

The Lost Heraldry of Europe:

Sixteen Shields in St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue

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- You are about to see sixteen shields -- newly photographed by Douglas Kiddie -- that form an integral part of the World War I Memorial in St. Thomas Church. All of the countries represented were allies of the United States during WWI. Other illustrations have been incorporated as needed.
- John Shannon and Jorge Rivera gave yeoman service in identifying the countries -- some extant, some long gone -- which these shields represent; John and Jorge also supplied additional examples of the heraldry of those countries and ruling houses.
- English heraldic artist and shield maker Baz Manning kindly donated his time and expertise to comment on the drafting and painting techniques employed. Baz also shared his evaluation of the quality and style of the work, and speculated on the identity of the artist.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this presentation and to making this event possible, especially the clergy and staff of St. Thomas Church. Thank you for having us here tonight.

Let's turn now to ...

The World War I Memorial

Based on the concept of St. Thomas' architect Bertram Goodhue, the World War I Memorial was designed by Lee Lawrie (1877-1963), one of the finest architectural sculptors of his day.

Here is the memorial.

We'll be looking at these
shields individually in a
few moments. >>>>



Here are the 16 shields. [switch]

As you've seen, they are mounted in two groups of eight, four on top and four on the bottom, on the left- and right-hand doors of the Memorial. (Those doors are kept locked; the integrity of the Memorial and those it honors remain intact.)

A quick word about Lee Lawrie: he is perhaps most famous in New York for his Art Deco work at Rockefeller Center.

Here is his “Wisdom,”
above the entrance to 30
Rockefeller Plaza:



And here is his Archangel Michael, in St. Thomas:



Here are some of the names of those from St. Thomas who fought and died in World War I.

The names of the dead are rendered in gold.



Lee Lawrie also designed the 14 shields for the International Building (20 West 51st St.) at Rockefeller Center.



But Lawrie's shields do not represent any countries, governments, or families.

The shields do incorporate heraldic elements rendered in non-traditional, muddy colors to create a roll call, if you will, of imaginary countries that exist only in Rockefeller Center.

Did Lawrie, the Art Deco master,
design not only the framework and
carved details of the WWI
Memorial, but also its traditional
shields?

The answer is ...

probably not.

For these reasons ...

According to heraldist Baz Manning, the lions and eagles of the St. Thomas shields fill the space in a medieval manner, drawn almost to the edges. The artist was familiar -- and most likely, comfortable -- with this convention.

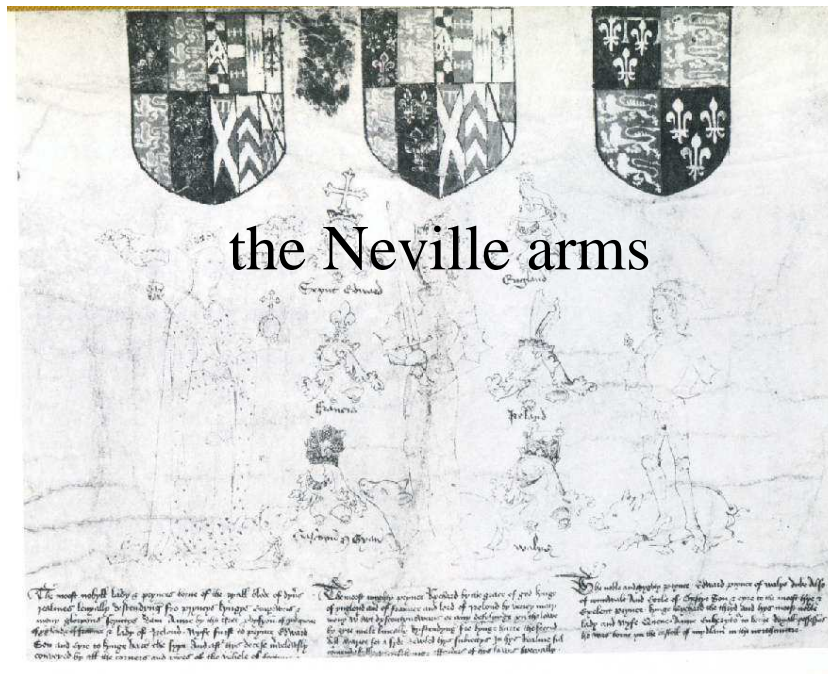
We don't know that Lawrie was. His known works are almost exclusively Art Deco. And we do know he used a commercial fabricator for the shields at Rockefeller Center.

Compare the Arms of Richard II (r. 1377 - 1399)



to the arms of Serbia ...

or compare the way the
charges fill the space in ...



... to this Belgian lion.

