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THE ARMS OF WADHAM COLLEGE

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Abstract
The reason why arms which were not those of Dorothy Wadham's father Sir William Petre were impaled with those of her husband Nicholas Wadham following the foundation of Wadham College is considered, with examples given of the usage of the college arms on the premises.

Introduction

Founded in 1610 by Nicholas (d.1609) and Dorothy Wadham (née Petre, d. 1618) [**Figure 1**], the Gothic and Jacobean style College is a grand sight on Parks Road in Oxford. The College opened three years after its founding, a result of Dorothy's relentless efforts in fulfilling the wishes of her late husband of establishing an Oxford College.[1]

Figure 1: statues of Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham above the main entrance to the Hall, with the College's arms in between. All photographs are by the author unless otherwise specified.

1 T. G. Jackson, *Wadham College, Oxford, its foundation, architecture and history, with an account of the family of Wadham and their seats in Somerset and Devon* (Oxford, 1893), p. 3.

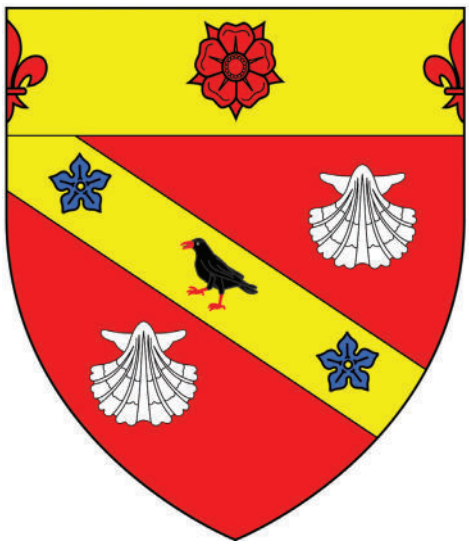

Figure 2, left, 2a: arms of Sir William Petre; right, 2b, his portrait from the National Portrait Gallery. Both Wikimedia Commons.

The Arms

> *Gules, a chevron between three roses argent barbed vert, for Wadham; impaling Gules, a bend or between two escallops argent, for Petre.*[2]

The official arms of the College are the impaled arms of the husband and wife. On the dexter side: the arms of Nicholas Wadham of Merryfield, Ilton, Somerset, and Edge, Devon; on the sinister side: the arms that are intended to represent Dorothy Petre, daughter of Sir William Petre (d. 1572) of Writtle, Essex, and Devon.

The arms of Dorothy's father, however, who as a *new man* was granted arms in the period 1545-49[3], were *Gules on a bend or between two escallops argent a chough proper between two cinquefoils azure; on a chief or a rose between two dimidiated fleurs-de-lis gules seeded or, barbed and leaved vert* [**Figure 2**].[4] These arms are frequently to be found as a sinister impalement of the arms of Exeter College, of which Sir William was a major benefactor. They were also painted on the portrait of Lady Wadham dating 1595 which is now at Petworth House, and on her tomb in the Wadham Chapel at Ilminster,

2 T. Robson, *The British herald; or, Cabinet of armorial bearings of the nobility and gentry of Great Britain and Ireland, from the earliest to the present time*, vol. 1 (London, 1830), p. 185.

3 Stephen Tucker, 'Variations in the Petre arms', *Archaeological Journal*, vol. 33 pt. 1 (1876), pp. 335-341.

4 W. Harry Rylands, *Grantees of Arms named in docquets and patents to the end of the seventeenth century*, Harl. Soc., vol. 66 (1915), p. 198; Robson, op. cit., p. 681.

