



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND**
A U S T R A L I A

The University of Queensland's Coat of Arms: Historical Aspects

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Introduction

The University of Queensland's coat of arms is an instantly recognizable symbol of the University's corporate identity. Granted to the University in 1912, it has undergone a number of cosmetic revisions and changes, but the motto and essential design have remained constant.

The origins, significance and evolution of the coat of arms are not examined in detail in the published histories of The University of Queensland. This report was commissioned by the Fryer Library to address this oversight, and to thus document the heraldic history of the University using archival and unpublished sources.

'The shorthand of history'

Heraldry is the practice of creating, managing and studying coats of arms, which are also referred to as 'armorial bearings' or simply 'arms'.¹ Heraldry in some form has been practiced since at least the twelfth century, though its exact origins remain obscure. The traditional argument is that the identity of individual knights was obscured by their full-body armour. Consequently, coats of arms were created and displayed in a prominent place (usually a shield or banner) to identify the knight. As the practice was taken up, rules and institutions governing the use of coats of arms evolved. Heralds, responsible for the organisation of tournaments, took on the role of experts in the identification of coats of arms. Important families and, by the fifteenth century, corporations, increasingly employed coats of arms, adding to the social value of armorial bearings. Because of its genealogical significance, Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, a well-known writer on the subject, described heraldry as 'the shorthand of history'.

There are heraldic rules that determine the granting of arms and their composition. In 1912, it was generally perceived that the most appropriate fonts for a grant of arms for an Australian university were the English Kings of Arms.² This path to a grant of arms continues to be open to Australians to this day, as seen in the example of St Johns

¹ 'Armorial bearings' can apply to other designs such as banners, seals and so on. Some historical sources (such as those used in this report) also refer to armorial bearings as 'armorial ensigns'. Unless directly quoted from a contemporary source, 'armorial bearings', 'arms' and 'coats of arms' are used in this report.

² The Kings of Arms are members of the Royal Household. There are three in total: Garter King of Arms, Clarenceux King of Arms and Norroy and Ulster King of Arms (formerly simply Norroy King of Arms).

College, University of Queensland, and the procedure is the same as it was in 1912 To receive a grant of arms from the English Kings of Arms, one must first petition the Earl Marshal of England. If the petition (also known as a ‘memorial’) is approved, the Earl Marshal then issues a ‘warrant’ to the Kings of Arms, at which stage the design of the coat of arms begins. Though the petitioner has some input to the eventual design, the Kings of Arms are ultimately responsible for the finished product, thus ensuring each armorial bearing is unique. When completed, the coat of arms and its technical description (referred to as the ‘blazon’) are recorded in ‘Letters Patent’. The blazon is the most important element of the Letters Patent. It lists the various components of the arms and their organisation, in technical language, so that the arms can be distinguished from other armorial bearings. The Letters Patent are then registered with the College of Arms.³

A coat of arms consists of several constituent parts. The distinguishing symbols (‘charges’) of a family or corporation are displayed on the ‘shield’. The ‘rule of tincture’ stipulates that a colour cannot overlay another colour, or metal over metal.⁴ The ‘crest’ comprises images that sit atop the shield, resembling the crest once worn on a knight’s helmet. The ‘supporters’ are the creatures, sometimes fantastic, that ‘support’ the shield. The ‘motto’ usually completes the arms and is typically displayed below the shield. In English heraldry, while the motto may appear in the Letters Patent, it does not actually form part of the grant, and can be changed at will.

The University of Queensland’s coat of arms consists of a shield and motto. It does not have a crest or supporters. The blazon is: ‘Or, a Cross Patee azure surmounted by an open Book proper’. ‘Or’ is the heraldic term for gold (metal) and ‘azure’ means ‘blue’ (colour), therefore satisfying the heraldic requirement that only metal and colour can be combined. (If the coat of arms is reproduced in black and white, the colour and metal can be represented by specific patterns, for example Or (gold) by dots and Azure (blue) by horizontal lines.) The two ‘charges’ are the ‘Cross Patee’ and the ‘open Book proper’. The ‘Cross Patee’ is a particular kind of cross, often called the Maltese cross, since it was used as an identifying symbol by the Knights of Malta. Crosses are common heraldic charges. The ‘open Book proper’⁵, signifying knowledge and learning, is commonly associated with the coats of arms of universities. The motto, *Scientia ac Labore*, is generally translated as ‘by means of knowledge and hard work’.

