IX

COATS OF ARMS

SIGNET RINGS—ARMORIAL BEARINGS—ESCUTCHEONS
—CRESTS—BADGES

BEFORE we deal with coverings for the hand, it will not be amiss to consider something else which is worn on the fingers. Strictly speaking, of course, rings should be reckoned as ornaments, but signet rings very often bear upon them the crest or coat of arms of their wearer, and thus we have still carried on the person at the present day, a small and inconspicuous vestige of what were once most important articles of costume. In fact, they had a significance as great if not greater than any others, for when the face of their wearer was hidden by his helmet, they told to those well versed in heraldry not only his name but his lineage.

The crest was worn on the helmet, and might or might not be one of the devices or charges embroidered on the surcoat,—which was worn over the armour—and emblazoned on the shield and elsewhere.

At the present day, except in the case of ceremonial dress such as the tabards of heralds, the only survivals are the crest and shield. The devices on the
latter are now called a coat of arms, as in olden times they were, as already indicated, merely a repetition of those actually worn on the dress or coat armour.

Let us compare for a moment the first two figures which illustrate this chapter. In the first (see Figure 83) we have a tiny device engraved on a ring that is worn on the little finger of the left hand. In the second (see Figure 84) we have Sir Geoffrey Lutterell mounted on his charger in the act of receiving his helmet and shield from some of the ladies belonging to his family. All of the figures and the horse are decorated with armorial bearings. We wonder whether there could be a greater contrast. The knight has what is really his surcoat on his back displaying six martlets with a bend between them. The charges are repeated on a small square shield on his shoulder called an ailette, which was used apparently more as an ornament than as a protection, though it is said that ailettes were originally intended as a defence for the neck. Sir Geoffrey holds his helmet, on which, in the place of the crest, we again see his armorial bearings. They appear again on the pavon or small flag held by one of the ladies, and on the shield which the other carries. We find the same devices repeated five times on the trappings of his charger; and as if this were not enough, the ladies also have the bearings on their dresses. In the case of Lady Lutterell, who was the daughter of Sir
FIG. 83.—The crest on a modern signet ring.

FIG. 84.—Sir Geoffrey Lutterell and the ladies of his family, showing the extent to which armorial bearings were worn in the middle of the fourteenth century. From a psalter, made for Sir Geoffrey (after Fairholt).
Richard Sutton, there is shown also the lion rampant borne by her father.

We give another illustration taken from the effigy of Henry, the first Duke of Lancaster, on a brass at Elsyng, in Norfolk. (See Figure 85.) On this figure the surcoat is very well shown, and on it are emblazoned the three lions (or leopards) of the Royal Arms of England. It is interesting, too, owing to the label which differences the arms and shows that the wearer was not the king himself. The label takes the form of three vertical bars joined by a horizontal
one, and is like that which may be seen to-day on
the Prince of Wales's banner in St. George's Chapel
at Windsor. In this illustration, too (Figure 85), the
crest is very well shown.

Armorial bearings are still used to a considerable
extent in architecture, but otherwise they are chiefly
confined to notepaper, carriage panels, and harness.
Occasionally hatchments, or more properly achieve-
ments, are put upon the fronts of the houses of im-
portant people on the death of a member of the
family, and afterwards transferred to the church in
which the body is buried. The hatchment consists
of the arms of the deceased person, painted on a
lozenge-shaped field, which is surrounded by a black
frame, and if it indicates the death of a husband, the
right half of the field is sable (black), the left, argent
(silver). If it is a wife that is dead, the colours on
the field are reversed. When a widower, widow, or
unmarried person dies, the whole of the field is made
black.

