

# SUTTON COLDFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL'S COAT OF ARMS - 1935

Roy Billingham

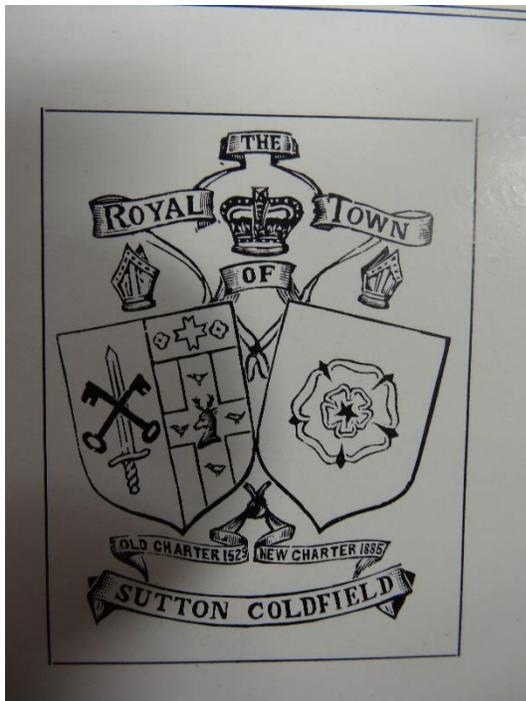


The photograph above shows a recently completed woodcarving of the coat-of-arms of the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield by Roy Billingham, a member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group. Roy studies woodcarving under Master Carver, Michael Painter, at his woodcarving studio in Austrey, North Warwickshire.

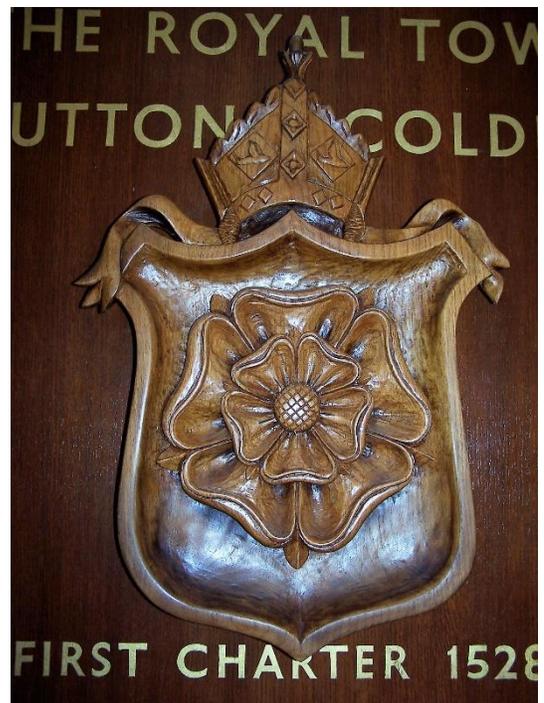
The coat of arms was an official grant by the Garter Principal King of Arms of the College of Arms to the Borough Council of Sutton Coldfield on May 15, 1935. Because there were various differences and irregularities in previous coats of arms used in the district, it was felt by the Borough Council that it would be advantageous to regularize the design officially, and in the necessary research work a leading part was taken by Mr. E.G. Harcourt of Four Oaks, the Town Clerk (Mr. R.A. Reay-Nadin), and members of the Old Veseyan Association.

The shield is composed of the arms of the Harman family (Bishop Vesey's family), comprising Argent (silver) on a Cross Sable (black) with a stag's head couped between four Doves of the field (sometimes referred to as martlets or martins) with the addition in the first quarter of a mitre proper. The Vert (green) upper division, known as a "chief", on which there are two stags courant Or (gold), represents Sutton Park. Arising out of a Mural Coronet Or in the crest is a demi Stag proper supporting between its legs two keys wards upwards and outwards in a saltire Gold and Sword erect proper representing the See of Exeter (Vesey's former bishopric). The helmet is placed to support the crest, and the mantling is in gold and red, the livery colours of the Town. There are Tudor supporters (the greyhound and dragon) in allusion to Henry VIII's Charter. These are differenced with mural collars (civic emblems) from which depend small shields charged with Tudor roses. The green mound on which the supporters rest is a further allusion to Sutton Park.

Prior to the granting of these coat of arms, the Borough Council used several designs, four of which are shown below:

