

The Coat of Arms

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AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF THE ARMS OF NORMANDY ON A GROUP OF MEDIEVAL FURNITURE FITTINGS FROM NORFOLK

STEVEN ASHLEY, F.S.A., F.H.S.

Abstract

A reconstructed armorial hinged hasp from Norfolk appears to be decorated with the arms of Stonor, and also those of Normandy, making it probable that the furniture to which it was originally attached belonged to Sir John de Stonor (d.1354), Chief Judge of the King's Bench, who had important links to the Channel Islands.

An armorial hasp (**Figures 1.1, and 4**) from a chest or casket¹ was found with the aid of a metal detector in August 2003, in the parish of Mulbarton, Norfolk² and the details of its discovery reported to the Finds Identification and Recording Service of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.³ It bears the arms of Stonor, of Stonor, Oxfordshire. Subsequently, the probable joining hinge-plate for this hasp, displaying arms usually associated with the Duchy of Normandy, was found in the same field in January 2006 (**Figures 1.2, 2 and 4**). The centre of the field is c. 450m west of the approximate centre of Mulbarton village and c. 600m west (and a little to the north) of the Parish church of St Mary Magdalen.

In 2008 a hinge-plate of remarkably similar form (**Figure 1.3**) was discovered in Old Catton, Norwich.⁴ It is decorated with an engraved stylised butterfly. The butterfly is one of the badges of the family of Audley. It also comprises the single charge on the arms of at least three other families and is a symbol of the Resurrection.

The locations of these three cast pieces, which derive from two sets of furniture, lie close to, or on the outskirts of Norwich (at c. 11km and c. 4.5km from the centre of the medieval city). The distinctive forms of these fittings appear to be unparalleled elsewhere, perhaps indicating that they were manufactured locally.

The Mulbarton hinge-plate and hasp

An incomplete gilt copper alloy hinged hasp in two joining parts (**Figure 4**). The hinge-plate comprises a cast lozengiform plate with a double loop at one end to accommodate

¹ Chests were made by woodworkers and were somewhat larger than caskets, which were made by metalworkers or, if wooden, by leather workers (because they were usually covered in leather, see J. Brennan 'Furnishings' in G. Egan, *The Medieval Household: Daily Living c. 1150–c. 1450* (London, 1998), pp. 65–84 (65)). A variety of large iron-bound wooden chests with a useful discussion of their classification can be found in D. Sherlock *Suffolk Church Chests* (Ipswich, 2008). See also Elizabeth Danbury, 'Security and Safeguard: Signs and Symbols on Boxes and Chests,' in John Cherry and Ann Payne (eds.), *Signs and Symbols: Proceedings of the 2006 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donnington, 2009), pp. 29–41.

² Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) 37179, Portable Antiquities Scheme database NMS-7EDD95.

³ Now Norfolk Historic Environment Service.

⁴ NHER 51381. The context of the object within the medieval landscape is uncertain as the field in which it was found now lies on the edge of the developed outskirts of the city and its airport.

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Figure 1, no. 1: copper alloy armorial hasp from Mulbarton; no. 2: copper alloy armorial hinge-plate from Mulbarton; no. 3: copper alloy armorial hinge-plate from Old Catton. Drawn by S. Ashley.

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Left, *Figure 2*: Copper alloy armorial hinge-plate from Mulbarton. Photo: David Wicks, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. Right, *Figure 3*: drawing of seal of Sir John de Stonor, ex Dashwood plate 12, no. 4.

the single loop on the separate hasp to form a hinge. There is a rectangular projection broken across a rivet-hole at the other end (extant length 52mm, width 27mm). The face of the lozenge is decorated with arms on a lozengiform field,⁵ and the reverse has a large circular depression. There are traces of gilding over much of the surface, and a fragment of the red enamelled field survives in the engraved arms: *Gules two lions passant guardant or*. These arms are usually associated with the Duchy of Normandy, where their earliest use dates to the fourteenth century.⁶ They have also been retrospectively attributed to William I, William II, Henry I and ‘Norman Kings’. However, John before his accession as king in 1199 certainly had a shield bearing these arms, and they were possibly used by John’s father Henry II.⁷

The hasp, now detached from the hinge-plate, comprises a cast lozengiform plate with a loop for the hinge at the upper end and a rectangular perforated projection at the foot (length 59mm, width 27mm). The face of the lozenge is also decorated with arms (on a lozenge) and has a large circular depression on the reverse. Traces of gilding survive but the enamel is missing from the field. The arms are: [*?Azure*] *two bars dancetty a chief or*, and are likely to represent a variant version of the arms

⁵ Arms are often depicted on lozenges in the Middle Ages, there being no exclusively female use of the lozenge as a shield at this time, e.g. on horse furniture, see S. Ashley *Medieval Armorial Horse Furniture in Norfolk* (Dereham, 2002), pp. 16–18, figs. 17–18.

