

Whence the Winslow Motto? Or: A Study and Correction of the Winslow Coat of Arms
by
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Following the article by David regarding the evolution of depictions of the crest used with the Winslow coat of arms published in the August 2020 newsletter (Vol. 7, No. 3) of the Winslow Heritage Society, the authors collaborated on producing a new, more accurate, rendition of the coat of arms of the Winslow family.

In the process of that collaboration, elements of the design were discussed. The study of the Winslow Coat of Arms included the type of tree depicted on the **Crest**, position of the **Helmet**, (which indicates that the bearer was a gentleman,) decorative **Mantling** on the sides, designated colors charged for the **Shield**, color and position of the diamond-shaped lozenges on the diagonal **Bend** on the shield. Ruth drew in changes as the design developed and according to David's knowledge of heraldic descriptions.

Several questions arose about the motto found with the coat of arms.

A brief chronology of the motto and its varied spellings and wordings can be summarized as follows:

17th and 18th Centuries: No motto is found on either the Josiah Winslow (Figure 1) or the John Winslow tombs in Massachusetts. (This last is also confirmed in the *Heraldic Journal*, vol. 2, p. 21, 1866)

1801: The motto, *Decoptus Florio*, is found on a very early 19th Century silver cider jug made for the Isaac and Margaret (Blanchard) Winslow. (Figure 2) Isaac Winslow was descended from John and Mary (Chilton) Winslow, and also from Edward Winslow, the famous Boston silversmith of the late 17th and early 18th Centuries.



Figure 1



Figure 2

1877: The motto, *Decoptus Floreo*, *Decoptus Florio*, *Decaptus floreo*, and *Decarptus Floreo* (cited as an old form), are all mentioned in the book by the Holtons, *Winslow Memorial*. (Figure 3) The meaning given for the motto is “**Truth crushed to earth shall rise again.**”

1901: The motto, *Decoptus Floreo*, is cited in a Trademark registered by Winslow, Rand & Watson, purveyors of tea and coffee, headquartered at 197-199 State St. in Boston, Massachusetts, on June 11, 1901, as found in the U.S. Patent Office Gazette, p. 2290. (Figure 4)

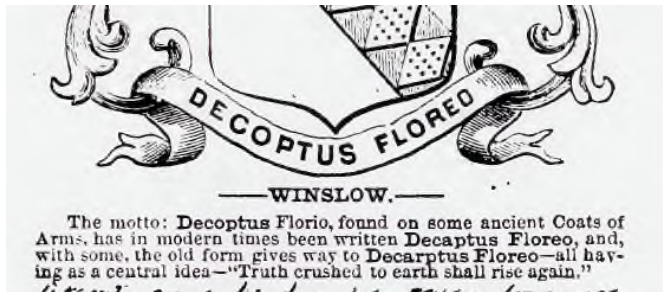


Figure 3

86,577. TEA AND COFFEE. WINSLOW, RAND & WATSON, Boston, Mass. Filed May 14, 1901.



Essential features.—A shield bearing a dexter bend upon which a series of lozenges are displayed, a helmet and crest surrounding the shield, the motto “DECOPTUS FLOREO,” and an ornamental scroll partly surrounding the shield. Used since April 1, 1901.

Figure 4

1907: The motto is given as *Decarptus Floreo* in Matthews’ *American Armory and Blue Book*, p. 13a, but no image is given there.

1909: The motto *Deceptae Flores* is found in Smith’s *Colonial Families of America*. (Figure 5)

1915: The motto is given as *Decapti et Floremus* in Bryant’s *Genealogy of Edward Winslow*. (Figure 6)



Figure 5



Figure 6

1923: The motto reverts back to *Decoptus Floreo* in Matthews' *American Armory and Blue Book*, p. 40b, but with no image.

1927: And finally, the motto, *Decoptus Floreo*, is cited in Bolton's *American Armory and Blue Book*, p. 183, as found on notepaper of "Mrs, Geo. S. Winslow, 27 Chestnut St., Boston." Here, also there is no image shown.

None of these variations of the motto, or anything like them, appear in Fairbairn's *Crests*.

None of the various iterations of the motto could be translated from the Latin using any of the on-line Latin-to-English translators. That issue was not helped by the inability to "reverse translate" as neither **Truth** (Latin *veritas*) nor **Earth** (*terra*) appear in the motto, so "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again" did not take us to anything close to the motto as it has been used for over two hundred years.

In an effort to go further, Ruth contacted Denis Feeney, a Latinist who is a professor at Princeton University, to enlist his help in searching for the actual translation of the original motto. He replied:

"DECAPTUS isn't a Latin word, and nor is DECARPTUS. But I think this last word is on the right track; the correct form would be DECERPTUS, from *decerpo*, to pluck/snip off. So it would be 'Although plucked off [the family stem] I flourish'. ... [I]n light of the image of the 'family tree' on the coat of arms I think the likeliest form would be DECERPTUS."

In further correspondence, Professor Feeney confirmed that the correct Latin for the motto is *Decerptus Floreo*, with a translation of either "Although plucked off, I flourish" or "Although cut off, I flourish."

How *decerptus* could have become *decoptus* (the most commonly seen form) seems well within the realm of probability that someone wrote it down correctly, as *decerptus floreo*, and that someone else, not knowing Latin and trying to read someone else's handwriting, could have mistaken the "er" in *decerptus* for an "o", transforming it to *decoptus*. And it also would not be hard to mistake the "e" in the middle for an "a", turning *decerptus* into *decarptus*.

It is my (David's) suspicion that both of the early 20th Century versions, *Deceptae Flores* and *Decapti et Floremus* are actually attempts to reverse-translate the meaning of the motto back into Latin while keeping it somewhat close to the earlier versions.

In any case, we believe we have finally solved an historical mystery meaningful mostly to Winslow family descendants: What is the correct form of the Winslow motto, and what does it actually mean? The answer: *Decerptus floreo* (**Although cut off, I flourish**), something truly applicable to Winslow family descendants here in America, "cut off" from the main stem of the family in England, but flourishing on these shores. New growth on the old oak stump depicted in the crest at the top of the Winslow arms reveals the Winslow family flourishing in America.