THE CORDER COLLECTION
of heraldic and genealogical manuscripts:
a users’ guide

The collection is housed in the Suffolk Record Office at Ipswich (ref HD2418)

JOAN CORDER AND HER COLLECTION

Between the mid-1950s and a few years before her death in April 2005, Miss Joan Kersey Corder built up a library of books and manuscripts to assist her study and the writing of four important works on Suffolk heraldry and Suffolk families.

She was born in 1921, into an old Suffolk family – her grandfather Richard Corder lived at Old Hall, Claydon – popularly known as Mockbeggars Hall. The family moved to Felixstowe in 1937 where her father died six months later. After four years service in the WAAF, she returned to Felixstowe to keep house for her semi-invalid mother.

From about 1957 to 1965 she toured the churches of Suffolk photographing every monument with effigies of those commemorated and every surviving hatchment. These photographs are items HD2418/96/7-9.

In 1957 she started work on a *Dictionary of Suffolk Arms*, which was published by the Suffolk Records Society in 1965 with encouragement from Sir Anthony Wagner, later Garter King of Arms. It was hailed ‘the first substantial English work in ordinary form since Papworth's *Ordinary of 1878*’ and 'within its territorial limits... a great improvement on Papworth'. In 1967 Joan Corder was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

She next worked, from 1965 to 1973, on an edition of *William Hervey's Visitation of Suffolk* 1561 for the Harleian Society and in the latter year moved to Ipswich following the death of her mother. When the two volumes appeared, an eminent reviewer wrote 'the impeccable scholarship of Miss Joan Corder has produced... perhaps the best ever transcript of a Visitation' praising 'the wealth of genealogical and heraldic detail drawn not only from wills and parish registers but from a great miscellany of printed works and manuscript sources'.

In 1988 work began on a *Dictionary of Suffolk Crests* which appeared ten years later. Thanks to her, Suffolk is better served for heraldic reference than any other county in the British Isles, and she has established standards and methods of working for larger surveys, notably the great *Dictionary of British Arms*

The Corder collection of eighty-seven East Anglian manuscripts and nineteen additional items was purchased for the county in 2006 for the use of current and future local and family historians and topographers. This was made possible by the generosity of local people, trusts and societies, as well as grants from national bodies such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, Friends of the National Libraries and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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JOAN CORDER’S PUBLISHED WORKS

_Hatchments in Britain, vol.2, Norfolk and Suffolk_, edited by Peter Summers (Phillimore, 1976): Joan Corder wrote the Suffolk section.

_A Dictionary of Suffolk Arms_ (Suffolk Records Society Volume 7, 1965).


These are all available for consultation in the three Record Offices and the first three can also be borrowed through the Suffolk Library service.

FURTHER READING

There are many books on heraldry which will provide much more information than can be supplied in a short leaflet. One of the best is _A New Dictionary of Heraldry_, edited by Stephen Friar (1987), which contains excellent illustrations and a clear explanation of terms: it is available for reference at the Ipswich Record Office. Researchers consulting the collection at Ipswich might also find the following titles useful:

A R Wagner, _Heraldry in England_ (1946)
C R Humphery-Smith, _Armigerous Ancestors_ (1997)
G C Rothery, _Concise Encyclopaedia of Heraldry_ (1985)
I S Swinnerton, _Heraldry can be fun_ (1986)

SOME USEFUL HERALDRY WEBSITES

www.ihgs.ac.uk - The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies at Canterbury
www.theheraldrysociety.com - The Heraldry Society exists to increase the interest in and knowledge of heraldry and allied subjects
www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/guide/her - an article on the history of heraldry and genealogy
www.digiserve.com/heraldry - a site designed to assist with heraldry research on the Web, many links to other sites
WHAT IS HERALDRY?

Heraldry began as a means of identifying friend and foe in early close-range combat by coloured symbols on shields and crests worn on top of helmets. Some men had arms engraved on their armour, or painted on the garment they wore over protective mail. Banners, pennons and flags used at tournaments and in battle also had matching devices which enabled men on the same side to group together. It was important even then to avoid ‘friendly fire’ and to be able to spot one’s compatriots on sight.

At first, fighting men adopted whatever designs they pleased, but the need for regulation was soon recognised and heralds and kings-of-arms established a College of Arms where records were kept, arms were granted and the use of illegally assumed arms and crests was banned.

Later, and most thoroughly in Elizabeth I’s reign, heralds were sent into the northern counties by Norroy King of Arms and into the southern by Clarenceux King of Arms to hold visitations of the nobility and gentry. This was to check the family’s version of their pedigree and their right to bear the arms they did. Garter King of Arms in London was the senior king and chief herald.

The colours used in heraldry are technically divided into metals (gold and silver) and colours. They may be given French or English names, and there is a hatched shorthand for illustrating them in black and white:

- Gold or Or: white with small black dots
- Silver or Argent: white
- Blue or Azure: horizontal hatching
- Red or Gules (blood): vertical hatching
- Green or Vert: diagonal hatching, top left to bottom right
- Black or Sable: hatching both ways
- Purple or Purpure: diagonal hatching, top right to bottom left

Coats of arms appear on a shield but the crest is set above it, usually on a helmet made softer for the head and shoulders by rich silk mantling. Only noblemen (and corporations, including towns and cities) are entitled to supporters at the sides of their shields, and the whole display is then called an achievement of arms.

