

CHAPTER NINE

Coats of Arms

Many, if not most people who begin to research their family history do so with the hope of finding that they are the rightful heirs to a dormant title. I felt that I had a head start here, as my father had inherited a small wooden shield bearing a crest and motto, together with a signet ring bearing the same crest. I was to be disappointed.

The crest (a cockerel between the antlers of a stag) and motto (*“Fortis et Vigilans”*, meaning *“Strong and Watchful”*) belong to a coat of arms granted in 1889 to a Frederick Warburton Dunston of Salisbury, a completely unrelated family. However, I was not the first to pursue this line of enquiry, as Wyndham Dunstan had written to Frederick Dunston in 1901 on the same subject.

The question that remained unanswered for many years was, how did Bernard



Dunstan (my grandfather) come to possess the crest? It turned out that it was supplied to his father Harry by an unscrupulous genealogist! My uncle Roy remembers seeing it displayed in his father’s consulting rooms in Crewe, so

perhaps it appealed to Bernard’s theatrical nature, and was used to impress his more “aristocratic” patients. The plaque is identical to the one that Bernard had for playing football at St. Thomas’s Hospital (see Chapter Six), so it was made no earlier than 1900.

The next crest that I discovered was on a plaque in Chester Cathedral that Sir



ARMS OF FREDERICK
WARBURTON DUNSTON

Wyndham Dunstan had erected in memory of his parents. This bore a stag’s head with the motto *“Be Just and Fear Not”*. It is interesting that a stag’s head appears also on the Dunston coat of arms described above. Papworth’s Ordinary of Arms attributes *“Gules a bucks head cabossed argent”* (a buck’s head, silver or white, facing forward on a background of red) to *“Dunston or Duston. De Dunston, Dunston or Duston. co. Northampton; and Raunton, co. Stafford”*. I have yet to trace the origin of the motto.



PLAQUE IN CHESTER
CATHEDRAL



ARMS USED BY
JOHN DUNSTAN

A number of letters written by John Dunstan have survived. His notepaper was embossed with the coat of arms shown above. The arms comprise a stag's head above a shield bearing garbs (sheaves of wheat) and lions rampant. The shield is from the arms of the City of Chester. The garbs appeared on the seal of Ranulph de Meschines, Earl of Chester who died in 1232. The lions are from the arms of England, and the combination was created when the arms were granted to the City in 1580.

It was the vogue in Victorian times for a gentleman to have his stationery embossed with a coat of arms (often wrongly termed a "crest"). The stationer would simply copy a design from Burke's General Armory if no authentic one existed. I think that John assumed the use of this device by virtue of his office as Constable of Chester Castle, but I do not know the origin of the stag's head or motto.