‘A Practical and Progressive University’⁶

The origin of the coat of arms of the University of Queensland is closely associated with the establishment of the university and contemporary debate over its purpose.

³ Another source of grants of arms is the Lyon King of Arms, based in Edinburgh. In the same year as the University’s grant, Emmanuel College received a grant of arms from this source. Lord Lyon generally makes grants to individuals and institutions with Scottish connections.

⁴ There are only two ‘metals’ in heraldry: gold and silver (often represented as yellow and white), and five colours: azure, gules, purpure, sable and vert. Because ‘metals’ tend to possess a lighter tincture and colours a darker one, metal cannot be placed on metal or colour on colour. This rule reflects the early use of armorial bearings as a form of identification, especially from a distance.

⁵ “Proper” in heraldic terms means “in its proper colours”. This can sometimes lead to a little variation in artistic interpretation.

⁶ Quoted in Malcolm I. Thomis, *A Place of Light and Learning: The University of Queensland’s First Seventy-five Years*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1985, p. 13.

Calls for a university in Queensland began as early as the 1870s. There was, however, some resistance to the idea. Queensland at this time was a largely rural and decentralized society, and practical skills, rather than intellectual pursuits, were considered paramount. The limited government expenditure in this period was directed toward key areas such as land development, ports and railways, and elementary (rather than higher) education.

Debate over the creation of a university, where it existed at all, generally centred on the subjects to be taught. Practical subjects of relevance to the economy, to some extent already covered by other educational facilities such as Technical Colleges, were favoured in business and political circles. Others advocated more traditional subjects in the 'Liberal Arts' as taught at universities in Britain and Europe, the presence of which, it was argued, would confer a mark of civilization on Queensland society.⁷ The debate went through various phases, and numerous plans were proposed and discussed, long before concrete action was taken. As University historian Malcolm Thomis points out, "The pursuit of ideas would inevitably take second place to that struggle to conquer the environment and make the land yield up its treasures, which was the central theme of the state's growth in the nineteenth century".⁸

Despite the prolonged debate, advocates for a university continued to lobby the Colonial (and later, State) Government and the public at large. By 1906 a University Movement had been created and support for the establishment of a university was at its highest peak in over thirty years.⁹ A University Bill was introduced into the Queensland Parliament in November 1909 and was passed. A Senate was created and a site for the university – the Government House Domain, located next to the Botanical Gardens – was selected. Sir William MacGregor, recently appointed governor of Queensland, was nominated as the Chairman and Chancellor of the first Senate of the University.

The Act allowed for the establishment of three faculties: arts, science and engineering, indicating that the debate over the subjects to be taught at the University had reached some compromise. In his speech at the official inauguration of the University on the 10th December, 1909, the Premier of Queensland, W. Kidston said:

I may express the hope that the University of Queensland will provide for the youth of Queensland the highest culture and the best University training that can be got...At the same time I would not have it forgotten that Queensland is a hive of working bees, and that all our educational institutions, from Kindergarten to University, should keep that fact in view. There is this difference between the youngest University in the Empire and the oldest: Oxford was established by a King; the University of Queensland is established by the people.¹⁰

This neatly summed up the debate leading to the establishment of the University, and the relatively egalitarian and pragmatic nature of both the University and the community it was intended to benefit.

⁷ For further details see, in particular, Thomis, *A Place of Light and Learning*, pp. 5-7.

⁸ Thomis, *A Place of Light and Learning*, pp. 4-5.

⁹ Thomis, *A Place of Light and Learning*, p. 15.

¹⁰ *The Inauguration of the University of Queensland on Queensland's Jubilee Day, 10th December, 1909*, Brisbane, Cumming, Government Printer, 1909, p. 7.

