

THE TRANSMISSION OF FEMALE ARMS IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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We tend to think of heraldry as an overwhelmingly patrilineal science, but in medieval heraldry the descent of entire arms through the mother was surprisingly common. Aspects of this practice are still with us today: the quartering of the arms of an heiress, and the introduction of elements of a mother's arms into those of her sons was another early development which still flourishes. Knights who lacked male heirs were often keen to see their arms survive, and to be used by their grandsons. Sometimes the arms were gifted to more distant kinsmen, even to individuals who were completely unrelated.

PERCY

The House of Percy, earls of Northumberland, provides several examples of female transmission of arms. The male line ancestor of this house was Jocelin of Louvain (d 1179-80), an illegitimate son of the Godfrey duke of Louvain, who accompanied his sister Adeliza to England to become the second wife of King Henry I. The actual arms of Jocelin are not recorded, but he married the Percy heiress, and both of his sons adopted the ancient arms of Percy. The younger brother, Richard Percy (d.1244) bore *azure five fusils in fess argent*, in the Matthew Paris shields.¹ His elder brother Henry Percy (d.1198) is assumed to have borne *azure five fusils in fess or* since these were the arms held by his descendants. The fusils probably represent pick heads, used for piercing wood, from the French *percer*, meaning to pierce.

A number of generations later the head of the family adopted the arms *Or a lion rampant azure*, which the family believed were the ancient arms of Louvain. They were presumably aware that the ancient arms of Louvain, on which the current arms of the kingdom of Belgium are based, were *sable a lion rampant or*. These arms themselves probably owe their origin to a female descent. Henry of Louvain, Duke of Brabant (d.1235), Jocelin's great nephew, married a daughter of the house of Flanders which was using *or a lion rampant azure* by 1168, and it was he who adopted the arms *sable a lion rampant or*. The Percys knew that they were descended from a younger son of the house of Louvain, and it would have been reasonable for them to have adopted Louvain with the tinctures reversed, even though these arms post-dated their own ancestor, but they evidently also wished to preserve their old livery colours of blue and gold. They therefore unwittingly adopted the arms of Flanders, *or a lion rampant azure*. Another factor which perhaps encouraged the first Lord Percy to adopt the lion was that his wife was the daughter of the earl of Arundel, whose arms were *gules a lion rampant or*.

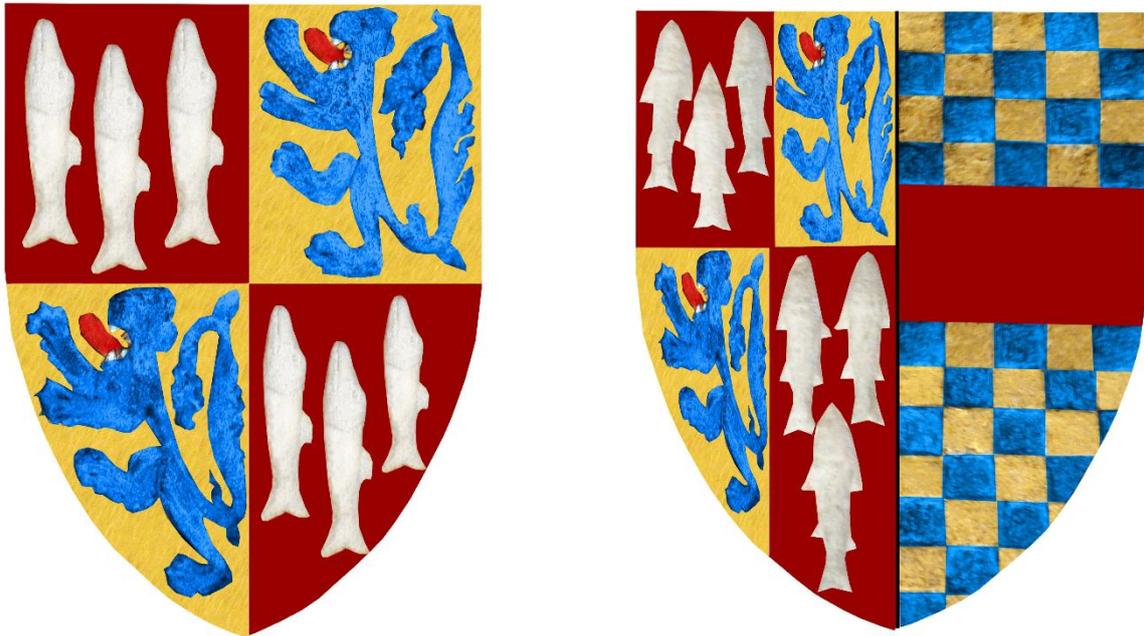
The first earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy, was created marshal of England in 1376. His third wife was the heiress Maud Lucy, who brought him the castle and honour of Cockermouth in Cumberland. Maud died childless, but her father wished his arms to be perpetuated, and Maud stipulated that her stepson Henry Percy the younger ("Hotspur") could inherit the Lucy barony provided that he and his sons continued to quarter the arms of Lucy (*gules three lucies hauriant argent*) which had been the practice of the first earl since 1383.²

Before leaving the house of Percy there is another interesting story to tell, because in the Canterbury cloister their quarters have been deliberately reversed (**figure 1**). The family were under attainder at the time when the cloister was built. Sometimes quarterings were reversed to signify the wife of the bearer, but this cannot be an example of such because the earl of Northumberland's third and last wife died in 1398 before the cloister was conceived. Hotspur's daughter Lady Elizabeth Clifford was a benefactor of the cathedral, and to signify this a shield was installed with her own arms of Percy in the dexter quarter (with quarterings reversed again) and her husband's arms of Clifford in the sinister (**figure 2**). This reversal of impalements cannot be anything to do with the

¹ Sir Anthony Wagner, *Aspilogia II* (London, 1967) p. 46.

