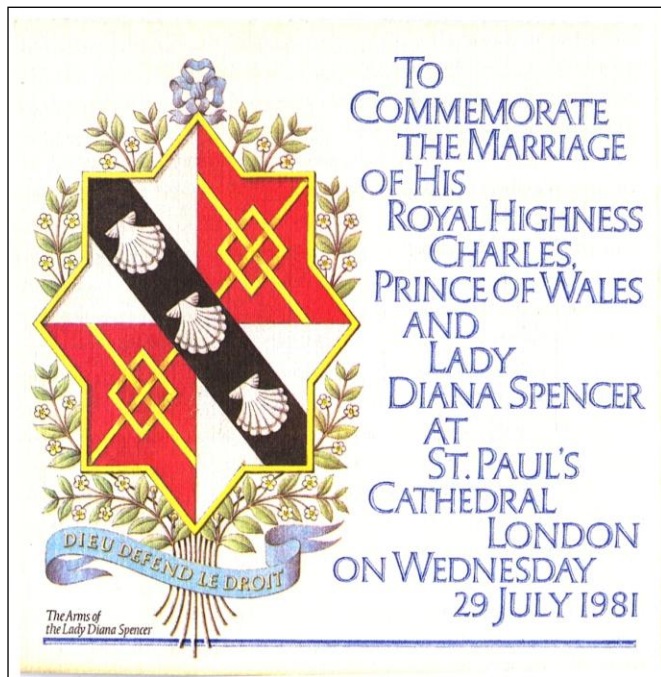


A Heraldic Favourite

by David F. Phillips SHA



It is hard to choose a single favourite over more than 800 years of heraldic art. The examples are not comparable. Which do I like better: the Matthew Paris shields (c. 1250) or Gerald Cobb's magnificent set piece of the royal arms, shown at the 1936 Birmingham Heraldic Exhibition? Anthony Wood's most sumptuous gilded illumination or the throne Augustus Pugin designed for the House of Lords? For present purposes it seemed best to select something less monumental but still accomplished, inventive and appealing. So I have chosen Jeffery Matthews' design of Lady Diana Spencer's arms, created for a first-day cover at the time of the royal wedding in 1981. A philatelic cover is a humble medium – the design was printed on thousands of envelopes, sold for a pound

or two to carry royal wedding stamps to collectors on their first day of issue. But Matthews' design is notable for its creative solution to the perennial problem of projecting arms onto a lozenge.

- By adding lobes in the corners more or less equal to the points of the lozenge, Matthews has transformed the display field from a lozenge to an upright rectangle, freeing up its elements (designed originally for a shield).
- He has exploited the intrinsic symmetry of the Spencer arms, focusing the construction on the fess point where the quartering lines (bisecting the lozenge points) and the bend and the sinister members of the frets (bisecting the newly added lobes) all meet beneath the central scallop shell.
- The frets are boldly off center within their quarters, but are centered exactly on the rectangular fields remaining when the extruding areas are omitted.
- The diagonals (bend and sinister fret members) now extend beyond the original lozenge, and so reproduce the structure of a fret.
- The bow at the top and the flower stems below (myrtle, since Queen Victoria traditional for a British royal bride) augment the paler line to reinforce the strength and stability of the design. In counterpoint, notice the asymmetry of the motto scroll, and the way the longest of the flower stems transgress the blue base line.

Matthews, who concentrated on postage stamps while still doing a lot of first-day covers and other heraldic and calligraphic work, has given us a small masterpiece – small, but one of my favourites anyway. ♦