The examples are similar though separated by centuries.
The charges fill the field (background).

As a rule, Lawrie's do not. In fact, he seems to me to
have embraced a minimalist approach.



Here is another example from St. Thomas:



Baz Manning commented:

“This man [the heraldic artist] certainly knew what he was doing. He has followed one of the first rules we are taught, that ‘a charge must fairly fill the space it is to occupy.’ His crosses *may* be too big to modern eyes but follow this principle perfectly ...”.

Manning speculates, “I wonder if [the St. Thomas shields] were done by the College of Arms? Now as then the artists are all experts at working on vellum and paper but have no idea how to paint a mirror finish on a shield of wood or metal.”

So -- who did design and paint the 16 shields in St. Thomas Church?

We don't know ... yet.

Work remains to be done.

And the mystery adds to my interest in these 16 shields, to which I turn now.

Let's take a closer look.

The first shield ...

is that of **New Zealand**. The coat of arms was granted by King George V in 1911; the current version, by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956. The shield itself (pictured here) has not changed.

The quarterly design:

top left: the four stars of the Southern Cross; top right: a golden fleece, representing the country's farming industry; bottom left: a wheat sheaf representing agriculture; fourth: the two hammers of mining and industry. The pale (center band) stands for maritime trade and the immigrant settlers of New Zealand.



The coat of arms of New Zealand

left: since 1956; right: 1911-1956



The central shield remains the same.

The second shield ...

At the time of World War I, this country did not have an official emblem for the nation. The ruler had a ...

mon:



But the series of shields in the Memorial had to be unified artistically, so the designer created this shield from existing symbols in order to represent our World War I ally,



Japan

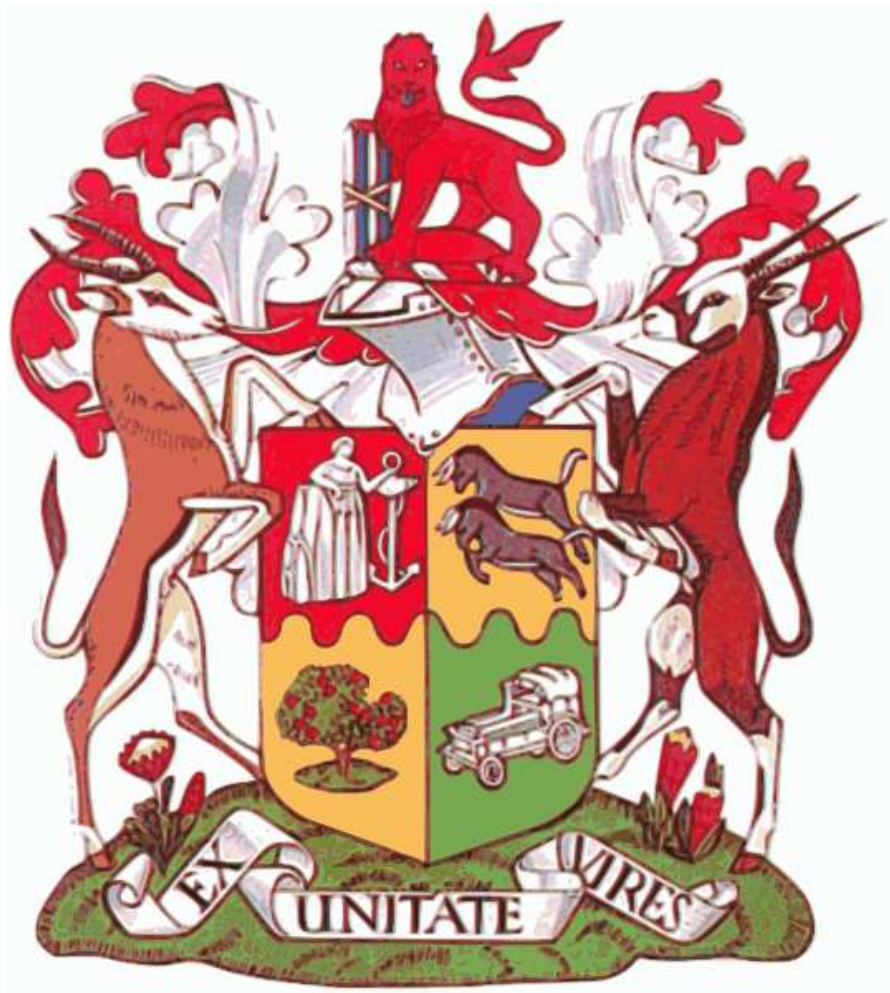
The next shield is part of the coat of arms of South Africa, in use since 1910; a new design was approved by the London College of Arms in 1930.

