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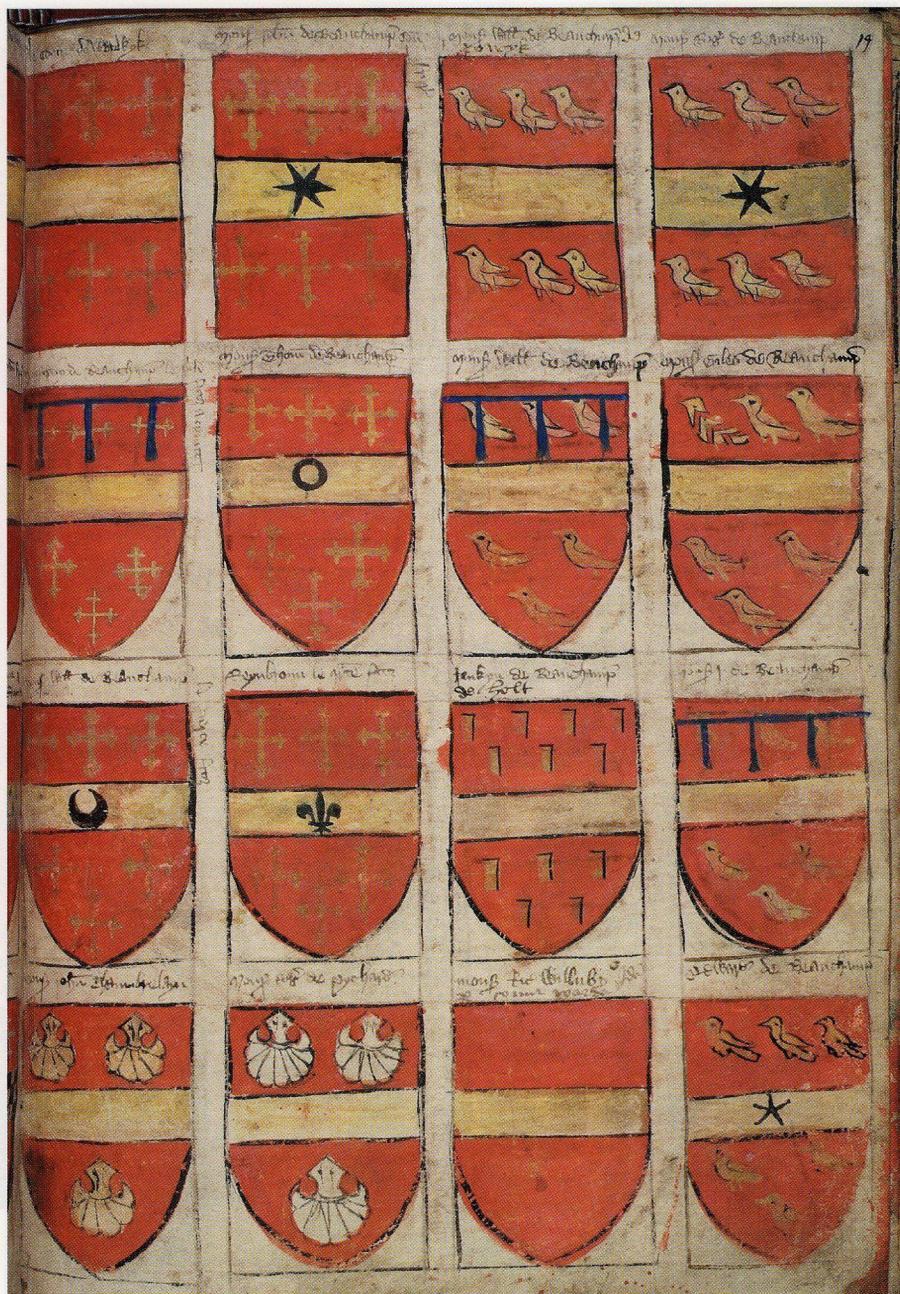
John Tunesi of Liongam

PLATE 2



CA Ms William Jenyns' Ordinary, fo 29v.
See page 23.

PLATE 3



CA Ms William Jenyns' Ordinary, fo 19r.

See page 24.