² *The Complete Peerage*, vol. 9, p. 712, note k.

Percy attainer, since lord Clifford was a loyalist and it would therefore have been unthinkable to disrespect his arms.



Left, *figure 1*: Henry earl of Northumberland (d. 1408); right, *figure 2*: Lady Elizabeth Clifford née Percy. Both © the author.

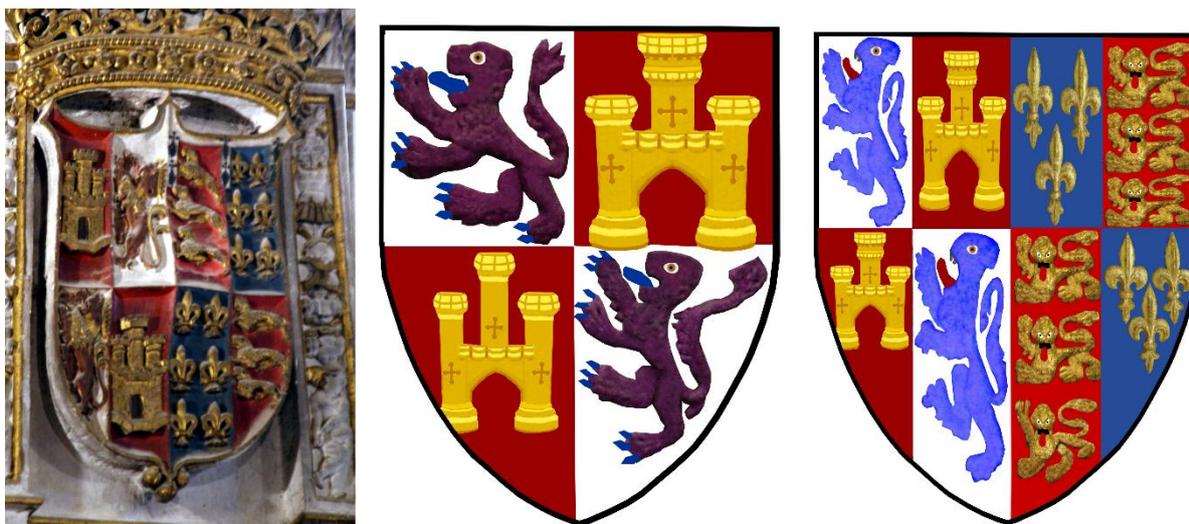
CASTILE & LEON

Perhaps the first occasion when arms were quartered was when Ferdinand III king of Castile (d.1252), son of Anfonso IX of Leon, inherited the kingdom of Leon in 1230. Up till that point he had been using the triple towered castle arms of his mother Berengaria of Castile, in whose right he had become king of Castile in 1217. His decision to add his paternal arms in the second quarter, and thereby to diminish the stature of the more ancient of his two kingdoms, may have been a consequence of having been repudiated by his own father and having grown up in the court of Castile.

There are a number of examples of the reversal of the quarterings of Castile and Leon and they are mostly linked to women. One might suppose that in the kingdom Leon the lion of Leon might have been placed in the first quarter, but the cathedral of Leon furnishes no examples of this. It has been possible to find only a single example in the ancient kingdom, on the tomb of Joan de Castro (d.1374) in the cathedral of Santiago da Compostella. Joan was the mistress of Pedro the Cruel, king of Castile (d. 1369). At the time of her burial local sentiments were running high, such that John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, found it easy to take Galicia, having claimed the throne of Castile in 1372 in right of his wife Constance of Castile. Henry II (d. 1379) is the only king of Castile who reversed the quarterings, and his reason for doing so is hard to fathom.³ It might be contended that it was a mark of his bastardy, but if so, it seems odd that he would have drawn attention to the fact. His descendants reverted to traditional practice.

The only other examples of reversal of the quarterings of Castile and Leon come from England. John of Gaunt impaled the arms of the kingdom with his own, but always in the traditional manner. His wife Constance probably used the same arms as her husband but with the Spanish quarterings

³ Douët d'Arcq, *Collection de sceaux*, tome iii, (Paris, 1868) no. 11256.



Left, *figure 3*: the tomb of Catherine of Lancaster in Toledo; centre, *figure 4*: reversed arms of Castile and Leon for Catherine of Lancaster (d.1418); right, *figure 5*: alternative version of the arms of Catherine of Lancaster from Canterbury. All © the author.

reversed. An example can be found in William Jenyns' ordinary, which was owned by John of Gaunt.⁴ John and Constance had a daughter Catherine of Lancaster, and in order to settle the dynastic succession, she was married to Henry III King of Castile (d.1406) from the rival Trastamara dynasty.

In Spain Catherine of Lancaster bore the conventional arms of Castile, as found on her tomb (**figure 3**) and seal.⁵ The seal of Catherine of Lancaster is accurately reproduced in the arms above her tomb in the cathedral of Toledo, except that here the royal arms of England have the quarterings reversed! The tomb was completed in 1534 at the behest of the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V, in the immediate aftermath of Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon, the emperor's aunt.⁶ Here we have an olive branch to France and a deliberate snub to Henry VIII.

