

A Note on Armorial Bearings of the Le Mare Family.

by

Peter H. Le Mare, April 1995.

In the family papers there are references to two different Arms in the Le Mare family. In a letter to his daughter, Annie, dated 21 May 1880, Ebenezer Robert Le Mare wrote, *inter alia*

It is also a tradition that the family were naval people, and there is a coat of arms extant in the family (altho' I never used it) which is quite of that character.

The crest is a mermaid with the glass and comb; the shield is all waves, of the sea: and the motto translated into English is "This is my Right". (In French "Ceci est mon droit").

In the papers of J.P. Consterdine there is a drawing of the crest and below it is the name Robert Le Mare. However there is no date so that we do not know which Robert Le Mare this was. The crest was redrawn and coloured by Kathleen Le Mare (née Bowen) who displayed it when she and Bernard attended the family gathering at Banbury in 1982; it is reproduced in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Arms of Robert Le Mare drawn and coloured by Kathleen Le Mare from a drawing in the records of J.P. Consterdine.

The other report is in the papers of Minnie Le Mare (1861-1947) who said the Le Mare arms incorporated a negro's head. About 1970 Gordon Havelock Le Mare (1910-1994), a first cousin once removed of Minnie, sought the assistance of the College of Arms in an attempt to authenticate these arms.

Early in 1995 I visited the College of Arms to enquire whether the crest of a mermaid was registered, and I also mentioned the other crest. I met Mr Robert Noel, Bluemantle Pursuivant, and later I asked him to investigate the former arms. He wrote a long report, with much herald's jargon, which I now summarize. Some heraldic terms are in the glossary and Plate 1 below.

Mr Noel described his search as being to see what Arms have at any time before 1850 been granted to those of the surname Le Mare and to whom they properly pertain; at the same time to see whether the Armorial

Bearings for Le Mare, which we might blazon as *Argent (or it might be Or) three Bars dancetty Sable (or other tincture)* with for Crest *A Mermaid holding in one hand a mirror and in the other a comb*, are on record and if so, to whom they properly pertain.

In 1417 King Henry V issued Writs to the Sheriffs of various counties stating that in future men might not assume their own Arms. Thereafter, a right of Arms could only be acquired either by proof of descent in an unbroken male line from someone using Arms before 1417; or by a new Grant of Arms. In 1530 Henry VIII commissioned two provincial Kings of Arms (Clarenceux and Norroy) to visit the counties in their provinces and to record Arms and pedigrees. This was known as the Heralds' Visitations and lasted until 1689. Arms were either accepted or rejected. Approximately twenty thousand pedigrees have been recorded since 1689.

The desire to be placed on record often flows from a determination or conviction that one should be entitled to ancient Arms by descent. In the official records only two registrations were found for Le Mare:

(1) was the result of the initiative of Gordon Havelock Le Mare, whose grant is from 1850, of the Arms *Per Chevron Ermine and Vert in chief two Moors' heads proper and in base a dolphin naiant Argent* with for Crest *out of a Crown palisado Or a Moor's head and shoulders proper*.

(2) The other registration is for the 1563 Visitation of Le Maire. The relationship between these Visitation Arms and the Arms of G.H. Le Mare is plain from the entry under Le Maire in Burke's *General Armory*:

Le Maire (London; DAVID L MAIRE, Visitation London, 1563, son of JAMES LE MAIRE, of Tournay). Ar. three Moors' heads coupéd ppr. Crest – A Moor's head coupéd ppr. Motto – *Tempera te tempori*.

The College of Arms was, seemingly, not satisfied that G.H. Le Mare could trace his ancestry to David Le Maire so similar Arms were commissioned, the grant to be to an ancestor of 1850; i.e. the Arms were backdated to that year. The moor's head of the Mair family is shown in Figure 2, copied from *Crests of Families of Great Britain and Ireland* by James Fairbairn (New Orchard Editions, Poole. 1986)



Figure 2. The moor's head of the Mair family.



Figure 3. The mermaid of the Mere family.

Mr Noel was not able to trace the Mermaid arms to any member of our family. However, there are similar Arms of other families with somewhat similar names.

