

John the Herald



My niece's husband has an 8th generational great grandfather who is noted for his work in the ancient practice of heraldry. John "The Herald" Guillim published the definitive work, "A Display of Heraldry" in 1610. It has been reprinted many times since and was widely considered at the time to be the "best book extant on the subject."

Its cover page quotes Samuel Pepys in describing the contents as "manifesting a more easy access to the knowledge thereof than has been hitherto published by any, through the benefit of method: where it is now reduced by the study and industry of John Guillim, late pursuivant at arms."

This monumental work displays and explains hundreds of the family crests and coat of arms that helped identify one's heritage, lineage, and legacy. While his was not the first book on the subject (the practice of which predates him by a few centuries), it was and continues to be a work recognized for its historical importance. Though some may disagree.

An entry in the online Encyclopedia Britannica states that Guillim's work not only perpetuates the nonsensical natural history of olden days but is largely responsible for erroneous beliefs about heraldic charges having definite symbolic meanings and their being granted as rewards for valorous deeds—beliefs that today are perpetuated by the vendors of mail-order and shopping mall "family coats of

arms.”

Furthermore, there are many who insist that the credit for the book belongs to a chaplain named Barkham who handed the manuscript to Guillim and allowed for him to publish it under his name as he did not want to use his own. This is a claim still in dispute. The truth may be lost to history.

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