

THE QUARTERINGS OF ASTON OF ASTON, CHESHIRE



In St Peter's church, Aston by Sutton, Cheshire, there is displayed a fine board painted with the genealogy and heraldry of the local lords of the manor – the Aston family. The board measures about four feet square and has a black background with a simple brown oak frame. The date of painting is after 1702, the year the last member of the family to be recorded died. In all it records twenty-four generations from before the time of the Conquest to the reign of Queen Anne. The board was noted in its present position, over the door on the north side of the chancel, by George Ormerod in 1817 when compiling his history of the county.

The Aston coat of arms is *Per chevron Sable and Argent* and it would seem that this coat had been borne by them from at least the time of Edward III, and, given the simple nature of it, from a much earlier period.ⁱ The crest is *an ass's head couped at the neck per pale Argent and Sable*, however in the Heralds' Visitation of 1580 it is shown as plain argent but by 1613 the black and white head was in use.ⁱⁱ

The genealogy starts with a claim that the family are descended of an 'Ernaldus de Estona' father of 'Thomas de Estona ano 984'. These two are followed along the top of the board by a further six generations to Richard Aston who lived in the time of King John, each with an impaled shield of which the female side is blank. Immediately below him on the right-hand side is the first recorded marriage. Richard Aston is said to have married Matilda Walton temp 1282. Ormerod provides the information that she was daughter of William son of Hurberd de Walton.ⁱⁱⁱ The arms of Walton as given here are: *Checky Argent and Azure, a chief engrailed Or*. Next, is the marriage, about 1311, to Rose Macclesfield whom Ormerod calls Rose Throstle of Macclesfield daughter and eventual co-heir of Roger Throstle. The arms *Gules, a cross engrailed Ermine*, are those borne by the Macclesfield family. Their son Richard married Anabella Rode according to the board in the latter years of the reign of Edward III; Ormerod calls her daughter of Eva and sister of William de Rode of Rode. The arms shown are *Argent*,

two quatrefoils Sable, a chief of the second. The date shown on the legend for this marriage, 44 Edw3 (1370-1), must be incorrect. A little later the main line of the Aston family failed and a junior line continued as lords of Aston. The next generation is represented by Robert Aston who married Felicia Hawarden, apparently the daughter of John Hawarden of Chester, hence the arms: *quarterly Argent and sable, a cross moline counter changed within a bordure Ermine.* This marriage is dated to 1334 according to a contract made between the two families and not as indicated on the board '1375'.^{iv} The last marriage on the right side and starting the bottom row is of Sir Richard and Ellen daughter of Geoffrey Dutton with the dates '9 Ric' (1385-6) and '10 Hen 4' (1408-9). The arms given are those of Dutton *quarterly Argent and Gules, in the first a mullet sable and in the second and third a fret Or.* The Aston arms are marked with a gold label presumably to denote that he died in the lifetime of his father which does not seem to be the case, though it was so a generation earlier.

Sir Robert, son of Sir Richard Aston, married Isabel, daughter and heir of John Beeston, and the board shows their impaled arms with the date 1417, the year Sir Robert died. The canting arms of Beeston are: *Argent, a bend between six bees volant Sable.* Third from the right is Sir Richard Aston and Maude Massey' impaled arms. She was a daughter of Peter Massey of Horton whose arms were: *quarterly, Gules and Argent (Or?), in the second a mullet Sable voided.* They married about 1421 and Sir Richard died in 1492; the date '31 Hen 6' (1452-3) appears on the board. The marriage of Thomas Aston with Margaret (Margery) Dutton daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Dutton which occurred about 1467 is celebrated with *Quarterly Argent and Gules, and in the second and third a fret:* Thomas predeceased his father in 1484 which accounts for the label on the Aston coat. Next to be displayed is the marriage of Richard, and Dulcia (Dowse) Warburton, daughter of Peter Warburton of Arley which took place in 1484, when Richard was about sixteen years old: it was this Peter Warburton who built Arley Hall. The arms here are: *Quarterly Argent and Gules, and in the second and third a fret Or a crescent for difference.* In 1512, Thomas Aston married a lady from outside the county, Bridget, daughter of John and sister and heir to Thomas Harewell of Shotery, Warwickshire. The Harewell arms are: *Argent, on a fess nebuly Sable, three hares' heads couped Or.* Thomas died in 1552 to be followed by their son John, who married Margaret daughter of Thomas Ireland of the Hutt, Lancashire in 1546, whose arms were *Gules, six fleur-de-lis, 3,2,1, Argent.* John died in 1573.

In the bottom left-hand corner are the impaled arms of Aston and Mainwaring, *Argent, two bars Gules, a crescent for difference.* In 1569, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Arthur Mainwaring of Ightfield, Shropshire, married Thomas Aston, later Sir Thomas, who was sheriff of Cheshire in 1601 and died in 1613. Above, and next in succession, are the arms of John Aston and his wife Maude Needham. She was daughter to Robert Needham of Shenton, Shropshire, whose arms were *Argent, a bend engrailed Azure between two bucks' heads cabossed Sable.* John Aston was born in 1572. The Aston arms have a gold label suggesting that John died before his father, yet in fact he died two years after in 1615.

