

The Boke of
St. Albans

A modern rendition
of a medieval treatise
on heraldry

as reprinted in
*Inquiries Into the Origin and
Science of Heraldry in England*

by
James Dallaway
1793

Modern English Rendition
by
David B. Appleton

INTRODUCTION

The Bokys of Haukyng and Huntyng; and also of coot-armuris, more popularly known as *The Boke of St. Albans*, published in 1486, is a book of three treatises written to guide “gentill men and honest persones” in the arts necessary to an English gentleman; hawking, hunting, and, important to our purposes here, heraldry. (A second edition published ten years later added another treatise on fishing with an angle.) The author is generally believed to be Dame Juliana Berners, daughter of Sir James Berners and sister of Richard, Lord Berners, and one of the earliest women writers in English. Tradition makes her the prioress of Sopwell nunnery in Hertfordshire.

The text herein is taken from James Dallaway’s *Inquiries Into the Origin and Science of Heraldry in England*, published in 1793. In the Appendix, Dallaway includes the two parts of the heraldry portion of the *Boke of St. Albans*, though without the illustrations found in the original. The first portion, the *Liber Armorum* or “Book of Arms”, is an exposition on the ancient origins of coatarmor and related topics; the second, the *blasying of armys*, is a more practical discussion of the lines of division and charges used in heraldry and how to blazon them in Latin, French, and English.

It is a seminal work in several respects. It was the first book published in Hertfordshire, England,¹ just ten years after the introduction of the printing press to England by Caxton. It is the earliest example of color printing in England.² It is the earliest treatise on heraldry written in English. Though it was clearly derived from (or from the same source as) Nicholas Upton’s *De re Militari*, written in Latin about 1441 (*St. Albans* uses most of the same illustrations of crosses, lines of division, charges, etc., and in the same order as Upton’s work³, in many cases not even differing by tincture), it also had an undeniable influence upon other and later works in the field. It may have influenced *The Deidis of armorie: a heraldic treatise and bestiary*, written in Scotland after 1494 by R. Andersoun, Andersoun’s essay on heraldry being “very similar” to that found in *St. Albans*.⁴ Sir John Ferne’s *The Blazon of Gentry*, published a hundred years later in 1586, borrows heavily from the *Boke of St. Albans*, even to the point of using terms which are found nowhere else.

The purpose of this modern English rendering of the heraldry portions of the *Boke of St. Albans* is two-fold: (1) to make the text of this pioneering work more readily available to the modern reader; and (2) to try to make it more understandable to that same reader. Copies of the original are rare and expensive; the 1881 and 1901 facsimile editions are challenging to find at best. Even a copy of Dallaway can be difficult to acquire and will cost several hundreds of dollars, well beyond the book-buying budgets of most enthusiasts. Additionally, the text was written in an English even further removed from modern English than the Elizabethan English which many, having read Shakespeare in school, admit to having trouble understanding.

¹ <http://www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/topics/t024-spelling.htm>

² <http://www.stephen-stratford.co.uk/stalbans.htm>;
<http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/gb-herts.html#stalb>

³ See, e.g., <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/mss/holkham/misc/031.htm>

⁴ <http://www.manuscripts.org.uk/queens/MS.161.htm>

Third Part of the Boke of St Alban's.

Here in thys booke following is determyned the linage of coot armuris: and how gentilmen fhall be knowyn from ungentilmen: and how bondeage begun firft in Aungellys, and after fuceded in mankynde, as it is fhewede in proceffe, boothe in the childer of Adam and alfoe of Noe, and how Noe divyded the world in iij partis to his iij fonnys, also ther be showyd the iv colowris in armys figured by the iv orderis of Aungelis, and it is showyd by the forfayd colowris whiche ben worthy and which bene royall, and of riyaliteis, whiche ben noble and wich excellent, and there ben here the vertuys of chyvalry and many other notable and famowfe thyngys to the plefure of noble perfonys, fhall be fhowyd, as the werkys followyng witneffeth whofoever likyth to fe thaym and rede thaym, wiche were too longe now to rehers, and after theys notable thyngys aforefayd followeth the blazyng of all maner of armys in Latyn, French, and Englifh.

Incipit Liber Armorum

Beying in worthenes armys for to beere by the royall blode in ordynanace all nobill and gentil men fro the hyeft degre to the laweft, in thys booke fhall be fhowed, and to difcover gentilnefs from ungentilnes. Infomuch thatt all gentilnes cummys of God of hevyn, at hevyn I will begin, where were v orderis of aungelis, and now ftande but iv, in cote armoris of knowlege encrowned ful hye with precious ftones, where Lucifer with myliony's of aungelis owt of hevyn fell unto hell and odyr places, and ben holdyn ther in bonage, and all were erected in hevyn of gentill nature. A bond man or a churle wyll fay all we be cummy of Adam, fo Lucifer with his cumpany may fay all we be cummy of hevyn. Adam the begynnyng of mankynd was as a ftocke unfprayed and unflorefhed, and in the braunches is knowledge wiche is rotun and wich is grene.