THE MEDIEVAL ORIGINS OF THE BRITISH SYSTEM OF CADENCY

Paul A. Fox

This paper seeks to show how the cadency marks described by writers on heraldry and used today in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland came to be established, concentrating upon the evidence provided by a hitherto largely overlooked medieval manuscript source. It also notes the influence of published works on the evolution of cadency practices in the sixteenth century.¹

Heraldry began to develop rapidly during the twelfth century at much the same time that the fully visored helmet was popularized. With the face concealed it became essential to distinguish knights on the field of battle in some other way, and in that context the ability to distinguish a father from his sons would have been extremely important. It is a safe assumption that the differencing of the arms of sons would have been required even when heraldry was in its infancy, but our sources of information for this remote period of time are limited.

The number of ways that arms might be changed to distinguish between two members of a family is virtually limitless, but in practice the most popular early methods were colour changes; powdering the field with other charges ('geratting'); the addition of a bend or a border; and the addition of other charges which might be single or multiple.

Of these latter charges, the one most consistently used from the earliest period is the label, thought to be a depiction of a ribbon with a variable number of pendant strips which was worn around the neck, and possibly sometimes around the helm. One can imagine that the younger knights and squires at tournaments would have worn such fancy ribbons, perhaps to impress the ladies, and it is possible that such collars were sometimes bestowed as tokens. This association with youth would explain why the label, not at its inception the mark of a son, would have yet been considered a very suitable distinction for one.

The earliest verifiable example of the use of the label dates from around 1215 and is certainly not a father-son difference. These are the arms of Saher de Quincy, Earl of Winchester: *Or a fess gules with a label azure*.² The arms of Quincy were in fact *Gules seven mascles or*, arms which appear on the contemporary seal of Saher's first cousin Robert Fitzwalter. The two men were prime movers in the revolt against

¹ J. R. Planché studied the history of cadency marks in *The Pursuivant of Arms* (third edn., London 1873), pp. 176-89. The next useful survey of the subject appears in A. C. Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (first edn. London 1909; rev. J. P. Brooke-Little, London 1969), chapter 31. There is a less detailed but clear study in *Boutell's Heraldry* (rev. J. P. Brooke-Little, London 1973), chapter 10.

² Henry Laing, *Descriptive Catalogue of impressions from ancient Scottish Seals* (Edinburgh 1850), p. 128 and plate xi: the date given here is incorrect. The seal carries the title Earl of Winchester, which was bestowed on de Quincy in 1210.

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King John, and both adopted the *fess gules* at this time. Fitzwalter took his ancestral Clare arms, *Or three chevrons gules*, and changed the central chevron to a fess. If the seals of de Quincy and Fitzwalter are placed side by side they appear to be riding towards each other, and each man has placed the other's arms in the same position on the seal. This combined with the adoption of the *fess gules* points to some powerful joint symbolism, most probably the two cousins had sworn blood brotherhood, for which it is hard to imagine a more appropriate heraldic device than the fess gules. Although the *label azure* may have also borne some connotation which is now lost to us, its addition was probably necessary because *Or a fess gules* was already in use by another knight.

The use of the label by de Quincy may have helped to popularize it. It is unlikely to be coincidental that the earliest known Scottish example of the label being used for an eldest son occurs in the family of Seton, who were feudal tenants of de Quincy. Saher de Seton's Christian name emphasizes that connection. He and his eldest son Alexander sealed one of the Holyrood Charters around 1260, the father with *three crescents*, the son with *three crescents and a label of three points*.³

In England the earliest surviving roll of arms (excepting the Matthew Paris shields), Glover's Roll, dates from the 1250s, and contains thirteen examples of the use of the label. Of these, only three are eldest sons within the lifetimes of their fathers. The most important of these is the king's own son and heir, the Prince Edward. A fourth knight, Thomas de Multon, occupies an unclear position because although he was a son and heir his father had already died, in 1246. Six of the knights were definitely not eldest sons, of whom Edmund de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, was using the label to distinguish his arms from the family of Eure.⁴

It is a fair supposition that the other five charges later added to arms to denote younger sons: the crescent, the mullet, the annulet, the fleur-de-lys, and the martlet, also came into use as cadency marks during the thirteenth century. For only one of these, however, has it been possible to find evidence from this early period, and that is the fleur-de-lys. In 1260 Humphrey de Bohun, then an eldest son, differenced with one.⁵ The three-part structure of the lily has long been regarded as an allusion to the blessed Trinity, but perhaps more pertinently the three lobes were said to represent wisdom, faith and prowess.⁶ There are several other early examples of its use, from 1292, and in the Parliamentary Roll of c. 1312, when it appears on the arms of Giles de Brewes.⁷

By the early fourteenth century examples of the use of modern cadency marks become very numerous. There is an excellent and much neglected source for cadency

³ Laing, op. cit. no. 736 and plate 10. See also Sir James Balfour Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, vol. viii (Edinburgh 1911), p. 562.