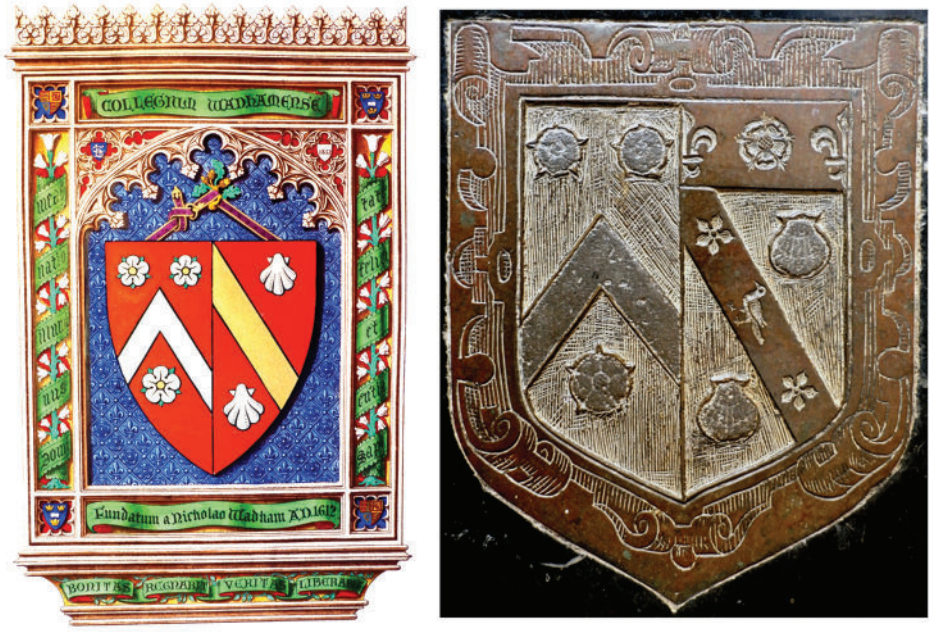

Figure 3, left, 3a: ornamental drawing of Wadham College's coat of arms by Shaw & Burgon, 1885; right, 3b: the arms of Wadham impaling Petre from the funeral monument of the College founders in Wadham Chapel, Ilminster Church. Wikimedia Commons, Lobsterthermidor.

Somerset, [**Figure 3b**] but are not on her portrait of 1611 which now hangs in the Hall of Wadham College.

Writing in the nineteenth century, Shaw and Burgon speculated on two possibilities for the discrepancy in the usage of the two versions of the Petre arms: either Dorothy and her brother John Petre rejected some 'augmentation' of their father's arms, or she had left the matter of the heraldry of the College to others.[5] The latter seems unlikely, as, despite never visiting the site in-person, she had so vigorously pursued its foundation, construction, and personally appointed the first Warden, Fellows and Scholars. Even the College cook was appointed by her. While it is not out of the question that the matter of heraldry was left to others, it would seem out of character for the passionate Dorothy not to have decided upon the official coat of arms of the College. Certainly, the impaled College arms of today are harmonious and aesthetically pleasing to behold [**Figure 3a**]. Shaw and Burgon were aware of the Ilminster church monument but were unable to explain it.

What then of Sir William Petre and his supposed 'augmentation'? It is true that a number of augmentations of arms were granted during the reign of Henry VIII, mostly for exceptional military service, including the well-known Flodden augmentation granted to Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey for his defeat of the Scottish king.[6] Petre, following a legal training, rose up as one of Thomas Cromwell's men and enriched himself greatly

5 H. Shaw and J.W. Burgon, The arms of the Colleges of Oxford (Oxford,1855), no pagination.
6 J.F.Huxford, *Honour and arms* (London, 1984), pp. 34-38.

in 1535-40 as one of the crown agents in the dissolution of the monasteries. He went on to become the principal secretary to three monarchs, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I, between 1544 and 1557. Under Mary he obtained a personal Papal Bull granting him title to his appropriated church lands. He prospered through a period which saw many of his associates executed for treason. His choice of godparents for his son John, born on 20th December 1549 in the reign of Edward VI, was extraordinary. They were the staunchly protestant John Dudley, later Duke of Northumberland, who was later executed for treason in 1553 for attempting to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne of England; Francois van der Delft, ambassador to the Emperor Charles V; Cardinal Reginald Pole (in absentia); and Lady Anne Paget.[7] It must be assumed that the cardinal's involvement was kept a secret from Dudley. Pole was at that very time sitting in a very protracted papal conclave in which he came close to being elected as the next Pope. He was a political and religious exile whom it would then have been very dangerous to admit to knowing. Lord Paget escorted him back to England in 1554.