In England we can find two versions of Catherine's arms with the reverse quarterings in the Canterbury cathedral cloister. This was constructed in the reign of her half-brother Henry IV of England, during the time when she was dowager queen and regent of Castile. Here we find Castile and Leon and Castile and Leon impaling Lancaster (**figures 4 and 5**). In the first instance the reversal informs us that the queen dowager rather than her husband is intended, while in the second we are being informed that it is Catherine rather than her father John of Gaunt for whom the shield was carved.

The reversal of quarterings in fourteenth and early fifteenth century England as a means of distinguishing the arms of a wife from those of her husband was a short-lived tradition which had its basis in the royal arms.

ENGLAND-FRANCE.

Isabella of France (d.1358), dowager Queen of England and widow of King Edward II, from early in her son's reign quartered the leopards of England with the lilies of France on her own seal.⁷ This was a highly political usage of heraldry, and she was clearly the hand that guided her teenage son to

⁴ Confusingly, the shield is labelled as being that of John of Gaunt, but this annotation is probably not contemporary. The reverse quarterings do not occur on either of the two seals used by Gaunt while he was married to Constance.

⁵ Douët d'Arcq, op. cit., no. 11260.

⁶ Pedro Beteta, Antonio Cabrera and Delgado Silveira, *The cathedral of Toledo*, (Tarancon, 1986), p 24.

⁷ Adrian Ailes, 'Heraldry in medieval England; symbols of politics and propaganda', being chapter 5 in Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (edd.), *Heraldry, pageantry and social display in medieval England*, (Woodbridge, 2002).

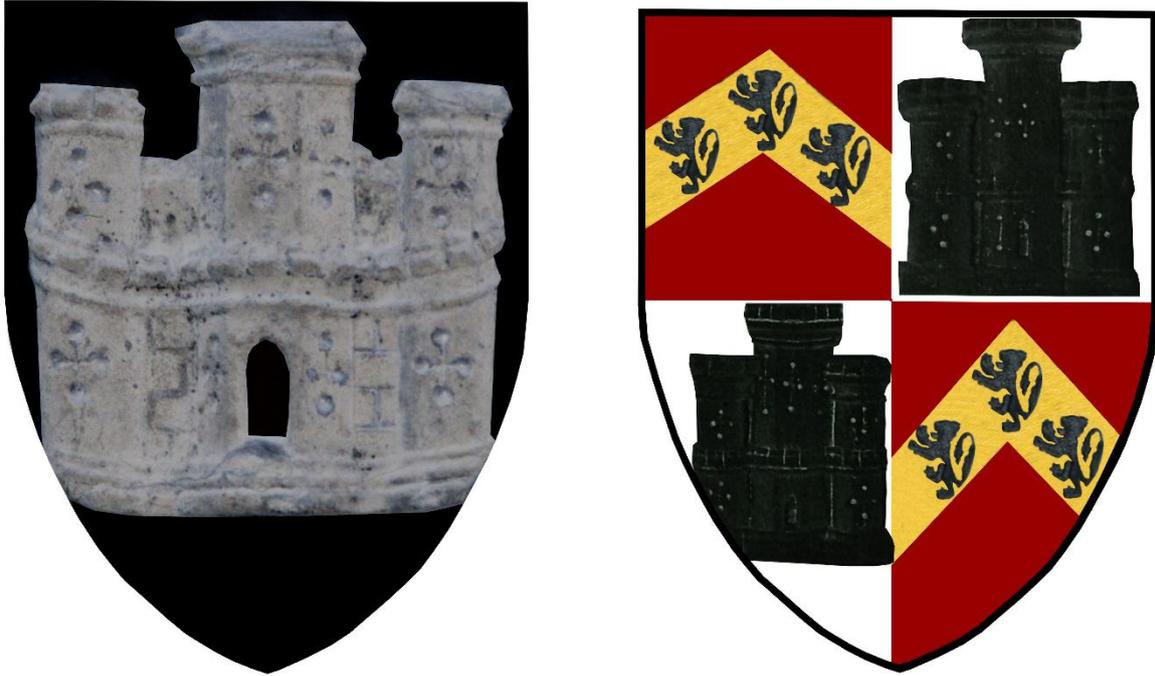


Figure 6: left: Sir John Oldcastle (d.1417); right: his wife Joan Oldcastle baroness Cobham.
Both © the author

claim the French crown in 1328. This claim was renewed with some vigour in 1340 when Edward III himself began to quarter his arms with those of France but with the lilies in the first quarter, to the utter chagrin of his cousin Philip VI of France. Isabella lived long into her son's reign, continuing to use her personal arms. It was doubtless assumed that this reversal was the mark of a queen, and there is a further example of reversed quarterings for a noblewoman in the Canterbury cloister. The arms of Joan Oldcastle baroness Cobham (d. 1434) are there represented with Cobham in the first quarter and Oldcastle in the second (**figure 6**). Her husband Sir John Oldcastle (d.1417) who in her right was lord Cobham, sealed with the quarterings the other way round, with the castle of Oldcastle in the first quarter.⁸

Sir John Blount, K.G. (d 1418) quartered his mother's arms in the first quarter in honorific transposition, and yet she was not even an heiress. His father Sir Walter Blount died defending the royal standard at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. As a younger son he rather cannily persuaded his cousin Alice Blount, the childless heiress of the senior line, to make over the ancestral lands to him, and he also took her arms *barry wavy or and sable* (**figure 7**). The surname comes from Blund, an allusion to blond hair, but the curvaceous arms are perhaps a play on the English word blunt. Sir Walter's wife Dona Sancha de Ayála, came to England with Catherine of Lancaster. Although not an heiress, she was of the highest nobility in Spain, a fact which she perhaps oft repeated to her son,