Sir Thomas Aston married Magdalene Poultny, daughter of Sir John and sister and co-heir of her brother John Poultny of Misterton, Leicestershire, in 1627. The Poultny arms are: *Argent, a fess dancetty Gules in chief three leopards' heads Sable.* This Thomas was made a baronet in 1635 and became sheriff of Cheshire in 1635. During the Civil War he served on the Royalist side and died in 1645 following an injury sustained whilst attempting to escape captivity in Stafford. The couple had two sons and two daughters who all died in childhood: the second son Thomas is recorded on the board as having died aged five years in 1636.^v Magdalene's death was the subject of a painting by John Souch of Chester (c.1593 -1645). The painting has a portrait of Sir Thomas standing at his wife's deathbed

with son Thomas by his side. This Thomas junior is recorded on the board with a label on the Aston coat, showing that he died before his father, and impaling a blank as he died young and unmarried

The last generation to be represented is that of Sir Willoughby Aston, baronet, was son of Sir Thomas' second marriage to Anne daughter and sole heir to Sir Henry Willoughby of Risley, Derbyshire. He was born on 5 July 1640 and died on 14 December 1702. He married Mary, daughter of John Offley of Madeley, Staffordshire.

The central achievement of arms is set in a very flamboyant cartouche: it contains twenty-nine quarterings with the Badge of Ulster overall in fess point:

1. *Per chevron Sable and Argent.*
2. *Checky Argent and Azure, a chief engrailed Or.* [Walton]
3. *Gules, a cross engrailed Ermine.* [Macclesfield]
4. *Quarterly Argent and Sable, a cross moline counter changed within a bordure Ermine.* [Hawarden]
5. *Quarterly Argent and Gules, in the first mullet sable and in the second and third a fret Or.* [Dutton]
6. *Argent, a bend between six bees volant Sable.* [Beeston]
7. *Per chevron Vert and Ermine, a chevron engrailed counterchanged.* [Stoke].
8. *Gules, a cross Or fretty Sable.*
9. *Sable, a sling between two pheons Or.* [Carden]
10. *Ermine, an escutcheon Gules.* [Hulgreave?]
11. *Quarterly, Gules and Argent (Or?), in the second a mullet Sable voided.* [Massey]
12. *Argent, on a bend Sable three covered cups Or.* [Butler]
13. *Argent, a squirrel sejant Gules.* [Nutshall]
14. *Quarterly Argent and Gules, in the second and third quarters a fret Or.* [Dutton].
15. *Sable, a cross engrailed Ermine.* [Halton]
16. *Argent, on a bend Gules, three escarbuncles Or.* [Thornton]
17. *Vert, a cross engrailed Ermine.* [Kingsley]
18. *Or, a saltire Sable.* [Helsby]
19. *Azure, a chevron between three garbs Or.* [Hatton]
20. *Azure, an estoile Or, within the horns of a crescent Argent.* [Minshull].
21. *Gules, a scythe Argent, in fess point three fleur-de-lis Or.* [Praers?]
22. *Argent, on a fess nebuly Sable, three hares' heads couped Or.* [Harewell].
23. *Argent, a chevron in base a saltire and in chief two crosses paty Sable.*
24. *Argent, three birds? Sable.*
25. *Argent, two bars Gules fretty Or.*
26. *Gules, ten bezants, 4,3,2,1.* [Zouche]
27. *Argent, a lion rampant Gules.* [Leigh of High Leigh]
28. *Quarterly, per fess indented Gules and Argent (Or).* [Bromley]
29. *Per chevron Sable and Argent.*

Crest: *An asses' head couped at the neck per pale Argent and Sable.*

Many of the arms quartered were not those of heiresses and ought not to have been in the achievement, e.g. Walton and Hawarden, etc. The arms that ought to be included, in order of marriage, are: Hatton, Throstle (Macclesfield), Beeston, Massey of Horton, Dutton (with Thornton, Kingsley, Helsby, Hatton, Minshull and Praers?), Harewell and Poultney. Curiously the last coat is not included despite the painting probably having been completed within a generation or so of that marriage.

By way of comparison, the quarterings detailed in the 1580 Heralds' Visitation have some of the quarters listed above. *Quarterly: 1, Per chevron Sable and Argent: 2, Argent, a bend between six bees volant Sable.* [Beeston]; *3, Per chevron Vert and Ermine, a chevron engrailed counterchanged.*

[Stoke]; 4, *Quarterly Argent and Gules, in the second and third quarters a fret Or.* [Dutton]; 5, *Azure, an estoile Or, within the horns of a crescent Argent* [Minshull]; 6, *Argent, on a fesse nebule Sable, three hares' heads Or.* [Harewell]; 7, *Argent, a chevron engrailed Sable, a chief of the second.*

The quarterings detailed in the 1613 Visitation have quarters not included in the above. *Quarterly, and a mullet for cadency in fess-point; 1 & 4, Per chevron Argent and Sable* [Aston]; 2, *Azure, a lion rampant Argent* [Crewe]; 3, *Argent, on a mount Vert a stag lodged Gules.*

ⁱ Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, DCC/17/1, pp 90a-96a; DCC/17/1, fs. 31-32r.

ⁱⁱ J.P. Rylands (ed.) *The Visitation of Cheshire 1580*, Harleian Society, vol. xviii (1882), pp. 15,16; G.J. Armytage & J.P. Rylands (eds.) *The Visitation of Cheshire 1613*, Record Society vol. lviii (1909), pp. 11-13.

ⁱⁱⁱ G.Ormerod, *History of the Palatine of Chester*, (ed. by T. Helsby, 1887), vol. I, p. 721-4.

^{iv} Ormerod, p. 722

^v Ormerod has aged six in 1637.