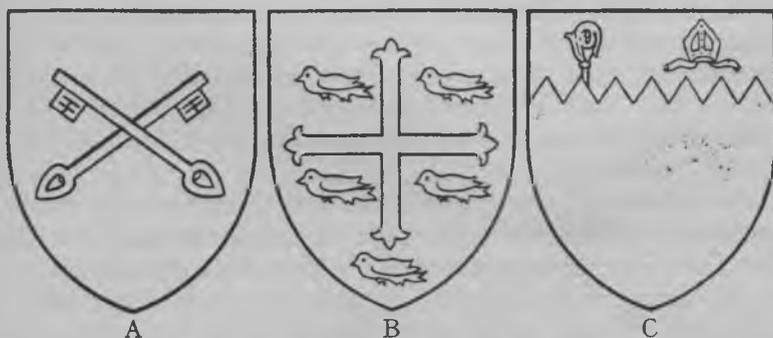


AMPLEFORTH ARMS

READERS of *The Times* with an interest in Ampleforth will, most of them, have been taken somewhat aback when they opened their paper on January 5 and found in a prominent place on the principal page the heading: "Ampleforth Arms." The letter printed beneath it from the Rev. H. F. Westlake, of Westminster Abbey, questioning the correctness of the Herald's recent action in our regard, has revived the interest of many in the story and status of the Ampleforth coat of arms; and it seems that the time has come for as simple a statement as possible of the real facts of the case.

In the first place it is important to realise that to speak of "*the Westminster Arms*," as if Westminster bore one definite unchanging coat from the institution of coat-armour down to the dissolution of the monasteries, is misleading. The ecclesiastical heraldry of the Middle Ages is famous for its complexity and uncertainty; and Westminster, like many other houses, seems to have made use at different times and in varying ways of at least three armorial charges. The evidence must be taken mainly from seals and sepulchres, where these charges appear, according to medieval custom, each on a separate shield; the marshalling of them into one coat is a later development.



These charges are: (A) On a red ground, two cross keys. (B) On a blue ground a cross surrounded by five martlets. (C) A blue ground with the upper part, or "chief," gold, marked off by a zig-zag line; on this chief two small charges in red, the upper part of a crozier and a mitre. These descrip-

The Ampleforth Journal

tions, clumsy through their avoidance of technical terms, may serve to carry with me some who have never interested themselves in the language of heraldry. The first charge (A) is plainly to be connected with St Peter, to whom the monastery was dedicated; the second (B) is the well-known coat invented for and attributed to St Edward the Confessor, in whose days there was of course no such thing as coat-armour. Of the third (C) there is no such definite ascription to be made.

All of these may be found on the seals of ancient Westminster that are preserved in the British Museum; or they may be examined with less trouble in Westminster Abbey itself on the tomb of Abbot Fascet (1498-1500), where since the recent removal of dust and varnish even the original colours are for the most part vivid and distinct. Now of these coats two (A and C) would seem to be associated uniquely with Westminster. The seventeenth century antiquaries in dealing with the arms of Westminster wavered between coat C and a later, definitely Tudor marshalling, with B for the main charge, and a new chief with France and England quarterly between two roses—a coat that has come down to the Westminster of to-day. On the other hand the British Museum expert who drew up the first volume of the Catalogue of Seals, Mr W. de G. Birch, regards coat A (the cross keys) as standing predominantly for Westminster; and it is remarkable that two other great Benedictine houses bearing arms most closely resembling coat A are clearly “differenced,” Gloucester having the cross keys on a blue ground, and Peterborough, with the keys and the red ground, having three “crosslets fitchy” added.

At any rate it is worthy of note that all three charges are to be found in the arms on the cover of this JOURNAL, if we allow for the disappearance from C of the crozier and mitre in chief. So marshalled, there is contemporary evidence (in the Wriothesley MSS at Clumber House, Notts) that the coat was borne by the only bishop of the see that was established to cover the disappearance of the great abbey on its first surrender, Thomas Thirleby (1540-1550); and it is difficult to see what other marshalling could better represent the armorial traditions of Westminster.

Ampleforth Arms

Of the link between Westminster and Ampleforth it is hard not to say either too much or too little. To deal with the historical question adequately would need many pages, of which a summary would be like all summaries, bald and unimpressive. The fact is simply this, that Dom Sigebert Buckley, the last survivor of the Westminster community, aggregated to his ancient house and congregation two young Benedictine priests, who brought the line to Dieulouard in Lorraine where an English monastery was just coming into being. So much was known even to the Protestant antiquaries of the seventeenth century, and is to be found recorded in their own words. Dieulouard was of course driven back to England by the Revolution, and settled at Ampleforth; and it remains only to say that all this has never been impugned either by friend or foe, and that Mr. Westlake himself in the foreword of his very attractive study of "Westminster Abbey, 1464-1532," makes mention of "one of Feckenham's monks," who "lived to pass on the lighted torch of the Benedictine succession."

It was not then for reassurance or corroboration that the Ampleforth conventus had recourse to the Heralds, nor was it for the enforcement of rights strained to their full extent. Historically Ampleforth had nothing to gain or lose: the facts could not be altered. But it seemed desirable that the armorial position should be regularised, so far as might be consistent with decent consideration for other bodies already bearing arms in the same line of descent. As luck would have it, the coat of arms outlined on the cover of this JOURNAL the coat of which I have tried to trace the origin and development in the early part of this article, was available, as no claim was ever laid to it, from the time of the Reformation down to the close of the last "Visitation" made by the Heralds in the time of James II; and previously, though in use, as we have seen, it was never recorded. The Heralds were therefore free to issue it, according to their constant practice in dealing with individuals or bodies, Protestant or Catholic, great or small, who could show just cause; and this is why the arms of Ampleforth are *Per fesse dancetté Or and Azure a Chief per pale Gules and of the second charged on the dexter with two keys in saltire Or and Argent and on the sinister with a Cross Flory between five Martlets of the first.* N.F.H.