

THE HERALDRY IN LITTLE MORETON HALL



Little Moreton Hall is a most charming, half-timbered, moated, Tudor house situated in the south-west corner of Cheshire. It is perhaps one of the most famous ‘black and white’ buildings in England and is a Grade I listed building and protected as a Scheduled Monument. The earliest parts of this iconic house date to the first decade of the 16th century to which additions were made throughout the century. It remained the home of the Moreton family until the end of the 17th century when the family let it to tenant farmers, before it was acquired by the National Trust.ⁱ

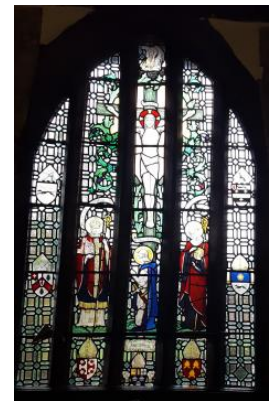
Surprisingly, for a house of this age, there are only a few pieces of heraldry to be observed. These items are either in stained glass windows or as sculptured stone fire mantles. What follows is a description and interpretation of the heraldry at Little Moreton Hall. There is a coat of arms, with crest and mantling, carved into the east side of the bridge across the moat but this is so very worn that it cannot be adequately described though it is likely to have borne the Moreton greyhound device and the wolf’s head crest is just about discernible.

The ancient and basic arms of the Moreton family are: *Argent, a greyhound courant Sable.*ⁱⁱ According to the *Visitation of Cheshire 1580*, the crest should be *a wolf’s head couped Sable, collared with a wreath Vert and Argent.* Because of the greyhound on the shield some versions of the crest, including that in Ormerod’s *History of Cheshire*, have the head of the same dog instead of a wolf.ⁱⁱⁱ Over time the collar formed by a green and silver wreath became a normal green collar with a silver rim to the top and bottom.



CHAPEL

The east window of the chapel is a comparatively recent addition to the building. This window of five lights, was originally plain leaded glass and what can be seen today was installed by Bishop Abraham in 1938, just before he granted the house to the National Trust. Charles Thomas Abraham (1857-1945) was the second Bishop of Derby, from 1909 until 1927, and rector of nearby Astbury, from 1927 until 1935. He was the only son of Rev. Charles Abraham (1814-1903) who was ordained Bishop of Wellington (New Zealand) in 1857. Educated at Keeble College, Oxford, Charles Thomas was ordained in 1881 to the curacy of St. Mary's, Shrewsbury, and then became vicar of All Saints, Shrewsbury (1885), and then vicar of Christ Church, Lichfield (1889). He was granted Little Moreton Hall by a cousin, Elizabeth, the last of the Moreton family, and then proceeded to undertake some necessary restoration. After the house was acquired by the National Trust in 1938, the Bishop moved to Upton Noble, Somerset, where he died in 1945.



The first section has a version of the basic arms of the Moreton family: *Argent, a greyhound courant Sable collared Sable rimmed of the first*, with the crest: *a greyhound's head coupé Argent collared Sable rimmed of the first*. The tinctures used here are incorrect or else have become discoloured through time, as the dog's collar on both shield and crest ought to be green and silver. The crest shown is a greyhound's head, but, as explained before, it ought to be a wolf's head.

Beneath are the arms of the Peperell family: *Argent, a chevron Gules between three pine cones Vert, a on a canton of the second a fleur-de-lis of the first, in fess point the badge of Ulster*, and for crest: *out of a mural coronet Or, an arm in armour embowed rising from a turret among three laurel leaves Proper, holding a staff thereon a flag Argent* (see detail below).^{iv} This represents the family of Peperell of Boston, Massachusetts, USA, who held a baronetcy between 1746 and 1759 which was then recreated in 1774 and continued until 1816; the heiress of that family married into the Palmer family of Wanlip, Leicestershire, who were related to the Bishop (see below). The rank of baronet is indicated by the red hand of Ulster on the escutcheon in the centre of the coat of arms. The crest is at slight variance with authorised versions which gives the arm emerging from the coronet between two laurel branches.^v