Here it is:



The female figure represents Hope; in the top right quadrant we see two black wildebeests; bottom left, an orange tree, and bottom right, a trek wagon in silver.

The full coat of arms of South Africa, in use through 2000, looks like this:



and the current arms:



Next, to the Balkans ...



Montenegro

The shield represents the 2-headed eagle in flight, of the House of Petrovic-Njegos.

It is a symbol of Byzantine and ultimately Roman origin. The design was inspired by that of the Russian Empire, with which the ruling family of Montenegro had close dynastic and political ties in the nineteenth century, when the coat was first adopted in its current form.

The shield within the St. Thomas shield is curious ...

The St. Thomas heraldic artist made the eagle dominant on the shield and set the lion within it. However, in the Arms of the Kingdom of Montenegro (1910-1918), only the *lion* is on the shield.



You'll all recognize the next shield.



Royal Coat of Arms, United Kingdom.

This is the official coat of arms of the British monarch.

The blazon: Quarterly, first and fourth Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or armed and langued Azure (for England), second quarter Or a lion rampant within a double tressure flory-counter-flory Gules (for Scotland), third quarter Azure a harp Or stringed Argent (for Ireland), the whole surrounded by the Garter; for a Crest, upon the Royal helm the imperial crown Proper, thereon a lion statant guardant Or imperially crowned Proper; Mantling Or and ermine; for Supporters, dexter a lion rampant guardant Or crowned as the Crest, sinister a unicorn Argent armed, crined and unguled Proper, gorged with a coronet Or composed of crosses patée and fleurs de lis a chain affixed thereto passing between the forelegs and reflexed over the back also Or. Motto 'Dieu et mon Droit' in the compartment below the shield, with the Union rose, shamrock and thistle engrafted on the same stem.

You've already seen the shield on the coat
of arms of the...



Kingdom of Belgium

Meet Leo Belgicus. He appears on the shield in accordance with the Belgian Constitution: “The Belgian nation takes red, yellow and black as colors, and as a state coat of arms the Belgian lion with the motto ‘Unity Makes Strength.’” The Royal decree of 17 March 1837 determined the form of the arms.

Following are the greater arms, rarely used. (They adorn the great seal that is affixed to laws and international treaties.)



Greater Arms of the Kingdom of Belgium

Leo Belgicus holds sway in the middle of the coat of arms. Above the mantle rise banners with the arms of the nine provinces that constituted Belgium in 1837. They are (from dexter to sinister) Antwerp, West Flanders, East Flanders, Liège, Brabant, Hainaut, Limburg, Luxembourg and Namur.

Since the province of Brabant was split into Flemish Brabant, Walloon Brabant and Brussels in 1995, the greater arms no longer reflect the present territorial divisions of the state. The changes made to the arms of the Flemish provinces as a result of this decision, are not reflected in the great seal either.

Turning to Eastern Europe ...



Kingdom of Serbia, 1882-1918

The St. Thomas artist has taken some liberties with this work: he added a green sword in the middle of the central shield.

The four letters are thought to be either the Cyrillic “C” [“S”] or the Greek B [beta]. If Cyrillic, they signify the Serbian words “Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava” [Only Unity Saves Serbs]. If Greek, they represent the first letter of each word in the Greek phrase “King of Kings Rules over Kings” from the Gospel of St. John.

The coat of arms of the current Serbian Republic is the same as that of the Obrenovic dynasty; these arms were re-adopted in 2004, having been first granted in 1882.

Republic of Serbia: 2004-current

Note that they retained the royal emblems.





Kingdom of Romania, 1881-1922

A fascinating, intricate shield. Despite the heavy-handed laying on of paint, note the details in the gilded figures and the care taken in their execution.

The design dates from 1859, when the countries of Wallachia and Moldavia united. Their two heraldic symbols, the eagle (top left) and the auroch (bull, top right) were officially juxtaposed.

Romania had three official coats of arms: 1881-1922, 1922-1947, and the latest, which follows. In all cases, they preserved the design of the central shield.



On the left, the new Romanian coat of arms, adopted 10 Sep. 1992. It is based on the lesser coat of arms (right) in use from 1922-1947, with modifications.



A treat! Baz Manning took this photo of the old Romanian coat of arms on a coach door. The shield is identical to the one in St. Thomas!

Off to the New World!

The next shield is in the top left corner of the right-hand door to the World War I Memorial.



Canada

Probably the most complex shield in the collection, taking in four provinces of one country.