⁶ Adrian Ailes *The Origins of the Royal Arms of England* (Reading, 1982), p. 15 and note 2 on p. 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45–77. The *DBA* lists Brunswick, Douvre, and Rey in addition to Normandy, England, Henry I and William I (vol. 1, p. 264).

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of Stonor, *Azure two bars dancetty or a chief argent*.⁸ The seal of John de Stonor(e), Chief Justice of the Kings Bench (d.1354), displaying these arms, is attached to a deed of 1329–30 concerning several pieces of land in the parish of Fincham, Norfolk which is illustrated in Dashwood's *Engravings from Ancient Seals* (**Figure 3**).⁹ On 26th June 1319 Stonor was appointed as a justice to enquire into allegations of misgovernment of the Channel Islands. The enquiry is reported to have been "of great importance for the early constitutional history of those islands".¹⁰ The official seals of Guernsey and Jersey are charged with the three lions of England, granted to them by letters patent of Edward I in 1279.¹¹ The islands were also all that remained to England of Normandy, and a contemporary Englishman would presumably have understood the implied significance of the arms *Gules two lions passant guardant or*.

Original articulation

Similar distortion on the integral loops of both parts of this furniture fitting suggests that they were originally joined, by a pin or bar, with the double-loop of the hinge-plate forming a hinge with the single loop of the hasp (**Figure 4**).

Unfortunately, the resultant reconstructed arrangement is problematic, with the two sets of arms lying head-to-head. If the hasp was resting or secured in a normal vertical position, the arms of Stonor would be displayed correctly on the face of the box. If the lid of the box was gabled or had a convex lid, then the two lions on the arms on the hinge-plate would be inverted, which is clearly unacceptable. If the lid was flat then the arms could be read from above and 'behind' the box, even though this still appears to be a rather awkward and unsatisfactory arrangement.

As already noted, all three loops are slightly twisted and distorted as though the hasp and plate were wrenched off the chest or casket to which they were once attached. It may be that the riveted plate was also broken at this time. Alternatively, the damage and distortion could have occurred in the ground after the separation of the hinged arrangement from its original position. In both cases, considering the angle of distortion on all three loops, it is likely that the damage occurred whilst the two parts were still articulated.

The Old Catton hinge-plate

This probable hinge-plate comprises a cast copper alloy lozengiform plate with a double loop at one end to accommodate the single loop of a missing probable hasp. It is broken before the springing of a rectangular projection at the other end (extant length

⁸ DBA vol. 1, pp. 33–4. The Stonors seem not to have owned land in Norfolk, but John de Stonor (Chief Justice of the Common Pleas 1330–54, with two intermissions) was a commissioner in Norfolk (e.g. in 1331: *CPR* 1330–1334 pp. 204, 207); the same arms are on his tomb in Dorchester abbey church, Oxon (personal communication from Sir John Baker).

⁹ G.H.D[ashwood] *Engravings from Ancient Seals attached to Deeds and Charters in the Muniment Room of Sir Thomas Hare Baronet of Stowe-Bardolph* *Sigilla Antiqua*, 2 vols, (Stowe-Bardolph, 1847 and 1862), vol. 1, pl. 12, no. 4.

¹⁰ Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290–1483*, Camden Soc. 3rd ser. vol. 29 (London, 1919) vol. 1, p. viii.

¹¹ *CPR* 1272–81 p. 337. For more on the seals see *Cartulaire des Îles Normandes*, Société Jersiaise (St Hélier, 1924).



Figure 4: the reconstructed probable original articulation of the hasp and hinge-plate from Mulbarton. Photo: David Wicks, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

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35mm, width 25mm) (**Figure 1.3**). The face of the lozenge is decorated with an incised butterfly within a lozengiform border, and the reverse has a large circular depression. Traces of gilding survive but there is no trace of any possible enamelling within the engraved lines.

Many examples of contemporary medieval enamelled copper alloy harness pendants bearing the badge or device of a butterfly have been found in recent years.¹² Norfolk examples include a pendant from Gooderstone¹³ and a stud from Great Dunham.¹⁴ Some depictions are more elaborate than others and tinctures vary, so this assemblage of horse furniture may comprise a combination of devices and/or badges representing known armigerous families, unknown armigerous families, or those used in a purely decorative manner.¹⁵

The butterfly is one of the well-known badges of the Audley family.¹⁶ A branch of the Audleys owned Wensum Lodge, Norwich, in the fourteenth century.¹⁷ A butterfly may also have been used as a badge by Nicholas Girlington of Yorkshire.¹⁸ However, when a charge is placed on a shield (heater-shaped, lozenge or otherwise) it is much more likely (and more correctly) to represent the arms of a family, rather than be a badge. A single butterfly is recorded as the coat of arms of at least three families: Bolour, Malevil and Mayre, the latter of which is present on a seal of 1291 for John, son of John Mayre, Burgess of King's Lynn, Norfolk.¹⁹ The arms of Malevil, like those of Mayre, only appear on a seal (of the early fourteenth century) and nowhere else, so both lack tinctures. The arms of Bolour also appear on a seal, used in 1420. They are recorded in manuscript sources as well, and can, therefore, be blazoned: *Argent a butterfly displayed sable*.²⁰ If the butterfly on the Old Catton plate was originally enamelled and intended to represent arms on a lozenge, then the field would have comprised a colour on which the gilded charge of the butterfly was placed, giving us the incomplete blazon: *[?] a butterfly displayed or*. This appears to rule out Bolour as a candidate for the arms, leaving us with the untinctured arms of Malevil and Mayre. Of these Mayre, with their known relatively

