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TO ABATE THE ROYAL ARMS?

PETER LINDFIELD, F.S.A.

Abstract

The rationale behind two unusual heraldic Tudor locks with links to King Henry VIII is considered.

Figure 1: lock probably by Henry Romaynes, *the Beddington lock*, *c*.1539–47. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M.397&:1 to 6-1921.

A wrought gilt iron lock carved all over with intricate Gothic architectural details can be found on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (**Figure 1**). Thought to date to around 1539–47, this lock is also assumed to have been made by the royal lock maker, Henry Romaynes (*d.* 1553).[1] It came from Carew Manor within Beddington Park, Greater London, and was installed originally on a door to the manor's palatial Great Hall, built by Sir Richard Carew (*d*.1520).[2]

Discussed recently by Dries Raeymaekers, the lock's many intricacies and, as explored here, irregularities, have not been addressed.[3] Awash with ornate Gothic detail, these architectural patterns and forms are noteworthy given that, by the time of its assumed production, the prevailing fashions, especially within court circles, had swung

1 The Beddington Lock, *V&A*, British Galleries Room 58, accession no. M.397&:1 to 6-1921.

2 Marian Campbell, *An Introduction to Ironwork*, (London, 1985), p. 19.

3 Dries Raeymaekers, 'The Monarch Exposed: The Negotiation of Privacy at the Early Modern Court,' in *Notions of Privacy at Early Modern European Courts*, ed. Dustin M. Neighbors, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, and Elena Woodacre, Reassessing the Public and Private Divide, 1400-1800 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), pp. 108–9.

Figure 2: Joseph Nash, *the Hall, Beddington*, 1839 from *Mansions of England in the olden time* 4 vols (London, 1839-41).

away from Gothic to Classical design. This change was ushered in by the work of Pietro Torrigiano (1472–1528) at Westminster Abbey, particularly via the black-and-gold, pilastered, heraldic, and *tondi*-decorated tomb of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York.[4] Dominated by mouchette wheels, cusped-tracery, and buttresses with crocketed pinnacles, the Beddington lock's decoration is self-consciously backward-looking and

4 See Alan P. Darr, 'The Sculptures of Torrigiano: The Westminster Abbey Tombs,' *The Connoisseur* (March 1979), pp. 177–84.

Figure 3: detail of the royal arms on the Beddington lock, probably by Henry Romaynes *c*.1539–47 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M.397&:1 to 6-1921.

seemingly respond to the great hall's hammer beam roof whose spandrels also featured mouchette wheels (**Figure 2**). These elements are also consistent with other late-medieval locks and fail to adopt mid-sixteenth century fashion.[5]

Whilst the barley-twist pilasters are noteworthy, more significant is the lock's heraldic decoration found towards the centre. Located on a sliding plate, that, when pulled down, reveals the keyhole, this escutcheon (**Figure 3**) displays *Quarterly 1st and 4th three fleurs-de-lis; 2nd and 3rd three lions passant guardant in pale.* These are the royal arms of England adopted by Henry IV employing France (modern), three *fleurs-de-lis*, instead of France (ancient), *semy-de-lis*.

Suggesting a sixteenth-century date, the shield is above a pair of roses used as Tudor badges. It is flanked by a pair of supporters incorporated into the body of the lock itself: the collared greyhound (dexter) and dragon (sinister). When combined with the escutcheon, the achievement appears to refer to either Henry VII or Henry VIII; Henry VIII continued to use his father's arms and supporters in an undifferentiated manner until the late 1520s,

5 See, for example, *V&A* Door lock, accession no. 5710-1859.

Figure 4: Henry VIII sovereign, crowned royal arms (reverse), 1544–47. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio. Public domain.

whereupon he adopted the crowned lion (dexter) and dragon (sinister) as supporters.[6] This lock must surely refer to Henry VIII; presumably it dates to the period after Carew Manor became crown property following Sir Nicholas Carew's trial and execution for treason in 1539. If so, as assumed by the V&A, these supporters, like the decoration applied all over the lock's body, are self-consciously and noticeably antiquated.

Henry was familiar with the house, having stayed there before Anne Boleyn's execution, and he continued to use the manor after 1539, being still in possession at the time of his death in 1547.[7] If the lock was made specifically for Carew Manor after it had come into crown ownership in 1539, we would expect Henry VIII to be represented by his then typical heraldic achievement incorporating the crowned lion and dragon supporters seen, for example, in a near contemporary gold sovereign (1543–47) (**Figure 4**).[8]

The lock's heraldic achievement displays several further irregularities. Firstly, the supporters are swapped around and placed on the incorrect sides of the shield; and, secondly, the escutcheon is inverted so that the rounded 'foot' is located at the head. The second characteristic is not a result of the plate being inserted upside down as the *fleurs-de-lis* and lions are right-side-up. Instead, the shield is inverted so that its rounded foot mirrors the semi-circular arch above. The twisted rope border at the base of the plate conforming to that encircling the lock confirms its correct arrangement as displayed:

6 Charles Hasler, *The Royal Arms: Its Graphic and Decorative Development*, (London, 1980), pp. 10, 130. Ambiguity over which monarch is referred to by these supporters (when combined with the royal arms) is articulated in ibid., pp. 112–13.

7 Stanford Lehmber, 'Sir Nicholas Carew (1496-1539)', *NewDNB*.

8 *BM*, E.5105.