⁸ James Robinson Planché, *A corner of Kent* (London, 1864), p 208. Robert Glover's transcript of the Cobham muniments, made in 1574 and reproduced in *Collectanea Topographica*, vol. 7, p. 338 show that Sir John Oldcastle used this seal in 1410, around the time of his donation to Canterbury cathedral. Just to complicate matters, the "Rouen Roll" has his quarterings reversed, as in the cloister, see the "Rouen" roll of arms, edited by James Greenstreet

Notes & Queries 6th series vol. 2, Dec 11th 1880, pp. 462-4, no 17. The roll is problematic in terms of dating. It purports to date 1418, which is after the death of Oldcastle. The individuals on the document cannot be reconciled in terms of date, some being deceased before other arms came into being, which proves it to be a compilation rather than a contemporary source. The Canterbury cloister might well be the source for Oldcastle's supposed arms in the roll.

who was inspired to adopt *or a castle azure*, the arms of Sancha's father Diego Gomez of Toledo, into the first quarter of his arms. These arms were on his Garter stall plate.

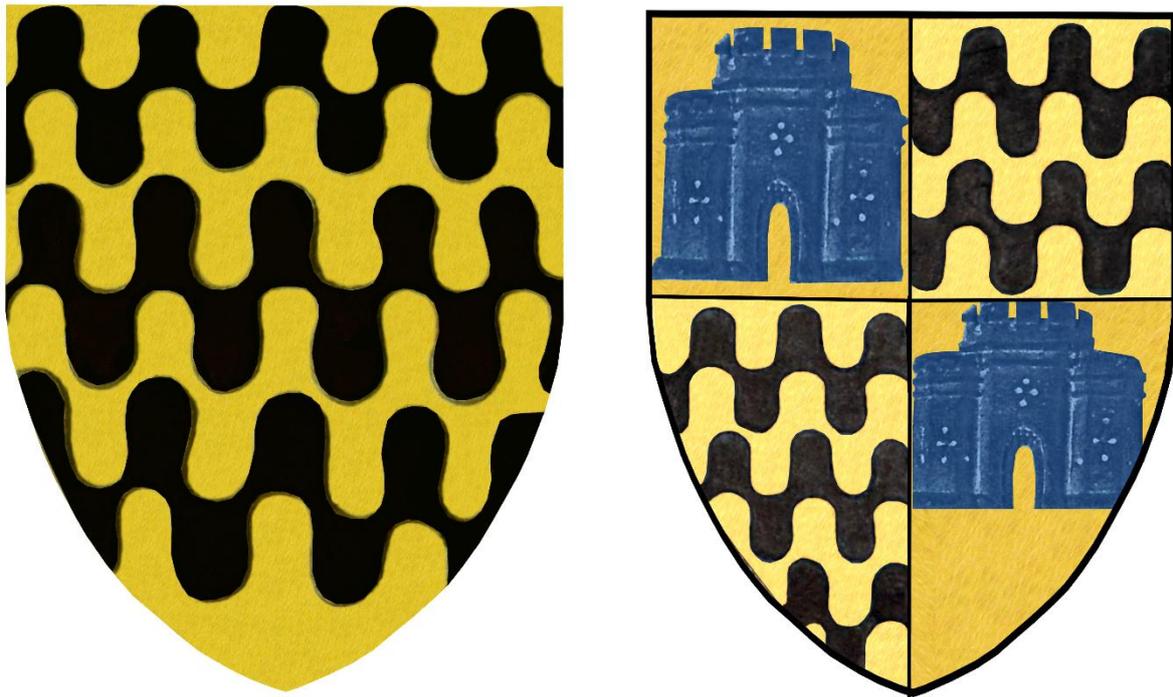


Figure 7, left: Sir Walter Blount (d.1403); right: his son Sir John Blount KG (d.1418).
Both © the author.

The adoption of women's arms entire by sons and husbands.

The practice of adopting female arms entire, sometimes in preference to paternal arms, would be very unusual today, but it was not uncommon in the middle ages and three further examples will be provided

BRITTANY.

The first of these, the arms of Brittany, is less clear cut than the examples which will follow, but is all the more interesting for it. The current consensus is that shield *ermine* saw its origin in the quarter ermine added to his father's arms by Peter of Dreux in 1213, on becoming duke of Brittany (**figure 8a**) Gerard Brault has demurred, contending that ermine is a canting device which came about because in Arthurian legend Brittany was known as "Erminie".⁹ Successive dukes of the house of Dreux continued for generations to use the ancient arms of Dreux with the canton ermine, until the time of John III (d.1334), who in 1316 adopted the plain shield ermine.

That the plain shield ermine is much earlier than this is shown firstly by an alternative seal used by Duke John I (d.1286) in 1251.¹⁰ The possession of alternative arms is a strong indicator of maternal descent, and John's claim to the duchy derived from his mother Alix, daughter of Constance of Brittany, who in turn was daughter of duke Conan IV (see **pedigree** on page 7). In 1166 Brittany was effectively annexed by Henry II of England as part of his Angevin empire. Constance, the only child of Conan IV, was betrothed, and much later married, to Geoffrey Plantagenet (d.1186).