How gentilmen fhall be knawyn from Churles, and how they firft began, and how Noe devydyd the world in iij parts to his iij sonnys.

Third Part of the Book of St. Albans

Here in this book following is determined the lineage of coat-armor: and how gentlemen shall be known from non-gentlemen, and how bondage began, first in angels and after succeeded in mankind, as it is shown in process both in the children of Adam and also of Noah. And how Noah divided the world in three parts to his three sons. Also there is shown the four colors in arms figured by the four orders of angels. And it is shown by the foresaid colors which are worthy and which are royal; and of royalties, which are noble and which excellent. And there are here the virtues of chivalry and many other notable and famous things to the pleasure of noble persons shall be shown as the works following witness, that whosoever likes to see them and read them, which were too long now to rehearse; and after these notable things aforesaid, follows the blazoning of all manner of arms in Latin, French, and English.

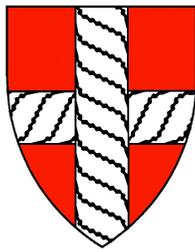
Incipit Liber Armorum

[Beginning the Book of Armory]

Being in worthiness arms for to bear by the royal blood in ordinance all noble and gentle men from the highest degree to the lowest in this book shall be shown. And to discover gentleness from ungentleness. In so much that all gentleness comes from God in Heaven, at heaven I will begin, where were five orders of angels and now stand but four, in coat-armors of knowledge encrowned full high with precious stones. Where Lucifer with millions of angels fell out of heaven unto hell and other places and are held there in bondage, and all were erected¹ in heaven of gentle nature. A bondman or a churl will say, "All we are come from Adam." So Lucifer with his company may say, "All we are come from heaven." Adam, the beginning of mankind, was as a stock unsprayed² and unflourished,³ and in the branches is knowledge which is rotten and which is green.

How gentleman shall be known from churls and how the first began. And how Noah divided the world in three parts to his three sons.

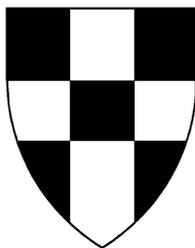
Among odyr croffis oon is founde the wich is calde a corddid cros as here it is fhewed is this cros the wich is calde a corddid cros, for hit is made of cordys, the wich certan cros I fee bot late, in the armys of a nobull man: the wich in very deed was fumme tyme a crafty man a roper as he hym felfe fayd. And ye fhall fay of him that berith theys armys latine. Ille portat gowles cum vna cruce plana cordata de argento. Gallice fic. Il port de goulles & vny cros playn cordee dargent. Anglice fic. He berith gullis and a cros playn cordyd of fyluer.



Among other crosses one is found the which is called a corded cross, as here it is shown in this cross, the which is called a corded cross: for it is made of cords, the which certain cros I see but lately, in the arms of a noble man: who in very deed was some time a crafty-man, a roper as he himself said. And you shall say of him that bears these arms: He bears gules and a cross plain corded of silver.

Off a cros playn perforatid.

Ther is an odyr cros playn the wich merueluffly fro the playn cros of Seynt George differis, as here apperith. And here it is to be merkyd, that thoppynyon of fum men fayng is, that theis armys be chekkerd armys, and this oppynyon is vturli to be repreuyd for armys may not be checkerd bot at the left in the nombur of iiij. and in a grettyr nombur they may wele be made, as afterward fhall be fhewed. Therefor it is to be faid, latine fic. Ille portat vnam crucem argenteam perforatam in campo nigro. Et gallice fic. Il port de fable vng cros dargent ptee. Anglice. He berith fable and a cros perforatid of filuer.

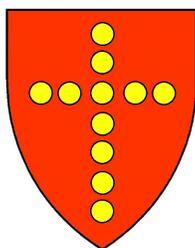


Of a cros plain perforated.

There is another cross plain the which marvelously from the plain cross of St. George differs as here appears. Here it is to be marked that the opinion of some men saying is, that these arms are checkered arms, and this opinion is utterly to be reproved for arms may not be checkered but at the least in the number of four and in a greater number they may well be made, as afterward shall be shown. Therefore it is to be said: He bears sable and a cross perforated of silver.

Off a befantid cros.

Over theis croffis we haue an odyr cros the wiche I fawe late in tharmys of a certan Januens as here it fhewis. And this is calde a befant cros for it is made all of befanttis, and fych a cros may be made als fone with lytill cakys as with befanttys, for befanttys and lytill caykys differ not bot in colore, for befanttis be euer of golden colore, ne the colore of the befant fhall be expreffid in blafyng of armys, for it nedis not to fay a befant of golde for ther be no befantis bot of golde, therfor it is to be fayd, latine fic. Ille portat vnam crucem calentatam in campo rubeo. Gallice fic. Il port de gowles vng cros befauntee. Anglice fic. He berith gowles and a cros befountid.