Delamare is represented as using *Or three Bars dancetty Gules* but with no Crest. Mere is blazoned Ar. a ship with three masts, sails furled, shrouded sa. Crest – A mermaid ppr. hair or. Thus the mermaid arms claimed by Robert Le Mare seems to be based on the Arms of Delamare and Mere. Figure 3 shows the Mere mermaid, copied from Fairbairn's *Crests of Families of Great Britain and Ireland*.

Mr Noel suggested that in the past Robert Le Mare or an ancestor of his, becoming a man of substance, may have made enquiries about his coat of arms. He did not go to the heralds, who would have informed him that he was not entitled to Arms unless he could prove descent from the Le Ma(i)res in the Visitation of London. Instead he became the client of an unofficial practitioner who said he was delighted to oblige and drew out the three bars dancetty of Delamare and the mermaid of Mere.

Mr Noel mentioned that the title 'gentleman' is strictly for one who, although not noble, is entitled to bear Arms. I found two uses of the term in our family. The first is with reference to Robert Le Mare (1734-1794) in his will. The second is in the Quarterage Reports of the Weavers' Company for 1819 where, under the heading "trade" one of Robert's grandsons, Ebenezer Robert (1797-1881) was described as 'gentleman'; he it was who referred to the arms in a letter to his daughter Annie, adding that he had never used them. Until we have more information the most likely originator of the unofficial 'mermaid' arms seems to be Robert of 1734-94.

During the 18th and 19th centuries many unofficial "armorial achievements" were produced by such practitioners as members of the painter/ stainer/ stationer/ undertaker professions. These craftsmen tended to advertise directly to the public and very many of their clients knew nothing of the true situation, namely that heraldry was (and is) officially governed by its own Laws and its own Court which seeks to ensure that the dignity of Arms shall not be usurped or traduced by those who are not by descent or otherwise entitled to enjoy the use of Arms.

Mr Noel also investigated the possibility that the arms were granted by the French Heralds but found no evidence for this. He then suggested that although the arms and crest for Le Mare Three Bars dancetty-Mermaid have never been registered in English armory, they were nevertheless the arms of Robert Le Mare, and the fact that he used them is a matter of considerable interest and worth commemoration so that now might be the time to introduce them officially. He suggested that I might be interested to petition for a Grant of the Arms and Crest subtly differenced, and that designing such is not only fun to do, but can have beautiful results when the products are painted by an heraldic artist. He stated that the cost of such a Grant to myself would now be £2200; if the grant was made to descendants of my father the fees would be £2450 and to the descendants of my grandfather, £2950. I have not pursued the matter.

The conclusion seems to be that the Three Bars dancetty-Mermaid arms are not officially recognized. The Arms of Gordon Havelock Le Mare are official but are somewhat different from those of David Le Maire because descent from him was not proved. Being dated 1850 the Grant is from the lifetime of Isaac Le Mare, 1835-1920, grandfather of G.H. Le Mare and an uncle of Minnie Le Mare. If the early claims were of officially recognized Arms, I think there would be convincing records in the family papers and their use would have been passed down the generations. Minnie may have assumed that David Le Maire was an ancestor and hence she regarded the arms as belonging to our family, but G.H. Le Mare could not prove this to be so.

Addendum August 2006.

In 2004 I sent a copy of my note on armorial bearings to Godfrey Milton-Thompson, great-great grandson of Robert Ebenezer Le Mare who is referred to at the beginning of the note. Godfrey is a member of the Heraldry Society and has his own arms. I asked him to comment and especially to correct any howlers. He replied: "The note reads well and there are no howlers although the colouring ascribed to the ?illegal arms cannot be correct as the mantling (the flowing bits of cloth spreading out from the helmet) would not be of two colours Black (sable) and red (gules) but more likely the colour and metal of the shield (or and sable). But I can almost hear Robert saying 'it would be much easier for you to have a new grant!' and allow him to collect a more certain (and larger) fee."

Glossary

Definitions from Shorter Oxford English Dictionary and Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary.

Argent – silver or white colour of a coat of arms.