⁹ Gerard Brault, *Early Blazon*, 2nd edition (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 36.

¹⁰ Michel Froger and Michel Pressensé, 'Etude sur l'hermine Bretonne', in *Armorial des communes du Finistère* (Chantonay, 2001), p 92. A better photograph can be found at www.loire-atlantique.fr: sceaux.



Left, *figure 8a*: Sword pommel with the arms of Dreux, © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; right, *figure 8b*: seal of Eon count of Rennes (d.1231), see ref. 12.

After Geoffrey's death she was forced to marry an Angevin loyalist Ranulph earl of Chester. She sought alliance with the kingdom of France and in 1199 she married the Frenchman Guy of Thouars, the second son of a family which in this period was using a shield charged with six fleurs de lis.¹¹ Constance died in 1201 bearing Guy a daughter, Alix who was the ward of the king of France and carried the dukedom in marriage to Peter of Dreux in 1213.

The reason why Brittany was called *Erminie* in late twelfth century literary sources has never been satisfactorily explained, but a ready explanation is to hand if ermine had already been adopted as the shield of its dukes! There is some heraldic evidence that the use of ermine by the dukes of Brittany might have pre-dated Conan IV (ruled 1156-1170). His predecessor Eudes II ruled 1148-1156 in right of his wife Bertha of Brittany, daughter of Conan III, who ruled from 1112 to 1148. Alan la Zouche (d.1190), a younger brother of Eudes II, was progenitor of an English family. It is of great interest that Alan's grandson Eon la Zouche (d. 1279) when he needed a mark of cadency as a younger son, added a canton ermine. Moreover, three of Eon la Zouche's cousins also used ermine cadency marks (**figure 9**). After Eudes II was deposed, his eldest son Eon, count of Rennes, bore a shield charged with three uncertain charges which might have been either peacock's feathers or ermine tails, arranged two and one (**figure 8b**).¹² The drawing of this lost seal should be compared with a sword pommel from the first half of the thirteenth century on which the canton ermine of the arms of Dreux shows three ermine tails arranged in like manner, two and one (**figure 8**).¹³

Conan IV inherited the duchy as Bertha of Brittany's son by Alan the Black. His paternal grandfather Stephen, count of Penthièvre and earl of Richmond, (d. 1136) was one of the first known armigers and bore fleurs de lis on his shield and surcoat. This apparent heraldic charge has been debated, but it seems to have descended through the female line to Roger de Mowbray who married Stephen's granddaughter.¹⁴ Conan IV, having his own ancestral arms, is unlikely to have invented the ermine shield, but might have used the arms in descent from his mother. He is hardly likely to have adopted ermine had this been first promulgated by his despised step-father Eudes II,

¹¹ Guy's own seal does not survive, but his eldest brother Aimery (d.1226), head of the family, sealed with these arms, Douët d'Arcq, op. cit., no. 1083.

¹² Dom Pierre Hyacinthe Morice, *Mémoires pour servir de preuves à l'histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Bretagne*, 3 vols (Paris 1742-46), vol. 3, sceaux no xxi.

¹³ Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number 38.60.

¹⁴ Adrian Ailes, 'Heraldry in Twelfth Century England: the evidence', in D Williams (ed.) *Proceedings of the 1988 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1990), p. 5 footnote 16.



Etienne comte de
Penthièvre
(† 1135/6)

Conan III **duc de Bretagne**
1112-1148



Gautier de Gant

Mathilde de
Bretagne

Alain II le noir († 1146)
comte de Richmond
et de Penthièvre

Berthe de Bretagne
(† 1158-64)

Eudes II **duc de Bretagne**
1148-1156

Alain la Zouche
(† 1190)

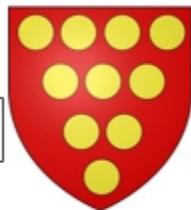
Alis de Gant

Roger de Mowbray
Sceau vers 1155

Conan IV **duc de Bretagne**
1156-66

Eon de Porhoët
(† 1231)

Roger la Zouche
(† 1238)



Geoffroy Plantagenet
duc de Bretagne 1166-86

Constance de Bretagne
(† 1201)

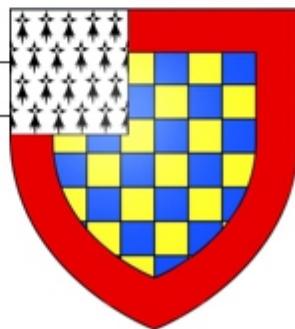
Guy de Thouars

Arthur I
duc de Bretagne 1199-1203

Alix de Thouars
(1201-1225)

Pierre de Dreux

Jean I de Dreux
(† 1286)



whom he deposed. Conan's daughter Constance spent her entire adult life married to men from armigerous families and it would have been an insult to her husbands to have invented her own. All of which suggests that the arms of Brittany date to the time of Conan III, and descended in the female line.

