history and function of the Council of the Marches, we turn to the detailed consideration of the roll itself and the arms shown. And here the one big unknown is reached: who created it? The arms are clearly executed to a very high standard but there is no signature. The authors carefully consider the several candidates without being able to nominate a preferred choice. What they do note is that the artist had access to rare and expensive pigments, and this makes one of the most remarkable and important chapters in the book. The successful fundraising allowed the roll to be examined in a laboratory and the pigments identified by high definition microscope, revealing for example two expensive blue ones – ultramarine derived from lapis lazuli and azurite. The analysis of the gold and other tinctures will be new and valuable information for many.

What the authors also clearly identify is that the script beneath each coat is not by the same hand as the artist. Though easy to read, in contemporary black letter with capital letters of owners in red, it is not so carefully set out or refined as to do the whole justice, but again we know no more. Before the detailed discussion of each shield on the roll and its owners comes a short explanatory chapter on heraldry generally for schools and those not acquainted with the system. This could have been better placed in an appendix at the end as this useful and well-illustrated guide does not sit well in the middle of the book. Neither does it quite get to grips with the very different system of Welsh heraldry and its tribal origins, as indicated subsequently when discussing the quarterings of Sir William

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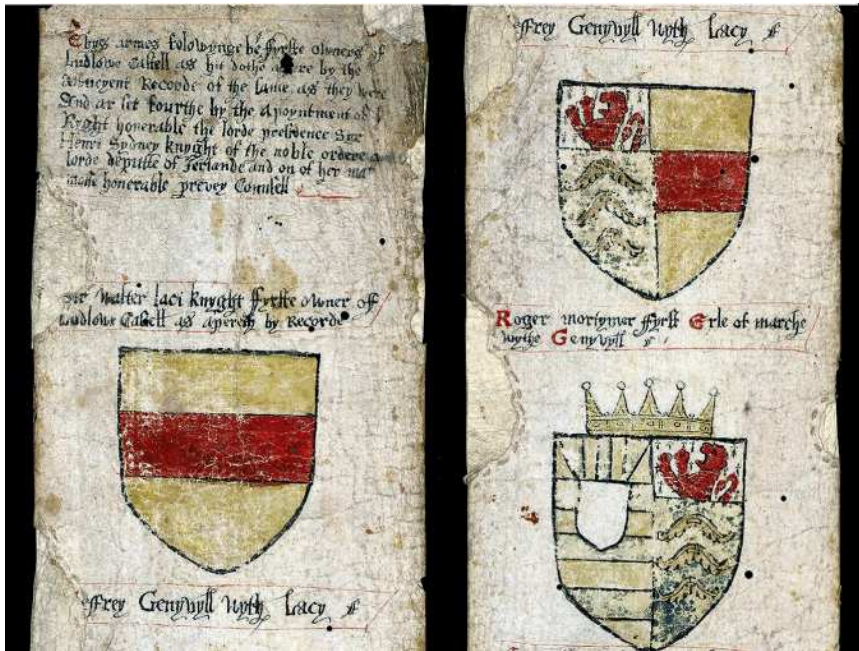


Figure 2: the opening section of the Ludlow Roll

Herbert (p.199) where the second quarter is described as ‘generally ascribed to Morgan, though sometimes to Vaughan and Gam’, when all three were equally entitled to that coat through common ancestry to that heraldic ancestor.

The pen portraits of those accounted for on the roll are attractively written, with their arms analysed in boxed sections for each. The several bishops who appear were notable survivors of those difficult times, with their nimble changing of beliefs. Of the arms, the authors have looked into the difficulties where they arise – for example the well-known problem of the arms of Bishop Robinson of Bangor, although they express themselves oddly there: ‘for the purposes of this book we’ll assume that the arms on the roll are the correct ones’, followed then by a long discussion. Another curiosity which is not discussed is why Bishop Richard Davies of St David’s has the same arms as Bishop Scory of Hereford, another Councillor.

The final appendices include more help for non-experts with heraldic terms and a genealogy of the Mortimer and de Lacy families, plus footnotes and bibliography. In all therefore there is much to like here, save that the regular remark of so many reviewers must come in here at the end – that one more reading of the proofs would have eliminated occasional mistakes (such as names spelled differently on different pages) which would be tedious to illustrate but do occur. On the other hand, the many excellent illustrations of portraits, funerary monuments, engraved views, artefacts and related heraldry make very light of that.

*Thomas Lloyd,
Wales Herald Extraordinary.*

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