

The Steyning Screen

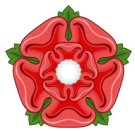


This unique oak screen is a celebration of Henry VIII and his first queen, Catherine of Aragon. It was carved for the Bishop of London, Richard Fitzjames. He rebuilt the Bishop's Palace in Fulham and it was probably there that the panels had pride of place, mounted on the wall of a fine room for entertaining guests. The bishop died in 1522. His spectacular panels would later become an embarrassment as Anne Boleyn replaced the queen in the king's favour. After 1533, when Henry divorced Catherine, the panels were probably moved out of sight.



The Tudor Rose

In 1485, Henry Tudor defeated King Richard III at the battle of Bosworth and became King Henry VII. He created the crowned red and white Tudor rose as his royal symbol. Henry's mother was Margaret Beaufort from the Lancaster royal family, symbolised by the red rose. Henry married Elizabeth of York, symbolised by the white rose. This marriage ended the Wars of the Roses, in which the York and the Lancaster branches of the royal family fought each other for the crown. King Henry VIII also used his father's symbol of the Tudor rose.



Plus



Equals Henry VII



and Henry VIII



The Pomegranate

Catherine of Aragon was the daughter of King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile. Their marriage and conquests in war unified Spain. Catherine lived in the fabulous Alhambra palace of Granada, from which she took the pomegranate as her own symbol when she came to England, aged 15. She was married to the royal heir, Prince Arthur, in 1501 but he died shortly afterwards. By the time King Henry VII died in 1509, the next heir to the throne had fallen in love with her. This was Henry VIII. They married and had one surviving child, Mary.



Plus



Equals



The Marriage and later Princess Mary

The Portcullis and the Fleur de Lis

Henry VII used this symbol of the Beaufort family, plus the crown, because his claim to the throne was through his mother, Margaret Beaufort. Her father was the grandson of King Edward III. Margaret married four times and it was her second husband, Edmund Tudor, who was Henry VII's father. She died two months after her son, in 1509. Henry VIII used the crowned portcullis too.

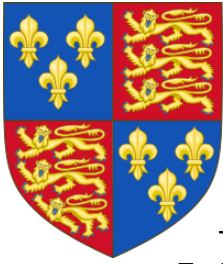


The fleur de lis, or lily flower, was the symbol of French royalty. The English kings had claimed the throne of France since 1340 and continued until 1801. Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII's mother, used the symbol in her personal coat of arms. Also, Henry VII's father, Edmund Tudor was the son of Catherine of Valois. She was the daughter of King Charles VI of France and the widow of the English king, Henry V, who took the French throne from her family.

The English Oak and the Spanish Grapevine

There is intertwined foliage on the panels, which is partly decorative but also a symbol of the marriage between Henry and Catherine. The oak tree and its acorns were symbols of the English people. Equally, grapes on the vine symbolised the Spanish people. Also shown as though they are growing together on a trellis are Tudor roses, Catherine's pomegranates and fleurs de lis.

The Royal Arms



Everyone will recognise the three lions of England. Henry VIII's royal arms (strictly speaking, the symbols used on a shield for battle) also included the fleur de lis. On the screen, the royal arms are crowned and supported by angels. Henry VIII's arms are usually supported by a white greyhound and a Welsh dragon. The white greyhound became Edmund Tudor's symbolic beast when he was made the Earl of Richmond. The Welsh dragon shows that Edmund Tudor, Henry VIII's grandfather, descended from the ancient princes of Wales. The full royal arms were too detailed to carve, but all the animals do appear somewhere on the screen.



The Arms of Richard Fitzjames, Bishop of London



The arms of the Bishops of London were the two crossed swords. Richard Fitzjames combined this symbol with his own family arms. These are on the right half showing wavy crosses, dolphins and spread eagles. The dolphins are strange, like fish with scales, but these are called dolphins when they appear on family arms. On the screen, the Fitzjames arms are supported by angels. A bishop's mitre, or head dress, sits on top.



Saint Paul

The Bishop of London's cathedral was Saint Paul's. This saint is usually shown holding a sword and a Bible. On the screen there is a figure with a sword, which is probably Saint Paul. If so, the angel unravelling two long scrolls, as though they are tumbling from Heaven, represents the Bible.

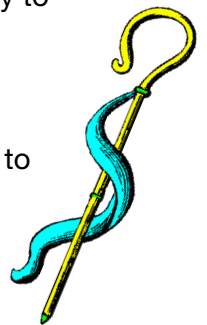
The Monogram



The Tudors sometimes used a monogram as well as a signature. Bishop Fitzjames used the letters V L E, arranged as two overlapping mirror images. The letters represented the Latin words Verus Londoniensis Episcopus, or True Bishop of London. Fitzjames became the Bishop of London in 1506. Before then he used the similar monogram V C E when he was the Bishop of Chichester. The V C E monogram can be seen today above a doorway to the Chichester Cathedral grounds in Canon Lane.

The Crosier

Bishops still carry a crosier, or crook, which looks like a large, hooked walking stick. It is a symbol of their position as the shepherd of God's flock. Real shepherds used their crooks to hook around the necks of sheep to draw them near. Fitzjames used the symbol of the crosier on his panels and showed it draped with strips of fabric. These are part of the symbolic clothing, or vestments worn by a bishop.



The screen suffered a lot of damage during its 500 year history. Some panels have been cut to fit different rooms. Some may be lost altogether. Part of the frame, which includes Latin writing, was added later - maybe much later and is not of the same quality as the panels. It tells us to "Give glory to God who made all things." It spells out 1522, the year when Bishop Fitzjames died and also "The arms of Richard Fitzjames, lately Bishop of London." There is a strange mention of "The arms of Saint Richard, one time Bishop of Chichester," which are not there.

How did the screen get to Steyning? Another Bishop of London, William Juxon, saved many treasures from destruction by Oliver Cromwell's army. Juxon's brother's granddaughter inherited some of these, possibly including the screen. She married a Rector of Steyning.

The Friends of Steyning Parish Church is Registered Charity No. 1169773
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