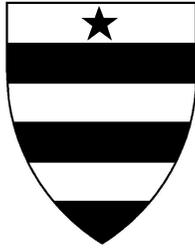
Of a bezanted cros.

Over these crosses we have another cross the which I saw lately in the arms of a certain Januens as here it shows. And this is called a bezant cross for it is made all of bezants. And such a cross may also be made with little cakes [torteaux] as with bezants. Bezants and little cakes differ only in color for bezants are ever of golden color nor shall the color of the bezant be expressed in the blazing of arms, for it needs not to say "a bezant of gold," for there are no bezants but of gold. Therefore it is to be said: He bears gules and a cross bezanty.

Off a cros flurry.

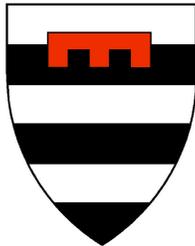
Of a cros flory.

fadyr with fum lyttyl differans as here, to whom fpecialli is geuyn a moon encrefyng, for that firft fon' is in hoope of augmentacion and encreffyng of his patrimony, and thys differans may be fum littill molet or a cros croflet or fych a like differans.

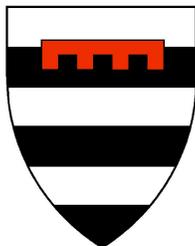


whole arms of his father with some little difference as here, to whom specially is given a moon increasing, for that the first son is in hope of augmentation and increasing of his patrimony. And these differences may be some little mullet or a cross crosslet or such a like difference.

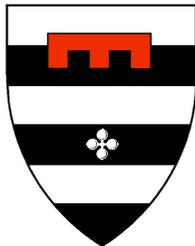
The fecunde broder fhall bere the hool armys of his fader with iij labellis to the differans and in to the figne that he is the thride that beris thof armys. Alfo the thride broder if ther be any fhall bere iiij labellis in tokyng that he is the faurith: that berith thos armys of whom the faderis the firft, the ayr is the fecunde, and the fecunde broder is y^e thride: that beris thos armys. And fo folowys that the thride broder fhall beere iiij labellif as here it apperith in thys figure. And foforth¹⁵⁴ iff ther be moo brether ye fhall encree powre¹⁵⁴ labellys after the forme reherfit.



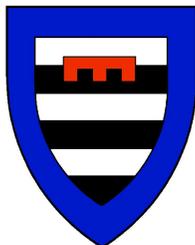
The second brother shall bear the whole arms of his father with three labels to the difference and in to the sign that he is the third that bears those arms. Also the third brother, if there be any, shall bear four labels in token that he is the fourth that bears those arms; of whom the father is the first, the heir is the second, and the second brother is the third, that bears those arms. And so follows that the third brother shall bear four labels, as here it appears in this figure. And so forth, if there are more brothers, you shall increase your labels after the form rehearsed.



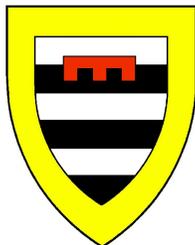
And the funnys of thos fame brether fhall beere the fame labelis. And in cafe that the fecunde brother the wich berith iij labeles haue ij fonnys, certainly thelder foon of thos ij the wich is hayre to his fadyr fhall bere the hool armys of his fadyr: with alfo many labelys as his fadyr did, with a littyll differans as here it apperith in thys fcochon. And hys fecunde brodyr fhall bere the hool armys of hys fadyr with the fame labellis as his fadyr baare and no moo with a bordure as herein thys figure next folowyng it fhall be fhewyt, and as it is reherfit in the chapiture of borduris.



And the sons of those same brothers shall bear the same labels. And in case that the second brother, the which bears three labels, have two sons, certainly the elder son of those two, the which is the heir to his father, shall bear the whole arms of his father, with also many labels as his father did, with a little difference as here it appears in this escutcheon. And his second brother shall bear the whole arms of his father with the same labels as his father bare and no more, with a border as here in this figure next following it shall be shown, and as it is rehearsed in the chapter of borders.



And iff ther be the thride brodyr then he fhall beere hys faderis armys with the fame labellis and a bordure of another colowre to the differans of hys brothyr as it fhall be fhewyt in thys fcochon next fuyng.



And if there is the third brother, then he shall bear his father's arms with the same labels and a border of another color to the difference of his brother as it shall be shown in this escutcheon next following.

And the chyldyr of thos men fhall beere theyr differans not in theyr faderis armys, bot in borduris and dyuyfionys dyu'fe.

And the children of those men shall bear their differences not in their father's arms, but in borders and divisions diverse.

And like as the chylder of the fecunde brodyr beryng iij labellis ar dyuydyt and dyfferit: by theyr fynys and theyr borduris. So the chylder of

And like as the children of the second brother bearing three labels are divided and differed by their signs and their borders, so the children of the