Despite the fact that it took decades for a university to be established, the actual progress of the university once the Bill had passed occurred with considerable haste. Within the space of just over a year the newly-formed Senate had to accustom themselves to the new university grounds, erect the administrative framework of a university and seek and appoint its first professors and lecturers. This was especially difficult as no one in the Senate had any experience running a university and some had never even been to one.¹¹ The university received its first students in March 1911.

‘A rough sketch embodying the ideas of the University’

The process of selecting a coat of arms and motto began as early as June 1910 with consideration of a seal and motto:

The Administrative Committee was requested to make enquiries in regard to the obtaining of a seal for the University. It has been ascertained that a seal can be designed by the Government Printer and I am now instructed by the Chairman of that Committee to request the Curriculum Committee to be good enough to suggest a suitable motto for the University.¹²

A seal is crucial to the carrying out of University correspondence and sealing of degrees and diplomas to verify their authenticity, and thus was an important matter. Though the desirability of a coat of arms was not suggested in this early correspondence, it was, nonetheless, a logical step. The University was established as a corporate body by the 1909 *University Act* and a corporate identity was traditionally represented by a coat of arms. This was further reinforced by the fact that the universities of Britain and elsewhere in the Dominions all possessed coats of arms.

The motto, as indicated, was an early consideration. Numerous examples of correspondence from willing contributors survive in the University archives, all dated from April to June 1911, suggesting a general call for a suitable motto had been made sometime in March or early April.¹³ All the dozens of suggestions are in Latin and reflected lofty scholarly ideals, but the preferred motto – *Scientia ac Labore* – is not among them. The precise origins of the motto therefore remain unclear, and later attempts to clarify this matter were unsuccessful. The Registrar, for example, wrote in 1936 that “Unfortunately there is nothing on record to show where that particular one originated”.¹⁴ A careful search by the University’s first archivist in the early 1980s also failed to discover any documentation revealing the reason why the current motto was selected.¹⁵

The matter therefore remains open to some speculation. It is possible to make a reasonable guess as to the intent of the motto, if not with whom it originated. The classical inclinations of the scholarly community in this period, and the desire to echo the practices of august universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, ensured a Latin motto would be selected. More practical and egalitarian ideas, however, about how the

¹¹ Thomis, *A Place of Light and Learning*, p. 33.

¹² Acting Clerk to the Chairman of the Curriculum Committee, 8th June, 1910, University of Queensland Archives (UQA) “Coat-of-arms Seal – Policy Matters”.

¹³ See UQA “Coat-of-arms Seal – Policy Matters”.

¹⁴ Registrar (C. Page-Hanify) to the Registrar, University of Tasmania, 11th September, 1936, UQA, “Coat-of-arms Seal – Policy Matters”.

¹⁵ The archivist’s toil was detailed in a brief article in *University News*, July 28, 1982, p. 6.

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University should contribute to the development of Queensland and its economy are also reflected in the phrase ‘by means of knowledge and hard work’. A 1912 memorandum from MacGregor indicated that “The Arms of the University in respect of Cross, Motto, &c., are to run on parallel lines with those of the State”, suggesting the pragmatic ethos expressed by Kidston at the inauguration of the University (and quoted above) was an important consideration.¹⁶

In June 1911 MacGregor wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies as to the process of acquiring a coat of arms. The request for arms was forwarded to H. Farnham Burke, Norroy King of Arms at the Herald’s College (as the College of Arms was then known). Mr. Burke replied, suggesting he was happy to proceed with the matter and “that the design should include an open book, a device which occurs in the Arms of many Universities in this country”.¹⁷ By October a Select Committee, made up of five members from the Senate, had formed to oversee the process.¹⁸ By early December “a rough sketch of the proposed arms”, originating from the Committee, had been forwarded to Burke in his capacity as a King of Arms.¹⁹ Though no copy of this sketch remains extant, correspondence suggests it contained the essential elements of the current coat of arms: the cross and open book on a shield and the motto *Scientia ac Labore*. The cross is identical to the State Badge located on the official Queensland flag, further reflecting MacGregor’s wish that the arms ‘run on parallel lines with those of the State’.