Sir William's rather cluttered arms are a typical example Garter Barker's grants. Petre's father was a franklin, and therefore by definition not a gentleman, and not armigerous.[8] Stephen Tucker, writing as Rouge Croix Pursuivant in 1872, having studied the Visitation records, and unaware of the father's status, was confident that Sir William was the first member of his family to bear arms.[9] The chief on his arms with its royal symbols of the rose and the fleurs-de-lis was part of his original grant, and not an augmentation. What probably confused Shaw and Burgon was the fact that in the 1563/4 Visitation of Devon Sir William's younger brother John was ascribed the arms without the chief. That prior to 1563/4 the Devon family of Peter, which became Petre, had not borne arms is confirmed by a grant of arms in 1573 to Sir William's younger brother Robert, who was given his eldest brother's arms with a mullet for difference as the third son of their father.[10] William Petre of Hayes, Devon sealed with Sir William's arms but with a crescent for difference in 1594, as the eldest son of Sir William's younger brother John Petre, the second son (d. 1570).[11]

In 1603 John Petre (1549-1613), Dorothy Wadham's younger half-brother, and the head of his family, was created Baron Petre of Writtle in Essex.[12] The arms which he had inherited from his father would have been obviously Tudor to his contemporaries, and implied new money, so he obtained a more simplified version, which necessitated a change of the field colour: *Azure on a bend between two escallops or a Cornish chough sable between two cinquefoils gules*.[13] He subsequently decided he wanted that medieval simplicity which was in keeping with old money, to enhance his status as a peer. He therefore changed his arms for a second time to *Gules, a bend or between two escallops argent.* It is not recorded precisely when Lord Petrie obtained his second grant, but when he did, Dorothy adopted the arms, as we see on her 1611 portrait. Her tomb bears her father's arms because, as was not uncommon for the period, it was created many years before her death, and indeed before the death of Nicholas Wadham in 1609.

7 J. J. Howard, H. F. Burke and H. S. Hughes (edd.) *Genealogical Collections illustrating the history of the Roman Catholic families of England* (London, 1887-92), vol. 1, p. 50.
8 C.S.Knighton, 'Sir William Petre (1505/6-1572)', *New DNB*.
9 Tucker, op. cit.
10 Howard, op. cit, p. 57.
11 Ibid. p. 39.
12 GEC, vol 10, pp. 505-6.
13 Robson, op. cit.

Figure 4: Wadham College's arms carved above the main entrance.

Lord Petre and his descendants were staunch Roman Catholics. The peer himself owned a Book of Hours of the Blessed Virgin which had belonged to his mother.[14] His sister Dorothy and her husband Nicholas Wadham were suspected of being Catholics. Within days of Nicholas' death in 1609, the secular priest Thomas More chastened Nicholas' College endowment will and described him as an "ancient schismatic" who died a Catholic.[15] Dorothy also suffered the same accusation of recusancy and was 'disarmed' in 1613, in the sense of the removal of physical armaments found in her house.[16] She was accused of harbouring priests – an offence she was likely guilty of, as the Wadham manor at Edge Barton does have a priest's hole.[17] Notably, according to Jackson, Dorothy's name is not found in the Recusant Roll or the rolls of Devon and Somerset. She was indeed pardoned in 1615, having submitted to the king and agreed to conform to the church.[18] The decision to seize Dorothy's weaponry was not revoked in her lifetime, as evidenced by a later petition by Nicholas' co-heirs to have the arms

14 Howard, op. cit., p.49.

15 M.C. Questier, *Conversion, politics and religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 178-180; C.S.L. Davies, 'A Woman in the Public Sphere; Dorothy Wadham and the Foundation of Wadham College, Oxford', *English Historical Review*, vol. 118, no. 478, (2003) pp. 883–911.