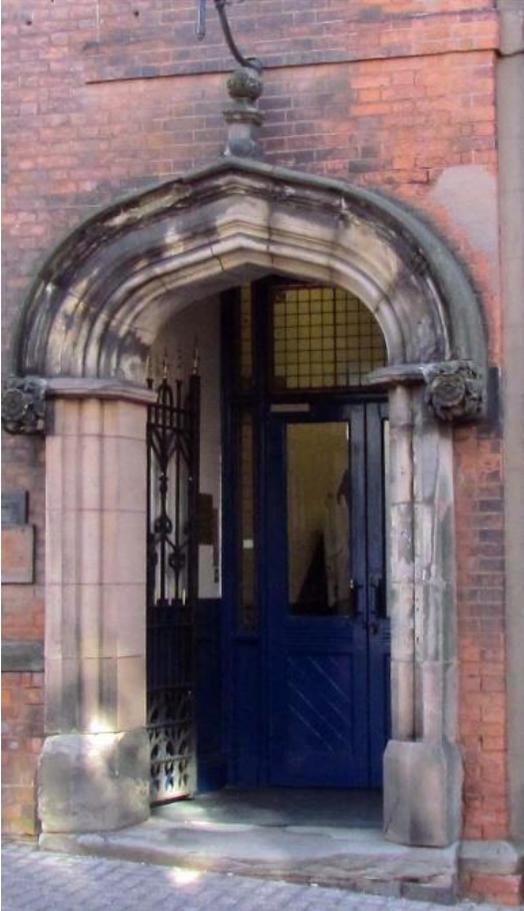


Coat-of-arms used on an 1886 official programme



Coat-of-arms in Sutton Coldfield's first Town Hall in Mill Street.

(Photograph courtesy of Keith Jordan)



**Tudor Rose bosses on either side of the archway to the main entrance of the first Town Hall in Mill Street, now known as the Masonic Hall.**



**Coat-of-arms as centrepiece on the balcony of the former Town Hall in King Edward Square. Although badly eroded, one can still make out the bishop's mitre surmounting the shield on which at the top would have been two Tudor Roses either side of a cross, and below are the cross keys and sword depicting the See of Exeter in the left half and the Harman family arms in the right half.**

## Other related woodcarvings by Roy Billingham:



I began woodcarving in 2004 and this was my first woodcarving project, completed in 2005. At that time the SCLHRG was a member of the Birmingham & District Local History Association, now defunct, but unlike most of the other ninety-six affiliated local history groups the SCLHRG did not have its own logo. I took the opportunity to design and carve this piece and the design was later adopted by the SCLHRG and appears on our letterheads.

The design is quite simple incorporating as its central theme upon a shield the Tudor Rose which from the days of Henry VIII's Charter was the basis of the seal of the Corporation of Sutton Coldfield up to 1886. It is surmounted by a bishop's mitre, symbolizing Bishop Vesey, and is supported by a banner upon which is carved the name of the group. The limewood carvings are mounted on an oak base.



In 2004, the bi-centenary of the death of Dr. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), the renowned scientist and theologian, I was researching his life from the time of his arrival in Birmingham to his eventual settlement in Pennsylvania in 1794 at Northumberland.

In 1780 he and his family moved from Calne in Wiltshire to "Fair Hill", a Georgian residence in Sparkbrook, then a part of Edgbaston. He soon became an active member of the Lunar Society.

For my second woodcarving project I chose to carve this bust of Priestley in limewood which I completed in 2007. Although there were numerous drawings and a few paintings of Priestley, there was no bust of the man. Several accurate profiles of Priestley exist, mainly thanks to the 18thC shadowgraph and the work of his great friends, Josiah Wedgwood and Matthew Boulton, but his features necessitated careful research to determine a facial likeness. In 2009 this carving went on

temporary loan to Soho House Lunar Gallery for the duration of the exhibition, “Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the world desires” in Birmingham’s Gas Hall.

The information required to enable me to carve the coat-of-arms was sourced from the Sutton Coldfield Reference Library. I also used internet sources to gather photographs of other examples of the Borough of Sutton Coldfield arms. Around the town there are still existing examples such as the entrance to Vesey Gardens and the gates of the Sutton Coldfield Crematorium in Tamworth Road.



(Photograph by courtesy of Keith Jordan)

The old Sutton Coldfield Mayoral chair that was housed in the former Council Chamber had a carving of the coat-of-arms on the back of the chair. Unfortunately, the carving was not of a very high quality and one wonders why it was ever accepted by the Council of the day. The greyhound supporter could not possibly be described as svelte, appearing to be too well fed and looks more like a horse. The proportions of the other supporter, the red dragon, likewise, are not very well represented.

While I was carrying out research into Herringshaw Avenue in Sutton Park, I was referred to an illuminated book which is held in the stacks at Sutton Coldfield Reference Library and contains the names of all the donors to this project for planting an avenue of Spanish Chestnut trees by the Sutton Coldfield Corporation in 1970 in celebration of the year 2000. It was hoped that this avenue of trees, which were planted either side of the Roman Icknield Street at its southern end, would have reached splendid maturity in the ensuing period of thirty years. However, very few of the trees originally planted have survived.



The project was paid for by monies raised by public subscription. At the front of the illuminated book I discovered this rather impressive interpretation of the coat-of-arms.

## The City of Birmingham Coat of Arms, 1977

The Borough of the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield became part of the City of Birmingham in 1974 and a new grant of arms was thought necessary. The arms granted in 1977 reflect not only the Arms of the former Lords of the Manor (the de Berminghams) but also of Henry VIII and Sutton Coldfield.

The Tudor Rose on the mural crown alludes to Henry VIII who granted Sutton Coldfield a charter in 1528. The Mitre on the shield is a reference to John Harman, alias Vesey, Bishop of Exeter, who was born in Sutton Coldfield.



### Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Sue Moreton of the Sutton Coldfield Reference Library for her assistance in providing me with the necessary information to enable me to undertake the carving of the Sutton Coldfield coat of arms and for access to the file containing the official correspondence from the College of Arms and relevant information to the City of Birmingham coat of arms.