Bar – an honorable ordinary, formed like a fesse, but narrower, and including the fifth part or less of the field.

Blazon – to describe in proper heraldic language.

Bluemantle – dress, and title, of one of the four pursuivants of the English College of Arms.

Charge – a bearing.

Chevron – a charge on the escutcheon, consisting of a bar bent like two meeting rafters, thus, ^.

Clarenceux – the King of Arms who officiates south of the river Trent.

Couped – tilted.

Dancetty – a fesse with three indentations.

Ermine – an heraldic fur; a white field with black spots.

Escutcheon – the shield or shield-shaped surface on which a coat of arms is depicted; also the shield with the bearings; a representation of this.

Fesse – an ordinary formed by two horizontal lines drawn across the middle of the field, and containing between them one third of it.

Fur – a tincture representing tufts upon a plain ground, or patches of different colours supposed to be sewn together.

Gules – a red colour.

Naiant – swimming.

Norroy – the King of Arms with jurisdiction north of the Trent.

Or – the tincture gold or yellow.

Ordinary – A charge of the earliest, simplest, and commonest kind, e.g. Chief, Pale, Bend-Sinister, Fesse, Bar, Chevron, Cross, Saltire.

Palisado – a 'fence' of lines with pointed tops.

Proper – represented in the natural colouring, not in any of the conventional tinctures.

Pursuivant – an officer of the College of Arms, ranking below a Herald.

Sable – black.

Tincture – inclusive term for the metals, colours, and furs used in coats of arms, etc.

Vert – the tincture green.

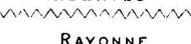
The following Plate is copied from *The Visitation of London In the Year 1568. Taken by Robert Cooke, Clarenceux King of Arms, and since augmented both with descents and Arms.* Edited by Joseph Jackson Howard, LL.D., F.S.A. and George John Armytage, F.S.A. London 1869.

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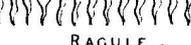
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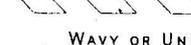
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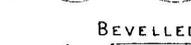
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RACULE



WAVY OR UNDY



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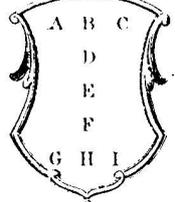


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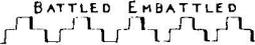
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 B *Middle chief point*
 C *Sinister chief point*
 D *Spour point*
 E *Base point*
 F *Middle point*
 G *Dexter base point*
 H *Middle base point*
 I *Sinister base point*



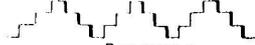
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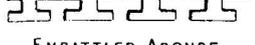
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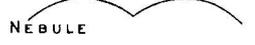
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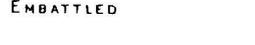
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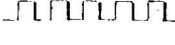
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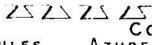
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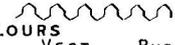
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URDEE OR PALISADO

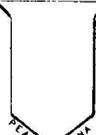


COLOURS

OR	ARGENT	GULES	AZURE	VERT	PURPURE	SABLE	TENNE
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GOLD



SILVER



RED



BLUE



GREEN



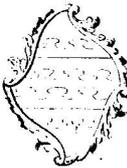
PURPLE



BLACK



ORANGE



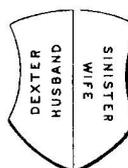
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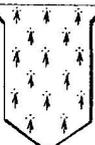
IMPALED



SANGUINE

FURS

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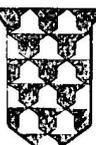
GUTTE D'OR



GOLD



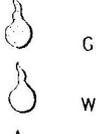
GUTTE DE SANG



RED



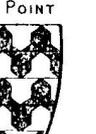
GUTTE D'EAU



WHITE



GUTTE DE LARMES



BLUE



GUTTE DE POIX



BLACK



GUTTE D' OLIVE



GREEN

ROUNDLES





BEZANT



PLATE



TORTEAUX



HURT



PELLET



POMME



GUZE



ORANGÉ



GOLPE



FOUNTAIN

C. N. Elvin Del.

P. C. Baker Sc.