16 For more on the disarming of recusants see B.W. Quintrell, 'The Practice and Problems of Recusant Disarming, 1585–1641', *Recusant History*, 17 pt 2 (1984), pp. 208–222.
1984; Jackson, 1893, p. 87

17 Davies 2003 op. cit., p. 888; Jackson, 1893, p. 87

18 Jackson, op. cit., p. 87

Figure 5: screen above the Chapel entrance with arms from left to right of the Wadham family, Wadham College and the Petre family.

restored after her death.[19] This episode and its epilogue show that, at heart, both Nicholas and Dorothy were unquestionably Catholics. As Davies writes: "Whether the Wadhams were technically recusants, even if they escaped conviction, is a moot point. But they plainly had access to priests, and there can be no doubt about their sympathies."[20] It is fascinating that they decided to found a Protestant College, but doubtless they looked towards better times of religious toleration.

Heraldry at the College site

The College boasts beautiful and varied architecture, with a Jacobean dining hall, a Gothic chapel, extensive gardens, and what is claimed to be the oldest purpose-built music room in Europe: the Holywell Music Room, built in 1748.[21] The College has been described as one of the "most uniform" of all Oxford Colleges.[22] Visiting Wadham College today provides an opportunity to those with a keen eye and appreciation for heraldry to spot a myriad of various depictions. As soon as one enters the main gate to the Lodge, looking up at the roof will reveal a beautiful carving of the arms, skillfully chiseled in stone [**Figure 4**].

Progressing to the Chapel, a beautiful wooden carving with plaster depictions of the arms can be seen above the main entrance portraying the arms of Petre, Wadham, and the impaled College version [**Figure 5**]. Guests invited to The Hall can also enjoy another carving of the arms atop the Hall screen, similar to the Chapel carvings in Figure 5, as well as modern stained glass showcasing the heraldry of both the College and its benefactors. For the Fellows of the College and their guests, the senior common room, dubbed 'The Green Room', can be used for smaller meetings, and the occasional pre- or post-dinner drink. The immediate focal point of the room is the ornate fireplace with a portrait of John Wilkins – Warden of Wadham College 1648 – 1659 and co-founder of the Royal Society. Crowning the chiseled frame is a prominent depiction of the College's arms, most likely dating to between 1690 – 1724 [**Figure 6**].[23]

The last highlight might also be the most impressive depiction of the arms still at the College: a woven pulpit fall of gold and silk thread meticulously and masterfully crafted [**Figure 7**]. Wadham's Warden (1871 – 1881), John Griffiths, believed the Pulpit to be contemporary with the College's founding, and was last used in the College Chapel in 1831.[24] In 1873, Griffiths took note of the then-decayed and fragile Pulpit, and took the measured decision of having it restored and conserved. It is currently in Wadham's archives, though it has been proposed to have it on proper display elsewhere in the College. The Pulpit is housed in what can only be described as the most reflective glass frame in existence, but with the tireless aid of Wadham's Keeper of the Archives and Emeritus Fellow Jeffrey Hackney, legible photographs were taken. [25]

19 ibid, p. 88
20 Davies 2003, p. 889
21 G. Tyack, Oxford : an architectural guide (Oxford,1998), pP. 186-187/
22 Jackson, op. cit., p. 4
23 Tyack, op. cit, p. 130
24 Archival letter on the Pulpit from Griffiths dating to September 18. 1873.
25 The author wishes to thank Dr Paul Fox for his dialogue on the arms of Petre; and also Emeritus Fellow and Keeper of the Archives Jeffrey Hackney for his invaluable help in identifying the various arms at Wadham, and for his guided tours through the College's many rooms and hallways.

Figure 6: portrait of John Wilkins in the Green Room, with ornamental decoration crowned with the College's arms.

Figure 7: pulpit fall believed to be early seventeenth century.