A coloured illustration of the proposed arms was made by the Herald’s College and sent to the Committee on the 16th January, 1912. After requesting a slight alteration of the cross, the design was approved. The University was then required to submit a formal petition, signed by the Chancellor, to the Earl Marshal of England:

I have the honour to represent to your Grace that by an Act of the Legislature of the State of Queensland instituted ‘The University of Queensland Act of 1909’ it was enacted that a University to be called the University of Queensland should be established, to consist of a Senate, a Council, and Graduate and Undergraduate Members, that the governing body of the University should consist of the Senate and the Council and that the University should be a body corporate with perpetual succession and a Common Seal.

That being desirous that the Common Seal to be used by us in our corporate capacity should contain fit and proper Armorial Bearings, I, on behalf of myself and the other Members of the said University, request the favour of Your Grace’s Warrant to the Kings of Arms for their granting and assigning such Armorial Ensigns as may be proper to be borne and used by us and our

¹⁶ Sir William MacGregor, Memorandum on the Seal of the University, 14th March, 1912, UQA S276 (Box 1).

¹⁷ L. Harcourt to Sir William MacGregor, 18th August, 1911, UQA S276 (Box 1).

¹⁸ The members were: Sir William MacGregor (Chancellor), Reginald Heber Roe (Vice-Chancellor), John Laskey Woolcock, Leslie Gordon Corrie and William Alexander Morrow.

¹⁹ H. Farnham Burke Esq., Norroy King of Arms, Herald’s College to Sir William MacGregor, Chancellor of the University of Queensland, 12th January, 1912, UQA S276 (Box 1). This sketch does not appear to be extant.

successors on Seals, Shields, Banners, or otherwise according to the laws of Arms.²⁰

The coat of arms was granted by Letters Patent on 27th June, 1912. The Letters Patent arrived in Brisbane, via steamer, in November that same year. The coat of arms could now be used in an official capacity by the University (**see Appendix One**).

‘Some variations in the printed designs...’

Almost immediately, notable variations in the design of the coat of arms appeared in the University’s usage. The laws of heraldry do not require the arms to be depicted exactly as they are on the Letters Patent; they may be depicted on any shape of shield, with variation of tinctures and so on. Nonetheless, consistency of design has been an important consideration for the University ever since 1912.

An early use of the coat of arms appeared in the student magazine, *The Magazine of the University of Queensland*, in 1911. As this occurred before the arms had been granted by the Herald’s College, the design may in fact resemble the original made by the Select Committee. It remained in use, however, long after the Letters Patent was granted; it appeared for example in the second incarnation of the student magazine, *Galmahra*, in 1921. The first use of a coat of arms in the Senate Annual Report (1934) reveals yet another design. There was clearly a lack of consistency regarding the basic design (**see Appendix Two**).

This inconsistency was acknowledged by the Registrar, C. Page-Hanify, in 1939:

It was noted recently that, during a period of years, there have been some variations in the printed designs of the University coat-of-arms, and it has been decided to have new blocks made so that, in future, the coat-of-arms will be in accordance with that originally granted to the University.²¹

This request was carried out. The original design (from the Letters Patent) appears sixteen times on the internal columns in the foyer of the Forgan Smith Building, the first building to be erected on the new site at St Lucia. The decision to standardize the design may therefore have been prompted by the desire to render the coat of arms in the building, construction of which began in 1938.

Shortly after the decision by the Registrar, however, the design of the coat of arms was once again altered. This was carried out by the then Professor of English at the University, Frederick Walter Robinson, with Senate approval. (Robinson also oversaw the painting of the arms in the foyer of the Forgan Smith Building in 1952.²²) This was the first official alteration of the arms since 1912. There is no documentation to indicate why the design was altered. It seems likely the modern appearance of the arms was simply intended to update the corporate identity of the University (**see Appendix Three**). The printing blocks with the original design were destroyed in April 1940 and the Registrar ensured the new coat of arms would be used on all

²⁰ Sir William MacGregor, Chancellor of the University of Queensland to the Most Noble Henry, Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal and Hereditary Marshal of England, 14th February, 1912, UQA “Coat-of-arms Seal – Policy Matters”.

