

N.S. Volume 1 No. 91

Autumn 1974

price 40p

THE COAT OF ARMS

an heraldic quarterly magazine published by The Heraldry Society



Sir James Audley's Cheshire squires

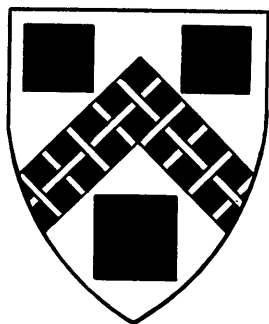
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Illustrated by Norman Manwaring

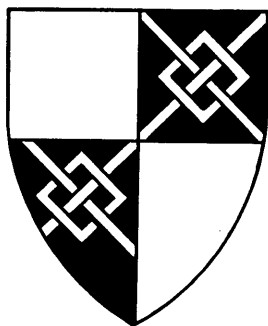
Probably owing its origin to Ashmole and subsequently repeated until, with the authority of the D.N.B. to support it, it has become invested with the mantle of historical fact, tradition identifies the four squires who attended Sir James Audley¹ at the battle of Poitiers as John Delves of Doddington, Thomas Dutton of Dutton, Robert Fouleshurst of Barthomley and John Hawkstone of Wrinehill.

It was shown some years ago² that not only is there a complete lack of support for the belief that these men took part in the expedition which culminated in the battle of Poitiers but that there is, in fact, evidence indicating that three of the four were elsewhere at the time. Furthermore two of the squires are identifiable as Laurence Pecche and John Welles. That the legend is going to die hard in spite of Dr. Hewitt's disclosures is proved by its reiteration without reservation in a number of works of subsequent publication.

In these circumstances it is not, perhaps, altogether irrelevant to comment on an associated tradition of more especial interest to students of armory. This secondary legend claims that the arms subsequently borne by the four putative squires derived the golden fret on a red field or ordinary which they share in common as an augmentation, comprising a part of his own arms "gules fretty or", granted by Sir James Audley to his squires as a reward for their services in the battle.³ The critical reader of this statement will probably reflect initially that it was by a particularly singular coincidence that Audley's four squires were all bearing arms which lent themselves so conveniently to augmentation in this manner. If he is sufficiently interested to search the more or less contemporary Powell Roll he will find that only something like one in six of the coats of arms emblazoned therein possesses this characteristic



Delves: argent a chevron gules fretty or between three delves sable.



Dutton: quarterly argent and gules in the second and third quarters a fret or.

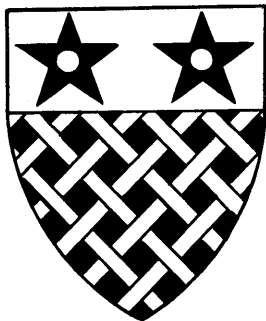
whence, if mathematically inclined, he will readily calculate that the chance of four such occurring together is of the order of one in 1,300.

If, having pondered on these long odds, he proceeds to consider the form which, it is to be supposed, the arms of the putative squires took prior to "augmentation" he will find in two instances at least the necessary ingredients for a "cause célèbre" similar to that in which another Cheshire knight was to become involved. He might then care to speculate on the fact that although John Delves died without issue in 1390 his brother and heir Henry and his successors continued to bear the "augmented" coat and to ask himself how did it happen that

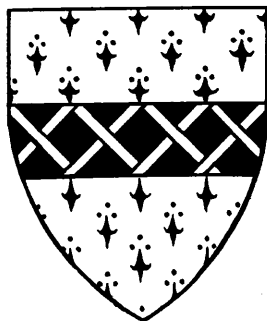
the arms granted to Robert Fouleshurst were also borne by the senior branch of the family (Fouleshurst of Edlestone) of which Robert was a cadet.

Thoroughly sceptical by now of the whole business it will cause him no surprise to find on further enquiry that Sir Thomas Hawkstone, steward of Queen Philippa's household and possibly brother to John, was, in fact, sealing in 1341 with a shield charged with a fretty fess⁴ and that the seal of Thomas Delves, younger brother to John and Henry, on a conveyance of 17 Ed. III "shows the fret very plainly"⁵ or to read the claim of a former Lord Sherborne that his Dutton ancestors were using the fret prior to Poitiers.⁶

1. See Josiah Wedgwood, "The Parentage of Sir James de Audley, K. G." (*Coll. Hist. Staffs.*, n. s. vol. ix, 1906) for a convenient summary of all the evidence showing that the hero of Poitiers was the son of Sir James Audley of Stratton Audley rather than James Lord Audley of Heighley to whom the exploits of his illustrious kinsman have frequently been attributed.
2. H. J. Hewitt, *The Black Prince's Expedition of 1355-1357*, Manchester, 1958, Appendix A.
3. See for example, *The Coat of Arms*, vol. iv, p. 43, and N. Denholm-Young, *The Country Gentry in the Fourteenth Century*, Oxford, 1969, p. 139, n. 1.
4. Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals, No. 168 (p. 121).
5. Sir Delves L. Broughton, Bart., *Records of an Old Cheshire Family*, Limited ed. of 110 copies only, London, 1908, p. 10. The legendary origin of the Delves fretty chevron is nevertheless still perpetuated in the article on the Broughton family in Burke's Peerage.
6. *Notes and Queries*, 9th Series, vol. vi, p. 517.



Fouleshurst: gules fretty or on a chief argent two mullets pierced sable.



Hawkstone: ermine a fess gules fretty or.