In reading a coat of arms it is important to know the difference between impaled and quartered arms. If both father and mother were heirs in their families, the children might use their two coats quarterly: the four quarters of the children’s arms would contain the arms of father and mother above and mother and father below.

A marriage is shown by impaling two coats, the husband’s on the left and the wife’s on the right. Left and right (looking at the drawn arms) are often called dexter and sinister, because if you held the shield from behind you would use your left hand on the sinister side and the right hand on the dexter.

Thirdly, the order in which sons were born is shown by marks of cadency (see illustration on right), a label of three points for the eldest, a crescent for the second, a mullet (five pointed star) for the third, a martlet (a legless bird) for the fourth and so on.

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THE CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

Heralds' visitations
HD2418/1, 2, 4, 6, 12-15, 19–21, 25, 26

For the nature of a visitation see the WHAT IS HERALDRY? section above. There are copies of the documents produced by William Hervy at different stages of his 1561 visitation - the earliest source for Suffolk heraldry (HD2418/1A-D) - and a copy of the 1638 Suffolk visitation (HD2418/21). In addition there are several visitations of Cambridgeshire (HD2418/4, 6, 14) and copies of the 1614 and 1634 visitations of Essex (HD2418/20). The illustration shows the entry for Sir George le Hunte, knight, of Little Bradley, from the visitation of Suffolk taken in 1638 by George Lilly, Rouge Dragon Pursuivant (HD2418/21/6)

Armorials and crest armorials

Armorials list the arms (or crests) of families putting the surnames in alphabetical order. The earliest (HD2418/5) is Thomas Wall's Book of Crests’ of 1530, with later additions. Item HD2418/28, the ‘Catalogue of Arms of many authors’ by Nathaniel Fairfax of Woodbridge (1689) is an important source, and is accompanied by a printed analysis of its contents, from the Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology for 1951 (Vol XXV, 288-296).

Ordinaries of Arms
HD2418/8, 23

In contrast to the armorial, an ordinary lists the arms in the order of the type of symbolism used, arranged alphabetically.

Joan Corder’s Dictionary of Suffolk Crests thus begins with the headings Acorn, Anchor, Angel, Annulet[s], Arm, Arrow, Axe, Beast, Beehive, Bezent, Bird, Bone etc., which indicates the very wide range of objects used in coats of arms.

The illustration shows two pages from an Ordinary of Arms compiled by Richard Golty of Framlingham (c1594-1768). Most of the arms relate to East Suffolk (HD2418/23).

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Heralds on their visitations often took notes, and antiquaries and local historians have continued the tradition up to the present. They often recorded memorials, brasses or even whole buildings which have since disappeared. The collection includes manuscripts by the prominent Suffolk antiquaries Robert Ryece (HD2418/18), George Ashby (HD2418/38, 40) and Richard Almack (HD2418/55, 61).

One of the most beautiful examples is HD2418/51 (illustrated below and on page 2): this is the work, in three large volumes, of Mrs Ann Mills, wife of the rector of Stutton, who made collections of her drawings of houses, churches, brasses and monuments, as well as the arms she found in and on them, covering the whole county.

Tombs: Sir Anthony and Lady Anne Everard, Great Waltham, Essex; Sir Michael Stanhope, Sudbourne

Grants and Confirmations
HD2418/80-84

Both grants of new coats of arms, and confirmations of arms already worn are official productions of the College of Arms and bear the seals and signatures of the heralds responsible.

The illustration shows the coat of arms on the grant made in 1562 to Thomas Smyth of Old Buckenham in Norfolk, by William Hervy, Clarenceux King of Arms (HD2148/80). The initial letter ‘T’ is embellished with a drawing of Hervy in his tabard.
These are family trees, often on long rolls of vellum or paper, arranged with the earliest generation at the top to the most recent at the bottom.

Some of the documents are collections of pedigrees. Others relate to a single family such as the Rokewodes (HD2418/16), Wingfields (HD2418/86), Heighams (HD2418/87) or Rivetts (HD2418/88)

The Wingfield Roll ends with Sir Robert Wingfield, 1567, and his achievement celebrates fourteen families his and his wife’s forebears had married into.

Genealogies of one or two families
HD2418/9, 27, 30, 41, 44, 63, 66

All heraldic records are a source for genealogical research; most of the records in the collection will provide genealogical evidence for many families. There are however some which relate specifically to one or two families only. These include the families of Ufford and Peyton (HD2148/9) (illustrated), Colt (HD2418/27), Gent (HD2418/30), Drury (HD2418/44), Dade (HD2418/63) and Freston (HD2418/66).
Manorial records and estate maps
HD2418/39, 93-95

There are a few documents in the collection which are not strictly speaking heraldic manuscripts. They consist of a court book for a manor in Haverhill, 1756-1768 (HD2418/39) and three manuscript estate maps on parchment, 1663-1776.

Although not a specifically heraldic record one of the maps, of the estate in Battisford of Reginald Rabbett, shows his coat of arms which punitively depicts three rabbits (HD2418/94).