²¹ Registrar to The Government Printer, 6th July, 1939, UQA “Coat-of-arms Seal – policy matters”.

²² F. W. Robinson, “Memorandum: Blazoning of University of Queensland Arms in the Entrance Hall under the Tower”, Papers, 1910-1968, Fryer Library Manuscript, Box 13.

“University publications” and further informed “all graduate and undergraduate organizations requesting them to use such new official coat-of-arms in future on all their publications, invitations, stationary, etc.”²³

The coat of arms went through another change in 1991 following the adoption by the University of a Corporate Identity Program (see **Appendix Three**). This is only the second time the design of the University’s arms have been officially altered. The Program represented a new and important phase of the history of the University. With regards to the coat of arms, the Program aimed

For a consistent standard of presentation in the visual media, including stationary, advertising and signage. The coat of arms has undergone minor changes throughout the University’s history, but this current version returns the design almost to its original shape.²⁴

It would be more accurate to state that the current design is itself an interpretation of the original ‘shape’. The shield is squatter like the original, but the scroll on which the motto is written is closer in style to Robinson’s design in 1940. The sentiment, however, bears a striking resemblance to the Registrar’s comments in 1939, indicating the ongoing need for consistency in the coat of arms as a symbol of the University.

As part of the implementation of the Corporate Identity Program, the coat of arms was incorporated as an integral part of the University logo (coat of arms, ‘University of Queensland’ and ‘Australia’) and as such “is an important and valuable symbol and is the centerpiece of the University's corporate identity”.²⁵

Conclusion

Despite the contemporary significance of the University’s logo, the coat of arms has been an important element of the University’s corporate identity since 1912, when the Letters Patent was granted to the University by the Herald’s College. The use of a coat of arms for this purpose is consistent with the use of armorial bearings by universities and corporations since at least the fifteenth century.

The origins of the coat of arms, and the various changes in their design, also reflect aspects of the history of the University. The motto arguably reflects the debate surrounding the creation of the University and the egalitarian, progressive ethos of Queensland in that period. ‘By means of knowledge and hard work’, however, remains as relevant today as it did a century ago. Concern in the late 1930s over the consistency of the University’s public symbol coincided with the relocation to the campus at St. Lucia. Since the implementation of the Corporate Identity Program in 1991 the University has continued a pattern of expansion and diversification as a major international research and teaching university. As the key element in the University logo, the coat of arms remains symbolic of this success. For the University of Queensland, it is indeed a ‘shorthand of history’.

²³ Registrar to F. A. Perkins, 23rd November 1939, UQA “Coat-of-arms Seal – policy matters”.

²⁴ *Contact*, Winter 1991, p. 11.

²⁵ *Handbook of University Policies and Procedures*, at <http://www.uq.edu.au/hupp/index.html?page=24981&pid=24980>

