

Is That a Bicycle Tire on the Crest?
The evolution of an emblazon

by
David B. Appleton

In doing some research for a presentation some while back, I noticed a phenomenon that was new to me. (Or, at the very least, it was something that I had not noticed before.) In reviewing a number of different emblazons of the coat of arms and crest of an American family over a period of some decades, one component in depictions of the crest had changed, from a reasonably identifiable element to become something that was unidentifiable, bearing nearly no resemblance whatsoever to what had been originally intended.

An affectation seen in some drawings of coats of arms: “Hanging” the shield (the coat of arms) from the crest or, for example, a tree, by its gige (sometimes spelled guige), “The leather strap by which the shield of a knight was slung across the shoulder, or across the neck and shoulder.”¹ An example of this is this bookplate of the Rev. D. B. Thompson, where the shield is hung by its gige from a branch of a tree. (Fig. 1)

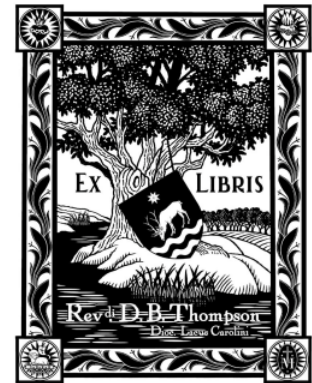


Figure 1

You also see a coat of arms hung by its gige from a peg or some other item, as in these carved stone coats of arms from Florence, Italy: the first on the Cathedral there; the second on the exterior of the Santa Maria Novella church. (Figs. 2 and 3) Both clearly show the gige, with its buckle, looped over pegs: one ending in a lion's face, the other plain.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Yet another rendition (also on Santa Maria Novella) shows the shield hanging from a peg, but the gige is less identifiable as such, consisting as it does of a strap (or two straps) without showing the buckle. (Fig. 4)

In all of these examples, it is clearly the shield of the arms which is being hung from the gige.

¹ *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, 1913, C. & G. Merriam Co., <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Gige>

But now we come to the arms and crest of the Winslow family here in what became the United States of America. Here, the intent was pretty clearly to have the shield hanging on its gige from the crest, the stump of a tree sprouting branches.² Unfortunately, not only did early renditions fall short of the mark, they also led to an evolution of emblazonments which grew progressively farther from that original intent (*i.e.*, to hang the shield from the stump in the crest by its gige).

Even early on, both blazon and emblazons of the arms and crest separate the gige from the shield entirely, having it looping around the crest, but cut off by the torse, not extending down to the shield. For example:

“On a stump with growing twigs, a strap with buckle.” Grave slab of Josiah Winslow (d. 1680), his wife Penelope (d. 1703, and their son Isaac (d. 1738). (Bolton, p. 183) (Fig. 5) We find a similar depiction in the illustration of the arms of Chauncey Rose Winslow in Matthews (p. 13a) (Fig. 6), and in this colored painting found on the website of the Winslow Heritage Society (Fig. 7). In all of these depictions, the gige is still shown as a strap and buckle; it is just no longer attached in any way to the shield.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Then the identification as a strap and buckle disappears, and the gige becomes an arch only. (Fig. 8, from the *Genealogy of Edward Winslow*)



Figure 7



Figure 8

² The motto, *Deceptae flores* or *Decoptus floreo* is said to have as its meaning “Truth crushed to earth shall rise again”. The Latin-to-English translators I tried do not support this meaning.

The next rendition has what is still a strap and buckle, but removes it completely from any even potential connection to the shield by having it completely encircle the crest. We find this in the blazon from Crozier (p. 139): *A stump of a tree with branches proper encircled with a strap and buckle.* Renditions of this version (Figs. 9 and 10) demonstrate quite clearly

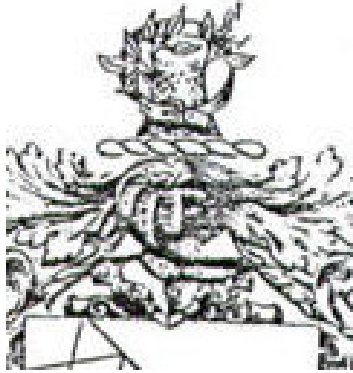


Figure 9



Figure 10

In its next phase, the gige becomes an annulet encircling the stump. (Figs. 11 and 12) Bolton (p. 183) blazons this as: *On a sprouting stump an annulet sable.*



Figure 11



Figure 12

Finally, the “annulet” is then further transformed to become what has been described as a “donut” (Fig. 13, from stonecarver.com) or a “bicycle tire inner tube” which has been “ring-tossed” onto and around the crest (Fig. 14, from Matthews, p. 40b.).



Figure 13



Figure 14

Conclusion

So, there you have it. The transformation of a gige, the strap holding a shield and from which a shield is hung, to a donut or bicycle tire, all because the artists (and the people who later blazoned their depictions) lost the connection from the physical strap for hanging an actual shield to “something” on the drawn or carved rendition of a crest.

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The page of depictions of the Winslow coat of arms at http://www.winslowtree.com/earlier_coa.htm notes: "Information provided by" Blaine F. Winslow, from his book *Hosmer Hyde Winslow: his ancestors and descendants*, 1980, 204 pp., privately published