⁴ For Glover's Roll, ed. H. S. London, see *Rolls of arms of Henry III (Aspilogia 2)*: London 1967), pp. 115-166. Of the final three knights not enough genealogy is known to indicate their status.

⁵ *BM Seals* no. 7530.

⁶ Guy Cadogan Rothery, *Concise Encyclopedia of Heraldry* (London 1985), pp. 166f.

⁷ For the 1292 example, Laing, op. cit. p. 58 no. 307; and for the Parliamentary Roll see Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, *A Roll of Arms of the Reign of Edward the Second* (London 1829), p. 30.

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in this period: William Jenyns' Ordinary (henceforth WJO; **Plate 2**).⁸ This roll would seem to date from the reign of Edward III, but the only surviving medieval copy was created in the time of Richard II with some small additions, and this copy is preserved in the College of Arms. An examination of this manuscript shows that, uniquely, it gives cadency marks to all the sons of some of the leading families, while at the same time stating whether they were the eldest, second or third son, and so on. With the aid of this manuscript it is thus possible to address the development of the other cadency marks, and I will do so in the order with which we have now become familiar.

The crescent, now the mark of the second son, was in the medieval period quite a popular choice for the eldest son. In WJO there are seventy-nine examples of eldest sons using the label, fifteen using crescents, fifteen using mullets and nine using annulets. From the same source it appears that the crescent was used most in descending order of frequency by the first, second and third sons.⁹ Representing the waxing or increasing moon, the crescent has been associated from ancient times with fertility and prosperity. It is said that the crescent moon was much used in Byzantium and thus acquired by the crusaders, in which context it is not surprising to find it on the great seal of Richard I.¹⁰

The mullet, now the mark of the third son, occupies in WJO joint second place in frequency with the crescent as the mark of an eldest son; it was also used with apparent equal preference by second and third sons.¹¹ Probably the best known early example of the use of the mullet as a form of feudal differencing is the family of de Vere, who used the mullet to distinguish themselves from de Mandeville. The mullet is often confused with a spur rowel, which has the same shape, but which naturally has a hole in its centre.¹² A star was used on coinage from the reigns of the Conqueror through to Henry I, evidently as a religious emblem. Anciently the morning star was associated with fertility. To be fruitful and to multiply were the most important duties of an heir.

The martlet, now the mark of the fourth son, was probably never used in the Middle Ages by the eldest son: writers on heraldry ascribed to it a particular symbolism which made it unsuitable for this use. The first British treatise on heraldry, the *Tractatus de Armis* of c. 1394, includes the following passage:¹³

The martlet borne in arms signifies that the bearer has acquired nobility either by his bravery and prowess or by his intelligence, and that he has but little inherited wealth.

The heraldic martlett has no feet, like something without foundation. Those who bear the bird dwell in the courts of lords or kings and live on the bounty of those lords.

⁸ *CEMRA*, pp. 69-71. A more detailed account of this manuscript is in preparation.

⁹ Examples from WJO of the use of the crescent by the second son include Audley of Heleigh, Mowbray, Percy and Strange of Knockyn; by the third son, Beauchamp and Neville.

¹⁰ Rothery, op. cit. pp. 92f.

¹¹ Examples from WJO of use by the second son are Fauconberge and Neville; by the third son, Percy and Holland.

¹² The spur rowel is generally referred to in England as a pierced mullet.

¹³ The text that follows is an adaptation of the translation by Evan John Jones from the Welsh version of the *Tractatus*, the *Llyfr Arfau*: E. J. Jones, *Medieval Heraldry* (Cardiff 1943), p. 45 (cf. p. 122 for the Latin version).

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Alexander Neville, Archbishop of York 1374-88, is a good example of a younger son who rose to wealth and power and adopted the martlet as his mark of cadency. The Great Cloister of Canterbury Cathedral, dating from the reign of Henry IV, has examples of the martlet being used by younger sons of the families of Colepeper and Leventhorpe.¹⁴ The most senior son in WJO to have borne the martlet was Sir Thomas Neville, Lord Furnival (1377-1407), who was second son of the first Earl of Westmoreland.