Quartered:

top left: from the coat of arms of Ontario; granted by Queen Victoria on 26 May 1868. Augmented with supporters and crest -- to follow -- by King Edward VII, 27 Feb. 1909.

top right: from the first coat of arms of Quebec (1868-1939); granted 1868 by Queen Victoria.

bottom left: shield from arms of Nova Scotia, used 1867-1929; yes, that is a salmon in the middle. Nova Scotia holds the oldest coat granted outside Britain, by King Charles I in 1625.

bottom right: New Brunswick, granted by Queen Victoria 26 May 1868. The original coat was only a shield, carrying the ship.

But wait ...

... doesn't Canada have ten provinces and three territories?

Yes, indeed, but ...

Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia are the original provinces, formed when British North American colonies federated on July 1, 1867, into the Dominion of Canada. Here you see only the shields from their arms.

The coats of arms of the four original provinces are:



Quebec



New Brunswick



Ontario



and the shield in use
from 1869-1929 on
the arms of Nova
Scotia



On to South America ... Brazil!

The coat of arms of Brazil was created on 19 Nov. 1889, just four days after Brazil became a republic. The shield you see here represents the Southern Cross in the center. The 27 stars surrounding it represent Brazil's 26 states and the Federal District.

The complete coat of arms follows.





Portugal:

11th - 13th centuries

First documented coat of arms - 11th century, during the time of Sancho I and Sancho II. That coat showed these same five blue escutcheons charged by silver dots.

Ca. 1252, under Alfonso II, the shield was added with the red border and golden castles, as here.

From 1385-1816, elements were added until this coat of arms ...

... was adopted in 1911. As you can see, it is based on the arms (especially the shield) in use since the eleventh century.





Staying in warmer climes, we come to the arms of Greece.

The first modern Greek national emblem was provided for in the Constitution of Epidaurus, 1 Jan. 1822 and established by decree on 15 Mar. 1822. It looked very much like the shield on the left.

The emblem has undergone many changes in modern times, through June 1975. However, the central cross remains almost the same. Examples follow.



The Royal & State Coat of Arms during the reign of King Otto (1833-1862). It was inspired by the royal Bavarian Coat of Arms.



The Greek State Coat of Arms during the Glücksburg Dynasty, 1863-1924 and 1935-1973.



3rd Hellenic Republic, from 1975



France

By my count, France has had eight coats of arms and at least one national emblem.

The shield in St. Thomas Church seems most closely related to the arms of the Third Republic, following.

However, many of the coats of arms and the current national emblem use the fasces (bundle of branches) and ax as a central symbol.

The French Third Republic was the republican government of France between the end of the Second French Empire (following the defeat of Louis-Napoléon in the Franco-Prussian war) in 1870 and the Vichy Regime after the invasion of France by the German Third Reich in 1940.



The current emblem of France,
adopted in 1912





Italy

The shield of Italy, like that of Greece, is simple and clear. Here, the white paint has yellowed.

The development of Italy's coats of arms is as varied as the country's history. A few examples appear on the next slide.

However, the shield design has remained fairly constant, with the exception of the fascist period and the modern arms.



Arms of the
Kingdom of
Italy, 1870–1890
version.



Arms as
modified under
Fascism,
1929–1944.



Arms of the
fascist Italian
Social
Republic,
1944–1945.



National
emblem of
Italy,
adopted 5
May 1948

and now, the best for last ...



Lesser State Emblem, Russian Empire - 1883

The two main elements of Russian state symbols (the two-headed eagle and the mounted figure slaying a serpent or dragon) predate Peter the Great.

The figure was not officially identified as Saint George until 1730, when it was described as such in an Imperial decree. The older form (a mounted dragon slayer known as "pobedonotsve," ("the slayer/vanquisher") was always associated with the Grand Duchy of Muscovy.

On the next slide, I explain the myriad shields seen here.

The shields on the Lesser Arms of Russia





The current coat of arms of the Russian Federation was designed by artist Yevgeny Ukhnyalov; it was adopted officially on November 30, 1993. The imperial crowns stand for the unity and sovereignty of Russia both as a whole and in its constituent republics and regions.

The modern arms of Russia were instated by a presidential decree in 1993, and then by a Federal Law signed by President Vladimir Putin on December 20, 2000.

and, finally, we arrive at Australia.

Australia

The first coat of arms was granted by King Edward VII on 7 May 1908, and the current version by King George V on 19 Sep. 1912.

The shield, shown here, contains the badge of each Australian state: from top left - New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland.

Bottom row: South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania.





Coat of arms since 1912;
supporters are a red
kangaroo and an emu.
The shield is the same as
that which hangs in St.
Thomas Church.



The 1908 coat of
arms, with an
earlier version of
the shield.

Photo credits:

Douglas Kiddie

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