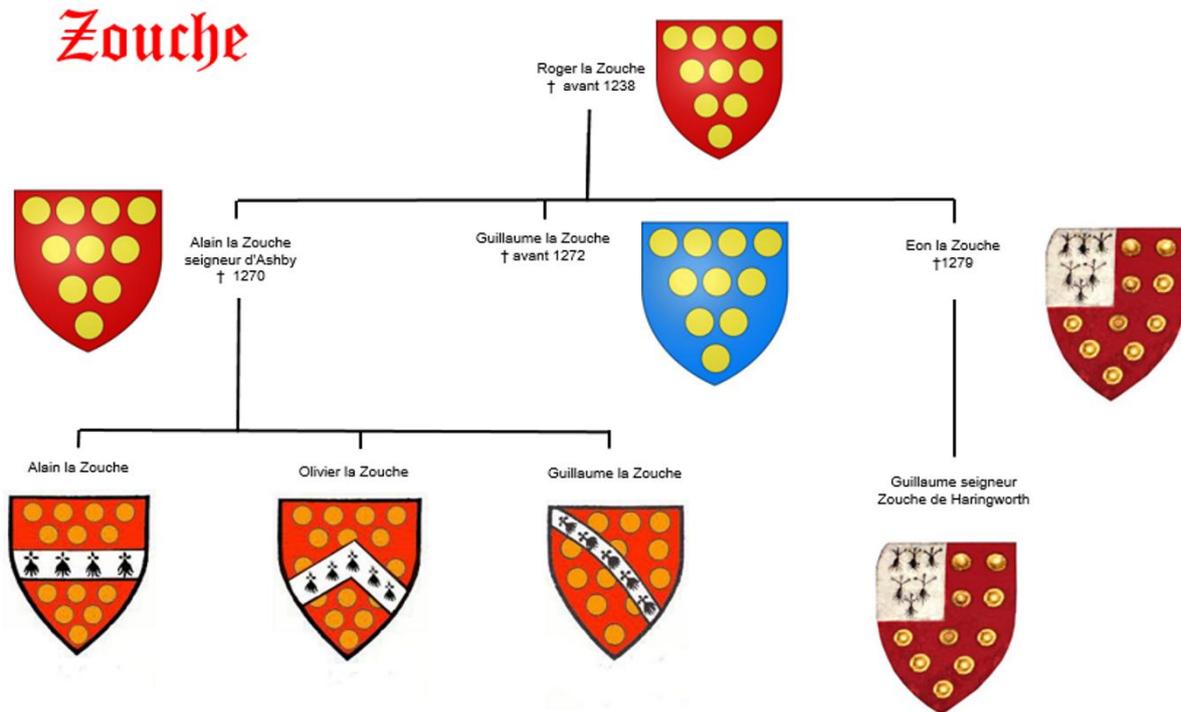


Figure 9: Pedigree of the Zouche family © the author

HAUTE of Kent.

Henry de Haute (d. bef 1321) married an important heiress, Margery de Marynes, who inherited the entire property of her family after the death of her nephew Roger de Marynes in 1342. It is almost certainly soon after this that all of Henry and Margery's sons adopted the arms of Marynes, *gules a cross engrailed or*, which being older carried a higher social cachet.¹⁵ Up till that point the arms of Haute had been *azure crusilly fitchy and a lion rampant argent, over all a fess gules* as evidenced by these arms impaling those of Marynes in lost glass from Selling church.¹⁶ The impalements are reversed, providing another example of modification of arms to signify that the wife was the donor. Notwithstanding the change in the family arms, Henry de Hawte the younger (d. 1370) continued to use his father's seal with the original arms throughout his life.¹⁷

WEST of Wiltshire

Sir Thomas West (d.1343) unexpectedly inherited Hempston Cantilupe in Devon and Snitterfield in Warwickshire in right of his wife Eleanor, daughter of Sir John Cantilupe. Thomas soon afterwards

¹⁵ These arms are recorded for Sir Thomas de Marines in Dering's roll of circa 1275 and in various rolls from the reign of Edward I, see Thomas Woodcock and Sarah Flower, *Dictionary of British Arms: Medieval Ordinary*, vol. 3 (London, 2009), p. 118.

¹⁶ Recorded by Philipott in 1614, *BL ms Egerton 3310A*, f. 19v. The impalements are reversed according to later custom, which is either an honorific transposition or intended to show that the wife was the donor. See also C.R. Cuncer (ed.) *Kent Records* vol. 22, *Lost glass from Kent Churches* (Maidstone, 1980), pp. 118-120 and *Kent Records*, vol. 17, *A Seventeenth century miscellany* (Ashford, 1960), p. 97.

¹⁷ Sealings survive from 1343 and 1357, Walter de Gray Birch, *Catalogue of seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 6 vols (London, 1887-1900), no. 10573-4.

adopted the prestigious arms of Cantilupe in the form used by his father-in-law, *azure three wolves faces inverted jessant-de-lis or* (**figure 10**).¹⁸ The original arms of Cantilupe were *gules three fleurs de lis or*, the family having risen up in the service of King John. A hundred years later a member of the family had the bright idea of converting these into canting arms. The fleurs de lis were given to emerge from the mouths of wolves, to suggest that the wolves were singing. In latin *canti lupu* means wolf song. This new version was quickly taken up by all the cadets of the family.



Figure 10: left: Cantilupe circa 1200; centre: Cantilupe circa1300; right: Sir John Cantilupe (d.1324) and Sir Thomas West (d.1343), all © the author.

The adoption of elements from a wife’s into her husband’s arms.

SCROPE of Bentley

Sir Stephen Scrope (d. 1409) a cadet of the Scropes of Bolton bore as his cadency mark a mullet ermine, which appear’s on Willements roll from the reign of Richard II. He married the heiress Millicent Tiptoft, who brought him Bentley in Yorkshire and Castle Combe in Wiltshire. Her arms were *argent a saltire engrailed gules*, and Sir Stephen added the saltire to the bend on his shield, placing it over the mullet, as can be seen at Canterbury (**figure 11**).