The annulet, now considered the mark of the fifth son, was thought to be an emblem of wealth and fidelity; it was also connected with the tournament. The tournament ring was hung from a cross-beam and the knight had to carry it off on his lance while riding at full tilt. The importance of the ring as a symbolic object is evidenced by the ancient legends which were the inspiration of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. In WJO there are examples of its use from the second through to the sixth son, and as a popular choice for cadency it ranked above the martlet and the fleur de lis.¹⁵

One family which has long been cited as the best medieval example of the modern usage of cadency is that of Beauchamp Earl of Warwick (**Plate 3**). Dugdale recorded the use of all six marks by the sons of Sir Thomas (Beauchamp), third Earl of Warwick, K.G., who died in 1369, from the windows in the chantry chapel of the family in the church of St Mary's, Warwick. These windows were smashed by the Puritans not long after they were copied by Wenceslaus Hollar. It must be emphasized that apart from the use of the label by the eldest son, none of the cadency marks stands for the same son that it would indicate in modern usage.¹⁶

There are rare examples of individuals changing their cadency marks later in life, suggesting perhaps that the distinction had been chosen by the head of the family and was not to their liking. All the indications are that the heralds of the day allowed families to devise their own systems of cadency provided that each mark was unique.

Medieval literature confirms that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was still no uniform system. The *Tractatus de Armis*, for instance, states that 'the eldest son during his father's lifetime bears his father's arms with a cross or some other little difference' but on the same page informs us that the eldest son bears a

¹⁴ The eldest son of Sir John Leventhorpe (who himself had a crescent for difference) bore the label, the second to fourth sons took the annulet, the martlet and the rose, and the fifth son used the mullet. Sir John Colepeper of Oxenhoath in Kent himself had an annulet for difference: his eldest son bore a crescent during his father's lifetime. The second and third sons used the mullet and the martlet.

¹⁵ WJO has 149 examples of the use of the label, 43 of the use of the mullet, 32 of the crescent, 24 of the annulet, 15 of the fleur-de-lys and 13 of the martlet. Here we find it used by the second son in the family of Beauchamp, by third and fourth sons in different generations of the Nevilles of Raby, and by the sixth son of Henry, Lord Percy (d. 1353).

¹⁶ Instead we have: second son annulet, third son crescent, fourth son fleur-de-lys, fifth son mullet and sixth son martlet.

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label of three or four points during his father's lifetime.¹⁷ These two statements reflect contemporary heraldic indecision. The work goes on to say that the second son bears a label of three points, the third son a label of five, and so on, and this decidedly is both contradictory and at variance with heraldic practice today.

What we in fact have here is the first recorded attempt to establish a formal system of cadency, one which was never adopted. The *Tractatus* was not a guide book on heraldry, but rather a philosophical discourse which described heraldry in accordance with the Aristotelian principles of logic, classification and natural history, the basis of university education at the time. It is not surprising therefore that the book became very popular to the extent of being widely plagiarized. Nicholas Upton, writing his *De Studio Militari* around 1440, copied the work and inserted some of his own ideas. What Upton said was in turn copied verbatim by Dame Julian Berners into the *Book of St Albans*.¹⁸

The first son shall bear the arms of his father with some little difference as here [indicating a mullet shown in illustration] to whom specially is given a moon increasing, and this difference may be a little mullet. The second brother shall bear the arms with a label of three points, to signify that he is the third to bear those arms. The third brother shall bear a label of four points, and if there are more brothers you shall increase the number of points.

The sons of the brothers will bear the same labels. For instance the second son's eldest son will add a little difference [marginal illustration of a cinquefoil] and the second son will bear his father's arms surrounded by a border. The third son will have his father's arms with a border of a different colour.

One hundred and fifty years after Upton, the idea of differencing the sons of a cadet with a border was taken up by the Lord Lyon in Scotland when in 1590 by act of the Scottish Parliament all arms had to be registered.¹⁹

No clear distinction can be made between the sorts of cadency markings which were popular in the British Isles during the medieval period and those employed in other parts of western Europe. The fifteenth-century Golden Fleece armorial gives very similar examples in the two sections which are substantial enough to include cadets, those of Normandy and Flanders.²⁰

¹⁷ Jones op. cit. p. 71, and the same in the Latin versions pp. 134 and 184. It is in the context of the Scrope-Grosvenor case that John Trevor, Bishop of St Asaph, wrote this first treatise on heraldry for Queen Anne, wife of Richard II, as convincingly argued by Evan Jones op. cit. Criticism of the work as an antiquarian source was voiced by Oswald Barron, quoted and seconded by Anthony Wagner in his introduction to Jones's *Medieval Heraldry* pp. xii-xv.

