The Arms of British Urology

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2020 sees the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS) and the centenary of the Urology Section of the Royal Society of Medicine. In a build-up to this celebratory year for British Urology, Trends will be looking at aspects of these two institutions which have supported urologists throughout that time. In this article the author describes the origins and perhaps unnoticed elements of the BAUS arms.

And sunset still a golden sea
From Haslingfield to Madingley?
Rupert Brooke

What has a ship sailing across a golden sea beneath a glorious sun got to do with British urology? The answer lies not in one of Professor Kirby’s summer holidays but in the medieval College of Heralds.

BAUS was founded in 1945, but it was not until 1994 that it was granted a coat of arms. These arms (Figure 1) are very colourful and attractive, but careful examination reveals more to them than first meets the eye.

The right to bear arms is granted by Her Majesty the Queen, but this honour is carried out on her behalf by the Marshall of England who, by hereditary privilege, is the Duke of Norfolk. In 1992, the then president of BAUS, Jo Smith (1931–2016) on behalf of the BAUS Council requested that arms be granted. In November of that year the Duke of Norfolk designated a King of Arms to create them. Kings of Arms, in discussion with an association or individual, design suitable arms that often reflect the work of the association or the life of that individual. The Kings of Arms retain their medieval titles of ‘Garter’, ‘Clarenceux’ and ‘Norroy and Ulster’. The BAUS arms were designed by the York Herald, Conrad Marshall John Fisher Swan Esquire CVO. Later that year Swan was made ‘Garter’, the principal King of Arms.

Once a design for arms is made, it is recorded and a letters patent is granted. This is the proof that the person or association may bear arms. As well as showing the arms, the letters patent – a beautifully illuminated manuscript – gives a written description. This is in heraldic language, a strange mix of Anglo-Norman French. The Heralds described the BAUS arms as follows:

Per fess wavy azure and or in chief a lymphad in full sail pennons flying with oars in action and in dexter chief a sun in splendour in base two dolphins addorsed urinant all in counterchanged.

The arms were presented to BAUS by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester on 29 June 1994. Although BAUS did not own formal arms for almost
50 years following its formation, it did have one pseudo-heraldic symbol, the president’s badge (Figure 2). This badge was presented to BAUS by John Everidge (1884–1995), consultant urologist at King’s College Hospital, London, and at that time BAUS treasurer. It was worn for the first time at the 1949 annual meeting. The BAUS coat of arms was largely derived from this badge, which in turn was carefully designed to represent aspects of BAUS and urology.

The ship (a *lymphad* in the language of the Heralds) symbolises the home and overseas nature of the Association. In heraldry, the *lymphad* usually indicates islands; for BAUS this would be the British Isles. The *lymphad* is sailing on a golden (termed *or* in heraldry) sea beneath a blue (*azure*) sky. The golden sea, of course, represents urine. The blazing sun in the upper right-hand (*dexter*) corner is the emblem of Apollo, the ancient Greek god of medicine. The two dolphins diving down at the foot of the shield represent the openings of the ureters in the bladder.

On the president’s badge the background above the shield is filled by representations of two pyelograms; these descend behind the shield to enter it at the two openings marked by the dolphins. The position of the dolphins is described using the Latin word *urinant*, meaning ‘to dive’. In the Roman world the Mediterranean sponge or pearl divers were called the *urinants*. It is, of course, an apt word to use on the arms of urological surgeons.

The other symbol seen on the badge and arms is the crossed keys of heaven, the emblem of St Peter. Peter, a disciple of Christ, was originally called Simon or Simeon, and was given the name Peter by Christ. Derived from the Latin *petrus*, Peter means ‘rock’ or ‘stone’. Christ told Peter he was to be the ‘rock’ upon which the Christian Church was to be built. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first urological hospital in Great Britain was called St Peter’s. The crossed keys of the BAUS badge also have a snake entwined around them. This feature is taken from the rod of Asclepius, son of Apollo and another Greek god of medicine. The keys also appear on the helm (knight’s armoured helmet) above the shield and along with the arms on a pennant (a narrow flag).

Arms are usually given supporters. The Queen’s arms, for example, are supported by the lion and the unicorn. The BAUS arms are supported by St Peter (with the keys to the gates of heaven on his belt) and Hippocrates, the ancient Greek father of medicine, holding the rod of Asclepius. On the letters patent they stand on a small grassy hillock on which grow sweet pea flowers – a final nod to the medium of ‘pee’ in which we work.

**Declaration of interests:** none declared.