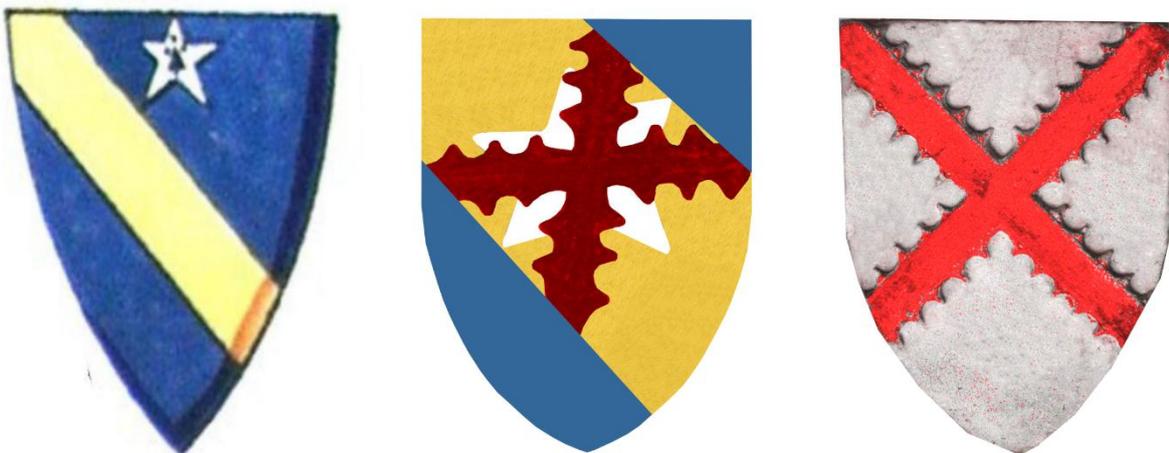


Figure 11: left: Sir Stephen Scrope of Bentley (d.1409) prior to his marriage; and centre: following his marriage to Millicent Tiptoft; right: Tiptoft. All © the author.

¹⁸ Being unaware of the origin of the arms later heraldists described the animals as leopards.

The adoption of elements from maternal into paternal arms.

This wonderful idea has been popular since its inception and is still in use today. It traces its origin to the daughters of Alfonso VIII of Castile (d. 1214) and his wife Eleanor Plantagenet, the daughter of Henry II of England. It has already been given as an example that Alfonso’s daughter Berengaria was the mother of Ferdinand III of Castile, who later in life quartered the arms of Castile and Leon with Castile in the first quarter. Alfonso’s daughter Blanche married Louis VIII of France, and their son Robert, count of Artois (d.1250) added a label of three points gules, charged with nine castles or, for Castile, to his paternal arms of Capet (**figure 12**). Alfonso’s daughter Urraca married Alfonso II of Portugal, and their son Alphonso III of Portugal created the Portuguese royal arms as we know them today by adding a border gules semy of castles or, again for Castile, to his father’s arms.

Blanche, the daughter of Robert of Artois married Edmund Plantagenet earl of Lancaster (d.1296) known as “Crouchback”, and he incorporated her arms into his, by adding a label of France to his father Henry III’s shield of three golden leopards. In the next generation Edmund’s sister Beatrice Plantagenet married John II duke of Brittany, and their son John earl of Richmond (d. 1334) added a border of England (gules semy of leopards passant or) to his father’s arms. Finally, John of Eltham, earl of Cornwall (d. 1336) a younger brother of King Edward III, added a border of France to his father’s arms from the arms of his mother Isabel of France.

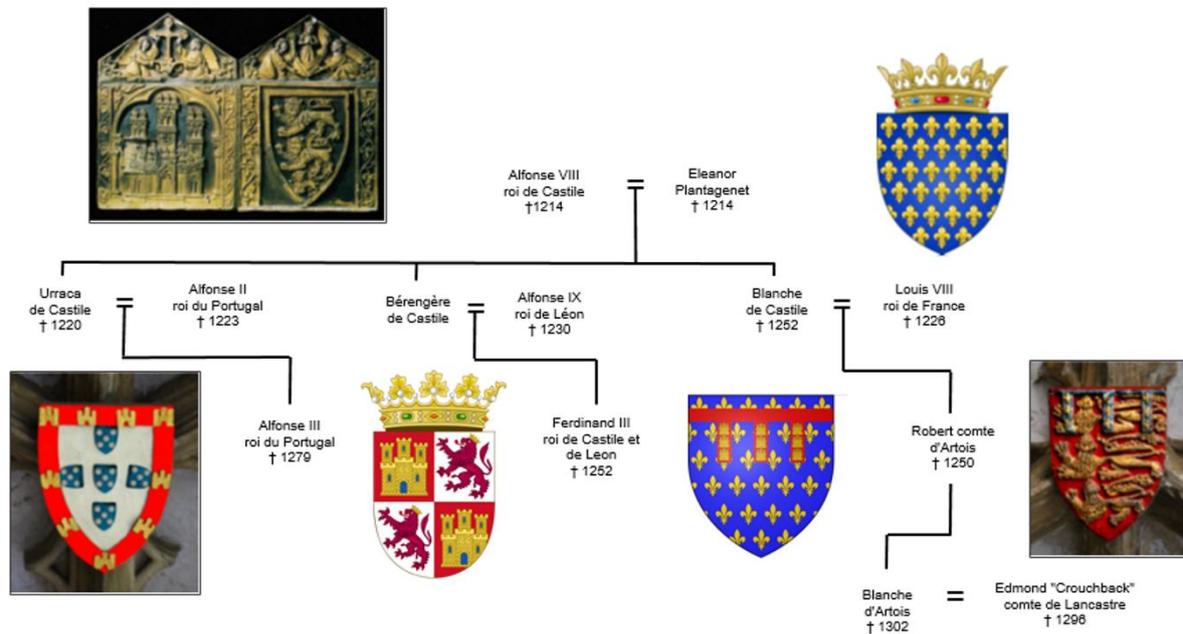


Figure 12: Castile descents. © the author.