¹⁸ Dame Julian Berners, *Book of St Albans* (St Albans 1486, reprinted by Wynkyn de Worde, Westminster 1496; ed. D. B. Appleton, 2003), pp. 58f.

¹⁹ See J. H. Stevenson, *Heraldry in Scotland* (Glasgow 1914), vol. 2, chap. 10, for a discussion of Scots cadency practice; see also Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, *Scots Heraldry* (rev. edn., Edinburgh 1956), chap. 8.

²⁰ Michel Pastoureau and Michel Popoff (edd.), *Grand armorial équestre de la Toison d'or* (two vols., Saint-Jorioz 2001), an edition of Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal Ms 4790. Admittedly Normandy was at that time under English suzerainty, but it was largely populated by Frenchmen. The escutcheon of pretence appears to have been quite a popular cadency mark in both of these territories, more so than in England.

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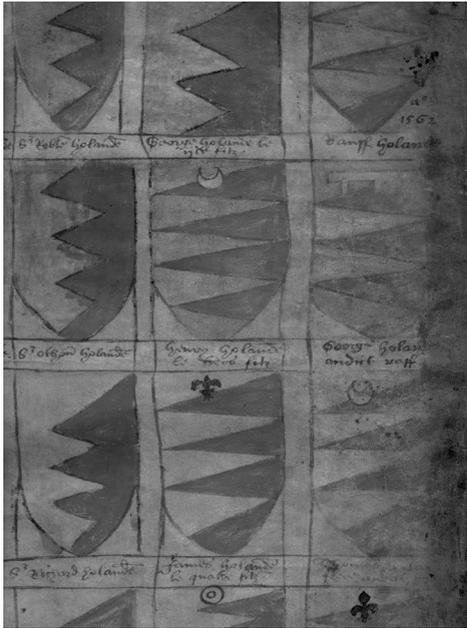


Figure 1: CA Ms William Jenyns' Ordinary, fo 1r (detail), showing arms of various members of the Holland family differenced with small charges and dated 1562.

The next development which took place was a very obvious and logical refinement of established practice. Following the creation of the College of Arms, Garter King of Arms is thought to have taken six commonly used cadency marks and attached each mark to a particular son. Tradition names Garter Writhe as the originator, but there were two Garter Writhe's, father and son. The former reigned from the time of the College's inception, but there is evidence that the distinction could not have been made so early.

During the sixteenth century WJO came into the possession of a Lincolnshire family by the name of Holland, and in 1562 Thomas Holland had his own family inserted on one of the blank pages (**Figure 1**). His younger brother is given a crescent, but the third brother bears a fleur-de-lys, and the fourth an annulet, whilst of his two grandsons the elder has a crescent and the younger a fleur-de-lys. The year 1562 has a particular significance because it saw the publication of Gerard Legh's *Accedens of Armory*, the book which first laid down the complete set of nine cadency marks with which we are now familiar (**Figure 2**). The cadency section is introduced with the following words: 'I proceed to tell you of nine sundry differences of brethren, whereof I warn you to give good heed.'²¹

Leigh was a lawyer, not a herald, but it is scarcely conceivable that he would not have been in communication with the heralds of the day on a matter of such evident importance. It seems that there was official sanction for the first six marks, but that Leigh perhaps exceeded his authority in devising three additional ones.²² John

²¹ Gerard Legh, *Accedens of Armory* (London 1562), fo 183; fo. 107 in the edn. of 1568.

²² Seventh son: rose; eighth son: cross moline; ninth son: double quatrefoil. The Scots later added a tenth mark, the anchor, between the cross and the quatrefoil.

