

Palmer Family Genealogical Roll of Arms
In Latin, illuminated manuscript scroll on parchment
England, London, c. 1575-1584

Parchment scroll composed of four membranes of varying dimensions, pasted together and joined end to end, no visible ruling, written in an archaizing hand with characteristics of Gothic cursive and hybrida scripts on one to eight lines within sixty-nine roundels painted green around the edges and ruled horizontally in crayon, twenty-nine armorial shields outlined entirely in black and painted in vivid blue, red, white, yellow, pale green, and black, with roundels and armorial shields joined by thin red lines, designed to be read vertically from top to bottom, THREE GRAND COATS-OF-ARMS at the bottom of the fourth membrane, drawn with delicate shading on the crests and painted in red, blue, yellow, and black, three armorial shields slightly smeared, one roundel slightly rubbed with no loss of legibility, some soiling and wear to outer edges of scroll, a few small brown stains, joint between second and third membrane slightly parted on far left, otherwise in very fine condition. Dimensions 2613 x 413-415 mm. (length of individual membranes: 765, 730, 646, and 472 mm.).

Modeled on genealogical rolls of the late medieval kings of England, this roll of arms, signed by Robert Cooke, Clarenceaux King of Arms, displays the ancestry of the Palmer family from the eleventh- or twelfth-century Henry Palmer to the four sons of Edward Palmer, a wealthy landowner in England and the New World. A crusader and a member of Henry VIII's Troop of Gentlemen number among the sixty-nine men and women identified here. Elegantly adorned with twenty-nine armorial shields and three grand coats-of-arms, still vivid and very well preserved, this is a high quality production that may have been displayed in the Palmer home in Warwickshire.

PROVENANCE

1. There is strong evidence allowing us to date this roll after 1567 and before 1584. It is signed by Robert Cooke (c. 1535-1592/93), the Clarenceaux King of Arms (see bottom of fourth membrane), and therefore it must have been produced after he was appointed to that position on 21 May 1567. Cooke was appointed acting Garter King of Arms on 3 October 1584, upon the death of Sir Gilbert Dethick (c. 1510-1584); it thus seems very likely that it dates before his elevation to that position.

The Palmer family resided in Gloucestershire at the time that this genealogy was made, and it is tempting to speculate that its commission or creation coincided with Cooke's visitation of Gloucestershire in 1583 (Moule, 1822, p. 576). There is no firm evidence to support this, but it does fit with the content of the genealogy. The last marriage recorded is that of Edward Palmer (c. 1550-1624) and Muriel Palmer, his third cousin; Edward (the last adult male recorded here) almost certainly commissioned the roll. We have not been able to verify the date when Edward and Muriel married, but they had at least four children at the time this genealogy was copied. It therefore seems improbable that it could have been copied before c. 1575, when Edward Palmer had reached the approximate age of twenty-five, and it may have been copied as late as 1583.

Though overseen and signed by Cooke, this manuscript was probably not copied in his own handwriting, which was known to be quite poor (after Cooke's death, his contemporary William Segar, Norroy King of Arms, criticized its lack of clarity). The handsome archaizing script of this genealogy may instead be the work of Robert Glover (1544-1588), Somerset Herald of Arms (for this suggested attribution we thank Dr. Nigel Ramsay).

2. This roll remained in the hands of the Palmer family into the seventeenth century, when William Camden (1551-1623), Clarenceaux King of Arms from 1597 until his death, recorded its contents in his 1619 visitation of the county of Warwick, perhaps in Compton Scorpion, the birthplace of Muriel Palmer and the dwelling of Edward and Muriel Palmer's later descendants (Fetherston, 1877, pp. 220-222).
3. The Palmer family continued to treasure this roll at least as late as the eighteenth century, when one of Edward Palmer's descendants, Giles Palmer, Esq. of Compton Scorpion showed the pedigree to Sir William Dugdale, who made note of Cooke's signature and presented the genealogy in full in his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1730, vol. 1, pp. 632-633). Dugdale supplemented the roll's contents with the subsequent genealogy of the Palmer family extending to Giles Palmer.

TEXT

Text and images run vertically from top to bottom:

incipit, "Henricus, Stephanus Le palmer henrici filius et heres, Johannes Le palmer filius et heres Stephani, Wilhelmus Le palmer militaris vir et non alienus a literis Richardi Regis in Saracenos ... Richardus Edwardi palmer filius primus, Johannes Edwardi palmer filius secundus, Edwardus Edwardi palmer filius tertius, Egidius Edwardi palmer filius Quartus. *Robert Cooke Alias Clarenceaux Roy Darmes.*"

ILLUSTRATION

Three large coats of arms:

1. (membrane four) Arms: argent, three martlets sable; crest: out of a ducal coronet a plume of five ostrich feathers alternately argent and sable;
2. (membrane four) Arms: Quarterly of four: 1. Chequy or and azure, a chief gules; 2. Argent, three martlets sable; 3. Argent, on a chevron gules between three lions' heads gules, a mullet for difference; 4. Quarterly argent and sable, on a bend gules three fleur-de-lis argent; crest: a griffin séjant with wings endorsed argent;
3. (membrane four) Arms: Quarterly argent and sable, on a bend gules three fleur-de-lis argent; crest: a horse's head, argent.