Randolph of Scotland

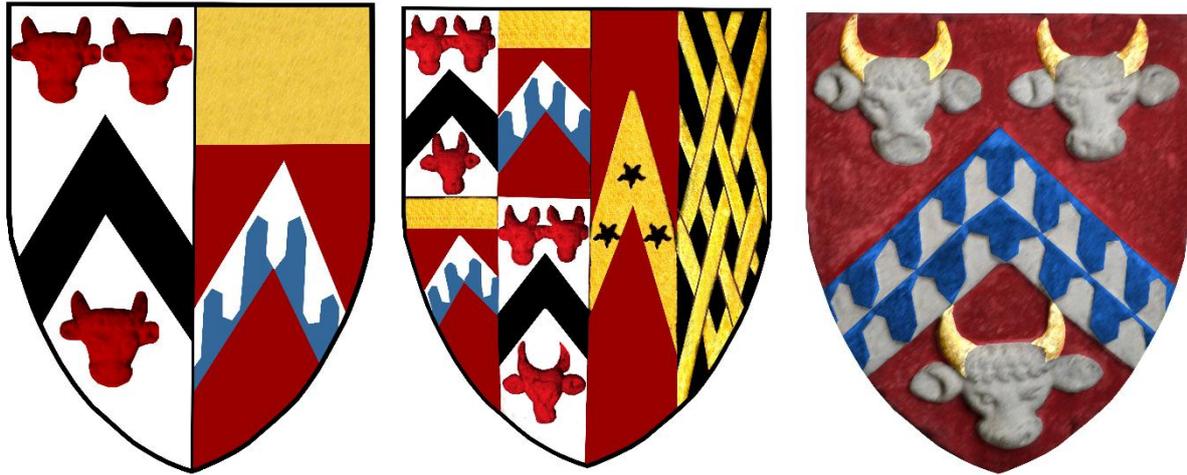
An early Scottish example of the addition of maternal elements to a father’s shield brings us fittingly to the year 1314 and the aftermath of the battle of Bannockburn which took place nearly seven hundred years ago close to the venue of this conference. Thomas Randolph (d 1332) was one of King Robert Bruce’s principal supporters, and contemporary documents name him as the king’s nephew. His mother was an unnamed half-sister of the King.¹⁹ His father’s seal in 1296, as appended to the Ragman Roll, was charged with three lozenges, probably intended to be *argent three cushions gules lozengewise*. In the aftermath of Bannockburn Thomas was created earl of Moray, and he added the royal double tressure gules to his father’s arms in right of his mother. His seal bearing these arms was appended in 1320 to that famous statement of Scottish independence, the declaration of

¹⁹ Bruce McAndrew, *Scotland’s historic heraldry* (Woodbridge, 2006), chart 3.10, facing p 53.

Arbroath. The earl's two sons died without issue, and his daughter Isobel's younger son adopted her arms, ultimately becoming earl of Moray in 1372.

CURTEYS of Kent

A final example of adoption of maternal elements comes from the Canterbury cloister. Two brothers Curteys, one a knight and the other a priest, were sons of an heiress of the family of Paunton. Both men incorporated their mother's arms into their father's shield *argent a chevron sable between three bulls heads caboshed gules* (figure 13).²⁰ The elder brother Reginald (d.1419) quartered his mother's arms with his own, while the younger, Master John Curteys (d. 1420), took the chevron vair from her arms, necessitating a reversal of the colours of the field (figures 14 and 15).²¹



Left, figure 13: Curteys impaling Paunton; centre, figure 14: Reginald Curteys (d.1419) and his wife Margaret, daughter of Reginald lord Cobham of Sterborough, and Eleanor baroness Maltravers; right, figure 17: Master John Curteys (d.1420). All © the author.

In the British royal family the arms have passed down on a number of occasions though the female line, but the incorporation of maternal elements into the arms of sons had seemed to end with the middle ages. All that changed when the Princes William and Harry adopted the escallop from their mother's arms of Spencer *quarterly 1 and 4 argent, 2 and 3 gules a fret or, on a bend sable three escallops argent bendwise*. It was deemed unsuitable for their labels to be sable, which would be against all precedent. William bears as his cadency mark a label of three points argent with a single escallop gules, while Harry has the same with three escallops gules. Both were reportedly delighted that their mother was being commemorated in this manner.

²⁰ Thomas Woodcock, Hon. Janet Grant and Ian Graham, *Dictionary of British Arms: Medieval Ordinary*, vol. 2 (London, 1996), p. 369. These are the tinctures recorded for Reginald in Basings book of circa 1395. The cloister shields have been incorrectly repainted. The tinctures of John's shield are recorded in armorials as *Gules a chevron vair between three bulls heads caboshed argent, armed or*, see Woodcock et al, loc. cit., p. 370.

²¹ Paul A. Fox, *Great Cloister, a lost Canterbury Tale* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 248-50. This reference was published at a much later date than the paper was delivered, but is far more useful than the original reference cited.