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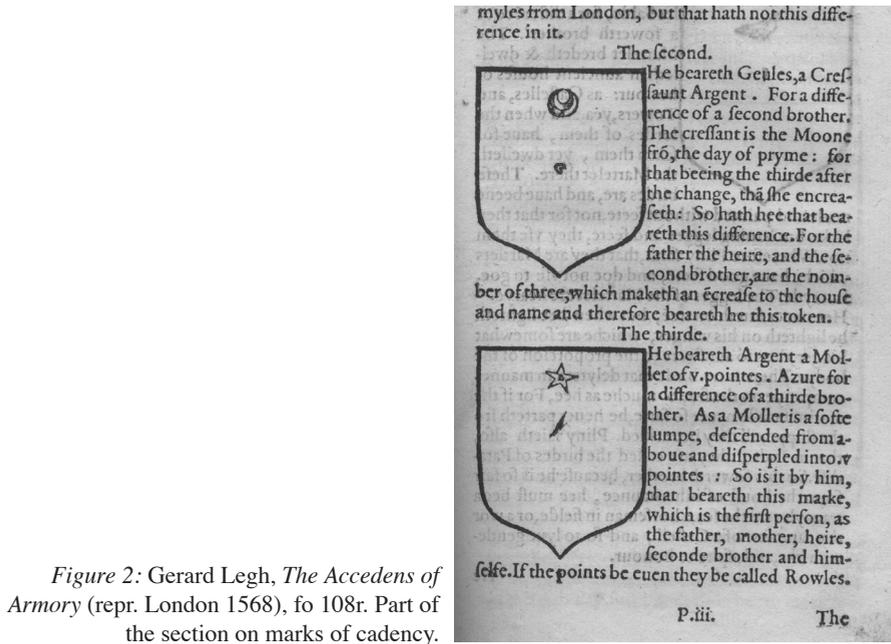


Figure 2: Gerard Legh, *The Accedens of Armory* (repr. London 1568), fo 108r. Part of the section on marks of cadency.

Boswell in his book *The Workes of Armorie* published in 1572 stated that ‘there are six sundry differences of arms for brethren. If there be more than six the assignment of further differences appertains to kings of arms.’²³ John Guillim, appointed Rouge Croix Pursuivant in 1613, informs us in his *Display of Heraldrie* published in 1611, that it was Gerard Legh who added the other three.²⁴

Clearly the six marks were instituted some time before 1562, but the question is when? Such regulation would have become necessary when the heralds began their regular visitations in the 1530s. It is a reasonable assumption that Garter Writhe (later Wriothesley) junior, who succeeded his father in 1505 and died in 1534, oversaw their establishment. Ultimately Legh’s scheme became the accepted orthodoxy, despite some opposition, for example from William Wyrley (appointed Rouge Croix Pursuivant in 1604) who in his *True Use of Armorie* of 1592 wrote that he speaks out ‘against these ordinary differences, knowing them to be but new inventions.’²⁵

The Holland family shields added to WJO demonstrate that the authority of the visitations had not by 1562 brought the new system into universal use; knowledge about the scheme does not seem to have been widely disseminated until the later Elizabethan publications on heraldry.

The unsatisfactory idea of placing cadency mark on cadency mark had already been devised by 1611, when Guillim declared himself not to be in favour of it. We have an example of its use from that very period in the funeral certificate of Sir

²³ John Boswell, *The Workes of Armorie* (London 1572), fo 10v.

²⁴ John Guillim, *A Display of Heraldrie* (London 1611), pp. 450-6.

²⁵ William Wyrley, *The True Use of Armorie* (London 1592), pp. 13f.

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William Cockayne who died in 1626.²⁶ As a third-generation second son he had three crescents of different colours, all superimposed. This became known as the English system of cadency, but it has never had unequivocal official support. William Camden, who was Clarenceux in the time of Guillim, was of the opinion that for the younger sons of younger sons the assigning of differences should be at the discretion of the King of Arms of the province.²⁷ The same view was held by Sir William Dugdale, who was Garter from 1677 to 1686; instructions to this effect given by Sir Henry St George, Clarenceux, to the heralds during their visitations survive from 1681.²⁸ Despite holding these views, Dugdale's own book on cadency included a plate illustrating the use of mark on mark.²⁹

In Scotland, where all cadets are still required to register their arms, the robust but flexible system which found favour with Camden and Dugdale is still maintained. The end of the visitations in England and Wales has resulted in some erosion of the ability of the College of Arms to enforce the differencing of arms. The decision to employ the so-called English system in any given case is now entirely at the discretion of the kings of arms.³⁰

²⁶ Cited in Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (1925 edn.), p. 344.

²⁷ Sir William Dugdale, *The Antient Usage in bearing such Ensigns of Honour As are commonly call'd Arms* (Oxford 1682), p. 25.

²⁸ A. R. Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1939), Appendix E, p. 148.

²⁹ Dugdale, *op. cit.*, plate opposite p. 36.

³⁰ This article is based on the text of a lecture delivered to the Heraldry Society on 21 November 2007.