¹² See list in John Baker 'Heraldic Insights from Small Metal Artefacts 1250–1350' in Nigel Ramsay (ed.) *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages* (Donington, forthcoming), and P. Reavill, 'Shropshire: Waters Upton' in 'Artefacts of Interest' in *CoA* 3rd ser. 8 (2012), no. 224, pp. 125–9.

¹³ NHER 38100, PAS SF8239, illustrated *ibid.*, p. 128, Fig. 2.

¹⁴ NHER 51155.

¹⁵ The number and variety of depictions of butterflies (and/or moths?) on medieval horse furniture may suggest a purely decorative function – see J. Baker 'Heraldic Insights' *op. cit.*

¹⁶ 'Sir John Awdeley, Kt.' *A butterfly charged with a crescent for difference*. The two other badges are: *A moor's head in profile proper, filleted round the temples, charged with a crescent for difference*, motto *Je le Tiens* (on a Standard – CA MS 1.2) and *A fret* (J.R. Planché, *The Pursuivant of Arms* (London, 1859), p. 190). See also A.C. Fox-Davies *Heraldic Badges* (London, 1907), pp. 76f.; Thomas Willement. MS. *Extracts Memorandums Notes etc. on the Badges, Cognizances, Motts[sic], Livery Colours Etc. Etc. that have been used within these kingdoms (and others)* vol. 2. 1819, p. 404; Sir James Audley (d. 1386) *A butterfly argent Siddons Badges*, vol. 2.2, p. 18; harness pendants in *City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Heraldic Exhibition* (Birmingham, 1936), pp. 20–1, nos. 158–9, 167.

¹⁷ J.I. Dent, and J.S. Livock *Wensum Lodge: The Story of a House* (Norwich, 1990), p. 16.

¹⁸ *A bee or butterfly* (allusion to arms) *Siddons Badges*, vol. 2.2, p. 131.

¹⁹ *DBA* vol. 4, p. 179.

²⁰ *DBA* vol. 4, p. 179; *CA. MSS, L1, L2, L10*, c. 1520.

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local connections, may be the more likely original owners of these possible arms. That said, the butterfly has been associated with death, resurrection, and immortality since Classical times, and became a popular symbol of the Resurrection and the survival of the soul during the Middle Ages.²¹

Conclusions

The forms of chest or casket to which these fittings were attached is unknown. Their probable arrangement, comprising a riveted hinge plate with twin hinge-loops with a separate single-looped hasp with slot, can be seen on a reliquary casket of c. 1400 (of possible East Anglian origin) illustrated in Alexander and Binski.²² Although not of the highest quality, this copper alloy casket is engraved, gilded, and enamelled, and represents a form found throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. The best-known example of such furniture with enamelled armorial decoration, is the Valence casket, the surface of which is covered with an elaborate pattern of lozengiform shields bearing arms. It has been suggested that the combination of these arms dates the casket to c. 1290–1324.²³ The scale of both caskets is probably a little smaller than the boxes to which our incomplete fittings were attached, which, in any case, may have been constructed from wood rather than sheet metal. If, as seems probable, the pair of fittings described above was made for the Chief Justice Sir John de Stonor, it would date between 1320 and his death in 1354.

As can be seen from the preceding discussion there is much uncertainty surrounding these few scant fragments from what must have been significant composite pieces of furniture. Even so, enough survives of these unusual variant forms of fitting with their distinctive decorated lozengiform plates with hollowed reverse, unparalleled elsewhere,²⁴ to suggest they may have been manufactured locally, for a noble patron or patrons. It is to be hoped that in time these tentative conjectures will be confirmed, or disproved, by the discovery of other more complete examples.²⁵

²¹ V. Nazar 'Chasing Butterflies in Medieval Europe' *Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society*, vol. 68, no. 4 (2014), pp. 223–31.

²² *The Age of Chivalry* (London, 1987), p. 225, no. 88.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 357–8, no. 362. See also J. Titterton 'The Valence Casket and its Original Owner' in *CoA* no. 161 (1993), pp. 16–26.

²⁴ Portable Antiquities Scheme database checked 3.3.2021.

²⁵ I am most grateful to Sir John Baker, Adrian Ailes, and Paul Fox for their comments on the text. Sir John also provided additional information on the arms of Stonor. Andrew Hall kindly prepared a digital version of my original drawings for publication.