This vividly painted and painstakingly crafted roll of arms documents the genealogy of the Palmer family from their eleventh- or twelfth-century progenitor Henry Palmer to the offspring of Edward Palmer (c. 1550-1624), a wealthy English landowner based in Gloucestershire and London. It was issued (and signed) by Robert Cooke (c. 1535-1592/93), the Clarenceaux King of Arms from 1567 until his death. According to the Schoenberg Database, there have only been three other pedigrees issued by Cooke on the market in the last century; this appears to be a unique copy of the Palmer family's genealogy.

There is good reason to believe this roll's contents are not only unique, but also may owe more to fantasy than reality. Robert Cooke was an ambitious career officer of arms and, according to more than one of his fellow officers of arms, an unscrupulous one as well. After his death, William Segar (c. 1554-1633), Norroy King of Arms, accused him of profiting from the granting of arms to "base and unworthy persons" (Wagner, 1967, p. 207) and in 1614 Ralph Brooke (1553-1625), York Herald, who had served for a time as Cooke's deputy, complained to Sir Robert Cotton that Cooke had granted more than five hundred arms during his time as Clarenceaux King of Arms (see Rockett, 2000). Such accusations were not uncommon among the heralds, especially during the reign of Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603), which saw a rapidly increased demand for gentle standing and arms as the landowning classes grew. In fact, between the years of 1560 and 1640, four thousand new armorial grants were made in England (Mingay, 1976), leading in turn to a pedigree 'craze' as the newly created nobility commissioned fabricated genealogies to "clothe their social nakedness" (Stone, 1965, p. 23).

At the time that this roll was produced, the Palmer family appears to have fit the profile of wealthy, upwardly mobile landowners. The man who is likely to have commissioned the genealogy, Edward Palmer (see Provenance, above), was uncle to English poet and essayist Sir Thomas Overbury (1581-1613), a courtier during the reign of James I (reigned 1603-1625) and the victim of a scandalous murder. For his part, Edward Palmer appears to have been a wealthy man and an aspiring philanthropist, judging from his will, dated 1624, in which he detailed transactions of family lands and indicated how his income was to be disposed (see Waters, 1901, pp. 982-983). It is clear from this will that Palmer amassed land in the early colonies of New England and Virginia – he stipulated either the sum of seven hundred pounds for his eldest son Richard from his personal estate or "the sum of two thousand pounds or more out of ... profits of Virginia and New England" (Waters, 1901, p. 982) – and that he intended these lands be devised in order to establish a university in Virginia, to be called the *Academia Virginiensis et Oxoniensis* (Waters, 1901, pp. 982-983 and Tyler, 1907, pp. 111-112). These plans would never come to fruition – Palmer's executors wasted his estate – but if they had Palmer's academy might well have predated Harvard as the first university in what would become the United States.

The generations immediately preceding Edward Palmer traced a similarly ambitious trajectory, demonstrating, perhaps, how this branch of the Palmer family came to achieve its wealth, lands, and arms. As noted in the roll, Edward's uncle, William Palmer, had served as a Gentleman Pensioner of Henry VIII. (In fact, a c. 1546 painting of William Palmer by Gerlach Flicke depicts his coat of arms in the upper right, the same as that depicted at the bottom center of the fourth membrane of the present manuscript.) William and Edward Palmer both hailed from the manors of Upper and Lower Lemington, in the parish of Todenham, Gloucestershire (Edward and his father, Giles, would subsequently sell both manors to Richard Palmer of Berton, Edward's wife's father-in-law and his second cousin once removed; see "Parishes: Todenham" in Online Resources.) The antiquary John Leland (c. 1503-1552) records the Palmer family's acquisition of these lands as follows: "He [Palmer of Lemington] began first with a very smaull Portion of Lande: and being a Galant Fellow, and clothid yn migtie Colowrs, got a riche Widow in *Lemington* Ton to Wife, a 80. yeres or more hens; and sins there hath plantid themselves, and buildid a faire House, and bought faire Landes to it. He that now hath it [John Palmer (d. 1552)] married one of the *Gravilles* Dowghters of *Milcot*" (Hearne, 1744, p. 17). Further research may yield more information on this enterprising Palmer ancestor and his advantageous marriage,

but at least where the Lemington manors are concerned Leland's account may be misleading: records suggest that John Palmer did not inherit them but instead purchased these houses and their lands from his wife's family, the Grevilles, in 1541 (see "Parishes: Todenham" in Online Resources).

The earlier portions of the pedigree, clearly calculated to show off illustrious ancestors and to highlight important connections through marriage, present greater challenges for verification. This roll does not provide the dates of birth or death for anyone in the Palmer pedigree, and only a few are linked definitively to a particular monarch's reign or to a specific historic event. And even in these cases it can be difficult to find corroborating documentation. For example, this roll proclaims the accomplishments of William le Palmer, who fought with Richard I (reigned 1189-1199) in the Third Crusade, and identifies him as brother to John le Palmer, one of Edward's ancestors (see membrane one). At least one other Palmer genealogy also proudly owns William le Palmer, naming him the family "patriarch," but it presents the same limited information and does not furnish a lineage connecting him to his supposed sixteenth-century descendants (see Burke, 1846, p. 994). Still, from William le Palmer's crusading to the wounding of one John Palmer at Agincourt to William's service under Henry VIII, this pedigree is dotted with the Palmer family's participation in important moments in English history; continuing to probe their past, whether wholly true or partially imagined, should furnish a fascinating scholarly opportunity.

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