Beneath the image of St Chad are the arms of the diocese of Lichfield: *Per pale Gules and Argent a cross potent quadrate between four crosses formy all counterchanged*. Next, in the central light beneath the image of St. Alkmund, the patron saint of Derby, the arms of that see: *Sable, three fountains Proper, on a chief Or a pale Azure charged with the representation of the Virgin Mary seated and bearing the infant Christ on dexter arm Or, between on dexter side a stag lodged Proper and on sinister a cross raguley Vert*. The arms of the see of Derby, which were granted in 1884 are interesting. The 'fountains' represent the three wells at Southwell were the cathedral stands; the Virgin represents the ancient collegiate church of Southwell; the stag represents the county of Derby; and the cross the county of Nottingham. In the next section, below the image of St Werburgh, the arms of the see of Chester: *Gules, three mitres Or*.

The upper coat of arms in the fifth light represents the Bishop's mother's family, the Palmers of Wanlip Hall, Leicestershire: *Argent, on two bars sable, three trefoils, 2 and 1, slipped of the field, in chief a greyhound courant of the second collared or, in dexter chief the Badge of Ulster*, with the crest: *on a mound Vert, a greyhound sitting sable, charged on the shoulder with a trefoil slipped Or* (see detail below).^{vi} Bishop Abraham's mother was Caroline Harriet Palmer, daughter of Sir Charles Thomas Hudson Palmer, baronet. The dog in the crest appears to floating above the wreath as the colour of the mound upon which it ought to sit has faded.

The final coat in this window is: *Argent, a greyhound courant sable, on a chief Azure a sun in splendour Or*, with a mitre in place of a crest. This represents the Bishop himself being a combination of the arms of Moreton and that of Abraham.

At the head of the central light of the window is the image of a pelican on its nest feeding its young the significance of which is not known.

THE GREAT HALL

In the bay window of the great hall there is a full coat of arms of the Brereton family dating from about 1560. It displays: Quarterly: 1, *Argent, two bars Sable* [Brereton]; 2, *Or, a cross flory Azure* [Malpas]; 3, *Argent, an eagle displayed Sable* [Bruyn]; 4, *Gules, two lions passant in pale Argent, a label of three points of the second* [Strange] overall an *escutcheon of pretence, Sable, a chevron between three bull's heads cabossed Argent* [Bulkeley or Wright]. The Brereton crest is displayed as *a bear's head erased Sable, muzzled Argent*. (See detail below)



The Brereton arms are no doubt here to represent the marriage of William Moreton (c.1490-1525) to Alice, daughter of Sir Andrew Brereton of Brereton, early in the 16th century. The inclusion of the arms in pretence is curious as, so far as I am aware, there is no known marriage of a Brereton to either a Bulkeley or a Wright heiress and subsequently the Moreton family did not quarter Bulkeley or Wright. Of all of the marriages in the family why is it that this particular is displayed: is it the case that other marriages were illustrated heraldically which have been lost?

There are a few points of note regarding this armorial display. First, no marks of cadency are shown suggesting it represents the main line of the Brereton clan. The background to the second quarter ought to be *Argent*. Third, the third quarter which seems to be Bruyn is rarely shown in Brereton quarterings, but does occur in the arms of the Breretons of Ashley in 1580. Next, the label in the Strange quarter ought to be *Or*, though admittedly whenever the label appears in the Strange family's coat there seem to be other differences of tincture. Finally, the bear's head seems to be strewn with white spots, but this is probably a result of the painting technique. Its muzzle has bezants on the strapwork, but whether this is again just stylisation or intentional is not known – certainly there are no other references to the muzzle being *bezanty* in any other heraldic sources.

In Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* there is a description of the Brereton arms in the window as recorded by Dr. Renaud F.S.A., in the mid-19th century and published in the *Manchester Guardian*, which is at slight variance to what may be seen today. First, the Brereton quarter was apparently charged with a canton and the eagle was charged with an escutcheon.^{vii} The presence of both items are curious. There are no other known cases of a canton being used on the Brereton coat and today there is certainly no evidence of such a charge. As regards the shield placed on the eagle, is it possible that Renaud mistook the shape of the eagle's body and thought it was a shield? If any of these items were painted onto the glass when Renaud made his observation, then they have, over time, become erased.