In olden times the actual helmet, surcoat, and
shield were carried at the funeral, and in some in-
stances these were deposited over the tomb of the
deceased. Examples survive to the present day, and
one of the most interesting cases is to be found in
Canterbury Cathedral, where the shield, helmet, and
surcoat of Edward the Black Prince are still to be
seen. (See Figures 86, 87, and 88.) The Black
Prince left most careful instructions in his will with
regard to his funeral, and the accoutrements which we are able to figure through the kindness of the Society of Antiquaries, were the "arms of war," as he called them, that were to be carried at the ceremony. His "arms of peace" consisted of his ostrich feather badge, of which we shall again speak. There are

![Diagram of helmet and crest](image_url)

**Fig. 86.—The helmet and crest of the Black Prince. From "Vetusta Monumenta" (after St. John Hope).**

traces on the crest and surcoat of a label to distinguish them, but this is absent from the shield, though it occurs on the arms many times repeated on the tomb, alternately with the feather badge already mentioned.

With the exception of the signet rings and the ceremonial dress, which were alluded to at the beginning of the chapter, there are now but few cases where armorial bearings are worn on the person.
Fig. 87.—The shield of the Black Prince. From "Vetusta Monumenta" (after St. John Hope).

Fig. 88.—The surcoat or jupon of the Black Prince. From "Vetusta Monumenta" (after St. John Hope).
School and college arms are embroidered on the breast pockets of blazers and on the fronts of caps, while perhaps the most common instances are the devices which we see on the buttons of servants. Whole coats of arms may appear, but usually it is the crest of the master, which has now taken the place of the household badge which the retainers wore in olden times.

There is a difference generally between a crest and a badge, though in some cases the badge was really a crest. This was so before armorial bearings became hereditary, for the badge which the knight wore on his helmet formed its crest. Afterwards the same device was handed down to generation from generation. Individuals, possibly with a view of hiding their identity, sometimes wore a special badge instead of their family crest; but the badge as generally understood was, as has already been indicated, worn by the retainers and was usually chosen by each head of the family. The matter is further complicated, because badges were sometimes hereditary and occasionally identical with the crest proper.

It is of course only the hereditary badges which have survived to the present day, and in only one or two cases are they apparently still used as such, though occasionally they survive for other purposes. The Prince of Wales's feathers we have already mentioned. They were not adopted by the Black Prince for the reasons usually given in history, as there
is nothing to show that the King of the Bohemians ever wore them, and long before his time an ostrich feather was often used as a royal badge in England.

On his carriage, the Marquis of Abergavenny wears his badges, a rose and a portcullis, one on each side of his crest, and there are interesting cases here and there of badges worn as part of a livery. The porters of the Inner Temple wear the pascal lamb in silver. Watermen still have badges on their arms, and not very long ago the private firemen of the insurance companies wore badges bearing the sign of the company. When speaking of signs, it is worthy of note that very many royal badges have furnished signs for inns. We cannot go into details, but we may mention the White Hart of Richard II, the Falcon and Fetterlock of Henry VII, now degenerated into the hawk and buckle, and the Rose and Crown also used by the Tudors.

Those who chance to see the dress of our convicts will hardly be inclined to associate it in any way with that of royalty. Yet it is true, nevertheless, that the broad arrow which marks—we can hardly say adorns—the garments of the penitentiary, is in reality a royal badge. The broad arrow can be traced to an ancient symbol consisting of three converging rods or rays of light used by the Druids, and it was adopted by Edward III as his badge. The symbol was also worn by the Black Prince and other Princes of Wales. As early as the year 1386 the broad arrow
was used in the Royal household, and from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards it was adopted as a mark for distinguishing Government stores.

We may conclude our remarks upon this fascinating

![Image of a Lord Mayor of London](Fig. 89)

subject by alluding to a case in which a crest is actually borne on the head. It will be seen on looking at Figure 89, which represents the postilion of a Lord Mayor of London, that he wears upon his jockey cap the actual crest of his master, in the same
was used in the Royal household, and from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards it was adopted as a mark for distinguishing Government stores.

We may conclude our remarks upon this fascinating

![Figure 89](image.png)

**Fig. 89.**—The postilion of a Lord Mayor of London, wearing a crest upon his cap, and a coat of arms upon his sleeve. (Copied by permission from a plate published by the John Williamson Co., Ltd.)

subject by alluding to a case in which a crest is actually borne on the head. It will be seen on looking at Figure 89, which represents the postilion of a Lord Mayor of London, that he wears upon his jockey cap the actual crest of his master, in the same