



Some Notes on the Civic and Academic Heraldry of Armidale Dumaresq

Armidale Dumaresq is a community well endowed with civic and academic heraldry as well as personal heraldry. Armidale has traditionally been the 'capital' of the New England region. It was the centre of the New State Movement that between the 1920s and 1967 campaigned for the separation of a greater New England area from New South Wales and its admission into the Commonwealth of Australia as the seventh state. This strong sense of regional identity is evident in the public heraldry of New England.

British colonisation of the region began in the 1830s, but it was the establishment of local government with the creation of the Municipality of Armidale in 1863 that provided a basis for expressing regional identity through the heraldic arts. Local government requires a common seal to function as a corporate signature, and Armidale's first municipal seal was similar to those of other local councils, showing a pastoral scene with a cow, a sheep and a bale of wool inscribed with the letters "A.M." with a shield in the centre with a "golden fleece" and a sheaf of grain. However, within a few years, and probably before 1885, when the municipality became a city, a new seal was designed that was strikingly different to those of other councils (fig. 1).



fig 1 Seal of the Municipality, later City, of Armidale, c1880s

It shows a stem of waratah 'enfiled' or threaded through a coronet. The symbolism of the seal was not recorded at the time, but the rose-like waratah probably alludes to Australia's 'New England' while the coronet alludes to Armidale's Scots heritage in its namesake Armadail Castle on the Isle of Skye in Scotland, once the seat of the chief of the MacDonalDs of Sleat. The waratah was proposed as Australia's national flower during the period leading up to Federation, and this may have influenced its adoption by Armidale. While quite heraldic in its conception, this civic seal avoided the clichés of kangaroos, emus and symbols of agriculture and commerce, and is unique in its simplicity of design.

The Shire of Dumaresq, created in 1906, used a seal (fig. 2) that was quite plain with no allusion to the Jersey origins or personal heraldry of the family after which it was named. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Dumaresq Shire may also have used a golden fleece as a symbol, but visual or documentary evidence of this has yet to be found.



fig 2: seal of Dumaresq Shire Council, c.1906

In 1964 the City of Armidale was granted a coat of arms by the English Kings of Arms to mark the centenary of local government. The arms (fig. 3) feature two bishop's mitres for the city's two cathedrals (traditionally the presence of a cathedral in an urban centre defined a city), a ram's head on a green triangle at the top of the shield, alluding to the city's rural Dumaresqshire hinterland and possibly the roughly chevron-shaped cartography of New England, an open-book representing the city's university, and a rose alluding to the regional and university name of New England. The waratah and coronet of the old seal were transformed into a crest above the shield of a coronet-like wreath of waratah blossoms encircling a tower alluding to Armadail Castle.

The Arms, as described above and illustrated below, were befitting a city which could have become the capital of a new state: a city of learning, of faith, of material wealth, respectful of its cultural heritage, enriched by communal endeavour and civic virtue, facing the future with confidence.



fig. 3: Arms of the City of Armidale (1955)
(The motto alludes to the community spirit of the city's inhabitants.)

The Anglican and Roman Catholic cathedrals are the mother churches of their respective dioceses, and each diocese has its own arms (figs. 4 and 5) that reflect the traditions of Anglican (1953) and Roman Catholic (1904, 1932, 1948) ecclesiastical heraldry rather than the region's heraldry. The Anglican Arms have been formally granted, while the Roman Catholic Arms are assumed. Both are extensively used, and contribute to the diversity of the region's heraldry.



fig 4: Arms of Anglican Diocese of Armidale (1953)

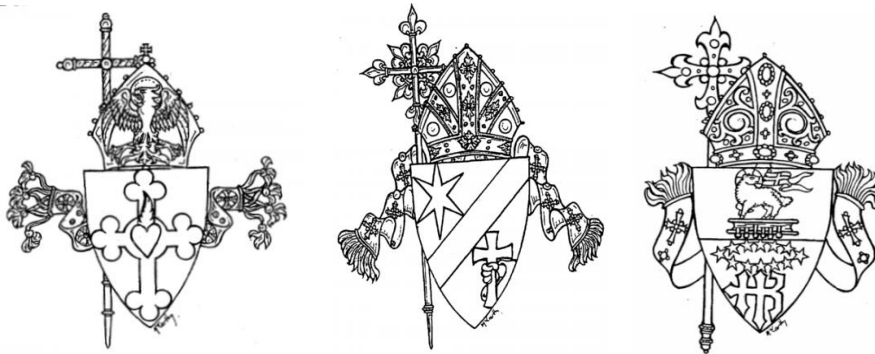


fig 5: Successive Arms of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Armidale (1904, 1932, 1948)

The University of New England was granted arms in 1955 (fig. 6) with symbols alluding to learning (the open book and the cresset, or fire-basket), Australia (southern cross) and New England (rose blossoms); while the supporters allude to the personal heraldry of the university founder, Thomas Forster (a Kings School old boy). In 1993 the Mary White College of the university was granted arms (fig. 7) showing three white rose blossoms above a green chevron on a white field, with obvious allusions to the White family name and the New England region.



fig 6 (left): Arms of the University of New England (1955)
 fig 7 (right): Arms of Mary White College, UNE (1993)

The use of the rose blossom as a regional emblem can be found in other granted public arms in the region such as Lismore (1948).

In 2003 the City of Armidale and Shire of Dumaresq were amalgamated as the Armidale Dumaresq Local Council Area. The new council uses a logo (fig 8) rather than the granted Arms of the former city. The university, college and diocesan arms, however, maintain the city's rich heritage of public heraldry, as does the continuing use of other municipal Arms in the New England region.



fig 8: Armidale Dumaresq Council logo (c2003?)

Acknowledgement of Heraldic Artists

- Fig. 1 WH Pentreath Kinsela
- Fig. 2: unknown
- Fig. 3: Denis Towner
- Fig. 4: Allan K. Chatto
- Fig. 5: Michael McCarthy (all three)
- Fig. 6: Denis Towner
- Fig. 7: A Lyon Court heraldic artist
- Fig. 8: unknown

References

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Prepared by
Bruce Baskerville
(Senior Heritage Officer)
and Stephen Szabo
(Observer, History Advisory Panel)
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