Figure 5: the royal lock at Hever Castle, possibly by Henry Romaynes *c*.1539–41. © Hever Castle, Kent.

even if the plate could be inverted, the *fleur-de-lis* and lions would be displayed upside down and this would not correct the supporters' substitution on lock's face.

Assuming Henry Romaynes made this lock specifically for Carew Manor after Sir Richard's execution, then he not only used archaic supporters that had been superseded a decade before to represent Henry VIII as the reigning monarch, but he swapped these supporters around and compounded this error by inverting the escutcheon and incorrectly arranged the *fleurs-de-lis* in quarters 1 and 4 (presumably to accommodate the shield's inversion). An accumulation of heraldic 'errors', this lock contravenes well-known royal heraldry. Shockingly, it effectively presents the arms in an abated form; something vanishingly rare in royal heraldry. As such, the plates' royal arms follow a practice used to express dishonour. John Guillim (1565–1621), in his *Display of Heraldry* (from 1610), wrote of the various forms of abatement, the "*worst of all the rest, which is a Coat-armour reversed. Reversing is a preposterous manner of location of a Coat-armour, by turning of the whole Escocheon upside downe, contrary to the usuall forme of bearing, after this manner*."[9] Writing of abatement far more recently, Charles Boutell and Arthur Charles Fox-Davies observe that:

> "Abatement is a term which was unknown until it made its appearance in certain heraldic writings of the sixteenth century, when it was used to denote such marks or devices as, by the writers in question, were held to be the reverse of honourable Augmentation—*Augmentations of dishonour* indeed, and

9 John Guillim, *A Display of Heraldry*, 6th ed. (London, 1724), p. 459.

> tokens of degradation. True Heraldry refuses to recognise all such pretended abatements, for the simple reason that they never did exist, and if they could exist at all, they would be in direct antagonism to its nature, its principles, and its entire course of action. Honourable itself, Heraldry can give expression only to what conveys honour, and it records and commemorates only what is to be honoured and held in esteem.
>
> The very idea of an heraldic Abatement implies, if not a complete ignorance, certainly a thorough misconception of the character and the office of Heraldry. Even if Heraldry were to attempt to stigmatise what is, and what ought to be esteemed, dishonourable, who would voluntarily accept insignia of disgrace, and charge and display them upon his Shield, and transmit them to his descendants?" [10]

Surely it is implausible that the lock's inverted shield was designed to express the monarch's dishonour? Perhaps this 'abatement' is simply an unwitting extension of the numerous other heraldic errors expressed on this lock plate. Even if it was made when Henry VIII's supporters were the dragon and collared greyhound, we would expect them to be placed correctly. If intentionally archaic, their inversion remains curious. Another suggestion, given these numerous irregularities in what would be very familiar heraldic forms, is the lock was made for the King himself, and that it was a royal joke—the world having gone topsy turvy—and perhaps signalling there was something special in the room behind the door this lock secured.

More surprisingly, these irregularities are found on an almost identical lock covered with the same repertoire of Gothic ornament at Hever Castle in Kent (**Figure 5**). Like Carew Manor, Hever Castle became crown property in 1539, but this time following the death of Thomas Boleyn (1477–1539), first Earl of Wiltshire, first Earl of Ormond, first Viscount Rochford, and father to Anne Boleyn (*c.*1503–36): Henry VIII's second Queen. In January 1541, the King granted the property to Anne of Cleves, giving a short window for the lock's installation.[11] Clearly related, the Hever lock lacks the supporters found on the Carew example, the Gothic tracery is larger and less refined, and the escutcheon is finished in a sharper point. Importantly, the lock also includes an inverted and partially abated royal coat of arms. Despite extensive similarities, these differences suggest the evolution of a pattern.

Consequently, there appear to be several potential explanations for this incorrect heraldry on what are otherwise high-quality royal locks, including jest, ignorance, and the flexibility of heraldic protocol in early-to-mid sixteenth-century England. Ignorance of royal heraldry seems unlikely, particularly by the royal locksmith, given the royal arms are the most well-known of all and appear in many different contexts. Another option is that these partially inverted shields, instead, signal death, a practice established and demonstrated earlier in Matthew Paris's illustrated itinerary to Jerusalem in the British Library, Royal MS 14 C VII (**Figure 6**).[12] If this is the case, then the locks would then

10 Charles Boutell and Arthur Charles Fox Davies, *The Handbook to English Heraldry*, 11th ed., (London, 1914), p. 207.

11 Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, 1st ed, 4 vols (Canterbury 1778-98), vol. 1, pp. 395-6. The crown sold the castle to the Darcy family in 1552.

12 *BL* Royal MS 14 C VII, f. 53.

Figure 6: inverted arms of King Stephen depicting his death. © British Library Board, Royal MS 14v C VII, f. 53r.

date to 1547 or thereafter signalling the death of Henry VIII; their Gothic appearance would, in this case, appear even more anachronistic. This also appears unlikely given that the locks would date to around a decade after each manor's acquisition by the crown. Surely, then, we must assume that these locks escaped the formalities of heraldic protocol governing early modern armorials and which are still maintained and adhered to today. They complicate our knowledge of sixteenth-century royal heraldry, and, when read within the context of other fields, including architecture and applied design, they demonstrate heraldry's importance to more fully understanding the past.