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Appendix One



The original coat of arms as granted by the Herald's College

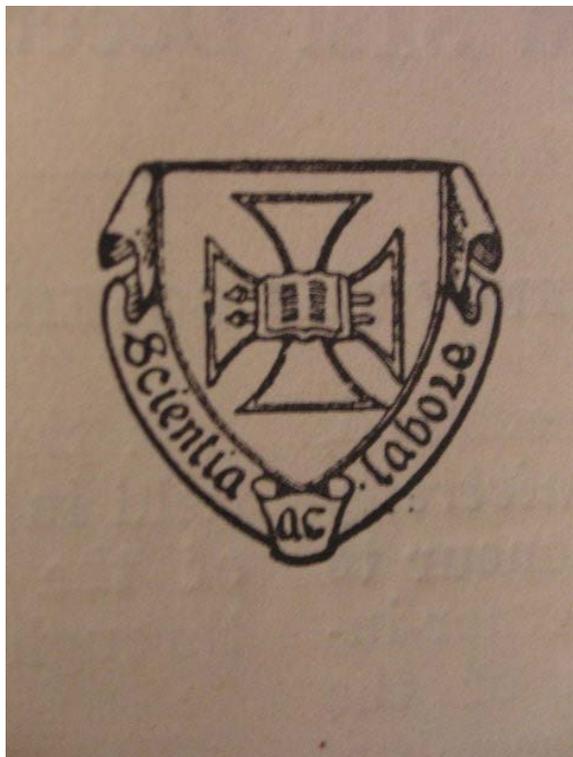


The Grant of Arms

Appendix Two

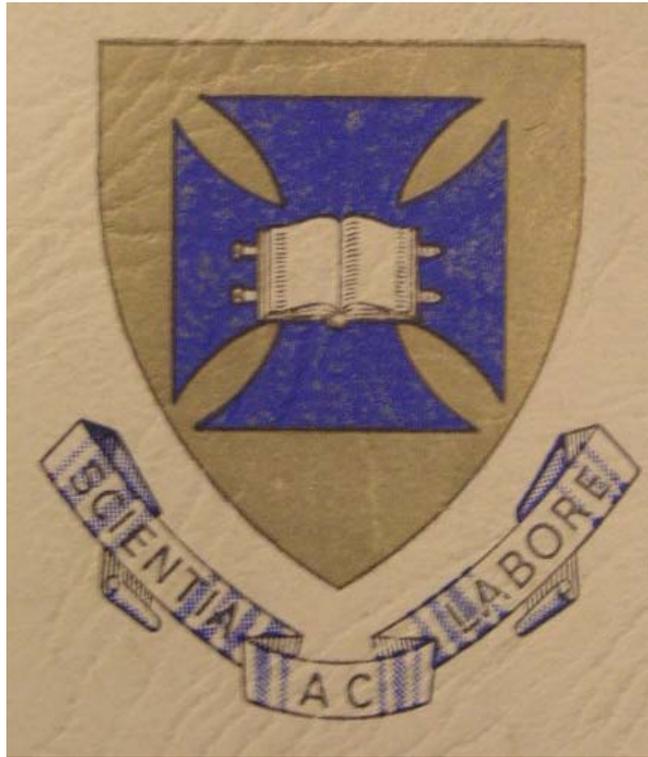


The coat of arms as used in Galmahra, 1921. This is may be the original design by the Select Committee

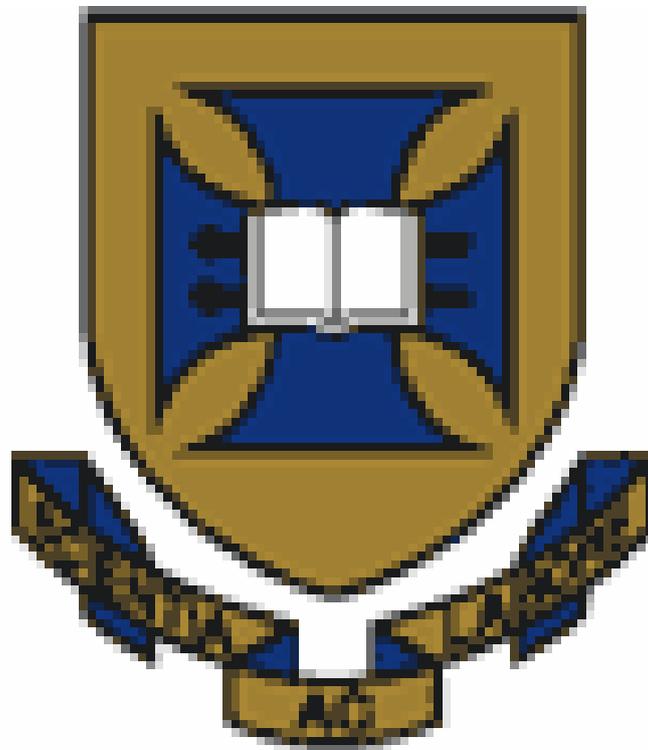


From The University of Queensland Annual Report, 1934

Appendix Three



The coat of arms designed by F. W. Robinson in 1940.



The present design of the coat of arms