

THE SCHOOL ARMS : A NOTE

For more than fifty years the Grammar School has used the familiar device of two shields surmounted by a crown : yet few people know its significance, and no one seems to know its origin or correct form. Three versions can be seen in the Hall alone (and many others elsewhere), all different in detail, but all agreeing in the three essential features : a crown, a shield with a swan, and a shield with a chevron.

The crown presents no difficulties ; it is a Royal crown, a shape familiar from official documents, in gold and silver, containing the red cap of state, and refers to the School's status under the Royal Charter of 1562.

For the original of the shield bearing a swan, we have to look no further than the Borough of Wycombe, whose arms are :

Black : a silver swan standing on a green mound, its wings folded, and a ducal coronet and a chain, both gold, round its neck.

The School has followed this fairly closely, except for occasional variations in colour. Very frequently, however, the swan is shown with its wings outspread, and no mound to stand on. This is a simple confusion with the arms of Buckingham.

As the first shield refers to Wycombe, and the crown to the Royal Charter, we may expect the second shield to refer to Sir Edmund Peckham, the first founder, whose arms were :

Black : a golden chevron between three silver crosses ' bottony fitchy,' that is, the three arms developing into three buds each, something like clover leaves, and the foot pointed.

This shield has suffered more than the other, because no one knew its origin. It is very commonly seen as a light blue shield with a red chevron, and plain crosses, shamrocks or daggers have replaced the ornamental crosses. But there is no doubt that Peckham's arms are intended. There is no one else who had so much to do with the founding the School, and whose arms might be expected to stand here : and in spite of the differences, the resemblance of the common pattern to Peckham's arms is too great to be explained by coincidence.

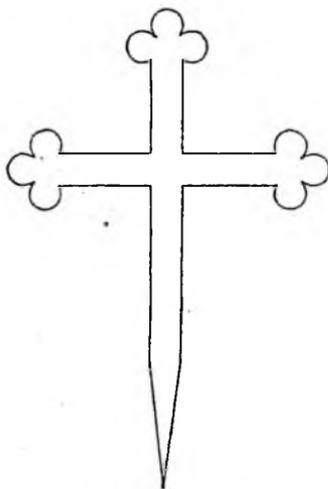
These three features were combined at some time before the beginning of this century, when Mr. G. W. Arnison found the arms in their present state. Unfortunately, there seems to be no record of their adoption, or their detailed design, and we must guess at their date. It has been suggested that they may date from the latter half of the nineteenth century, when schools were beginning to adopt "colours" and "badges." Negative evidence to support this date comes from the old Grammar School building in Easton Street,

where no examples of the arms are found, though we might expect to find them, if they had been in use at the time it was built. Assuming this date to be correct, then, the design belongs to a period that is notorious for its heraldic laxity, and although the inventor had Peckham's arms in mind, he may have changed them through ignorance, or even deliberately. He may perhaps have disliked black, or wished to incorporate the School "colours." Alternatively, his immediate successors may be guilty.

In my opinion, the change are errors, not deliberate, and the School might well have corrected them. That is one problem. The other is the use of deliberately changed versions of the arms by clubs associated with the School. The School may use the arms of Wycombe and Peckham, so long as it treats them with due respect: but that gives no one the right to design and use variations of them, whether by making a difference in the colours, or by mangling them together on one shield. And all these variations break some rule of Heraldry! If we are going to use the devices of Heraldry, and recognised coats of arms, we must abide by the rules of Heraldry, and that means being willing to correct past mistakes. But at any rate let us settle these problems—and settle them soon.

Germany, May, 1954.

B. C. PEATEY (1942-49).



A CROSS BOTTONY FITCHY