GREAT PARLOUR

In the Great Parlour the arms of the Moreton family are shown in the east window, along with other heraldic panels, all thought to date about 1560. The escutcheon in the first panel has: *Argent, a greyhound rampant Sable, collared Or*. The crest is *a wolf's head erased Argent*. The usual arms of the Moreton family displays a black greyhound running (*courant*), with a crest of a black wolf's head with a collar formed from a silver and green twisted wreath. Here the dog is up on its hind legs, the black effect seems to have eroded away in most places leaving the animal almost colourless, and the head on the crest has no collar.



The next panel has a red rose beneath a royal crown, representing the royal house of Tudor. The coat of arms of Moreton is depicted next. *Argent, a greyhound courant Sable, collared Argent*, but again the collar ought to be green and silver – again perhaps it was at one time.

The last panel has a black, erased wolf's head with a colourless wreath around the neck. Beneath are the intertwined letters 'A' and 'V', forming a 'W' on top of an 'M' referring to William Moreton who died in June 1563. These initials are followed by an unknown character, which is partly obscured by the lead, above a cask, both presumably representing a rebus of the family name – the cask being a 'tun' and a pun on the last element of the surname.

The bay window has a repeat of the first coat of arms in the large window with the greyhound on its hind legs.

The main feature of this room is the stone fireplace with, in the centre of the overmantel, the Royal Arms: Quarterly, 1&4 *France*, 2&3 *England*, these are surrounded by the Garter with the legend 'HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE'; the supporters are a lion for England and a red dragon for Wales. Flanked by statuesque terms, these are the arms of Queen Elizabeth I. Faint traces of colour and gilding survive.

GALLERY CHAMBER

In the small room over the porch and accessed from the Long Gallery there is a plaster fireplace with the arms of the Moreton family with wolf's head crest, helmet and mantling between terms depicting Justice and Prudence. The painting of the arms in the first and fourth quarters is no longer visible, but the cross in the other two quarters is still evident being in relief. These were the arms representing the 14th century marriage of John Moreton and Margaret daughter of Jordan de Macclesfield, who became heiress of her brother John.^{viii} These quartered arms were then used by successive generations. They ought to show: Quarterly, 1&4, *Argent, a greyhound courant Sable collared Vert* [Moreton], 2&3, *Gules, a cross engrailed Ermine* (see detail below).



SOME HERALDIC DETAILS

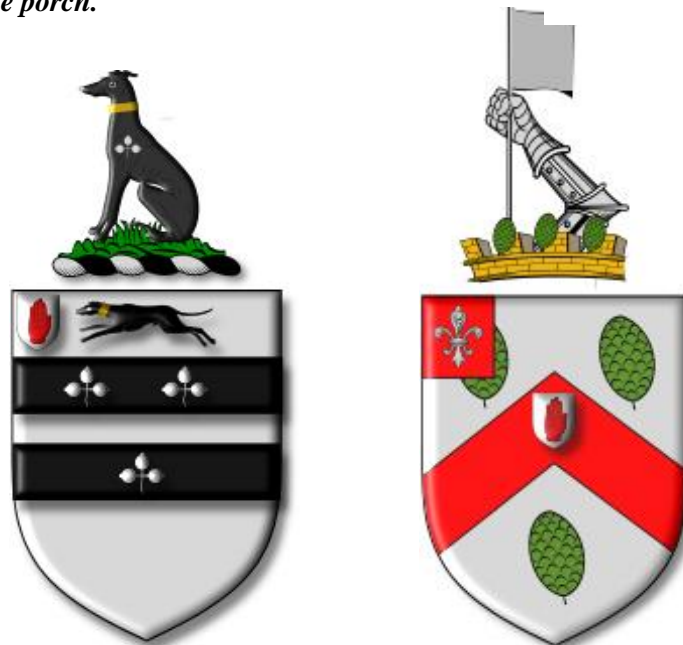
For clarity, the armorial details pictured below omit helmets and mantling.



The quartered arms of Moreton and Macclesfield, which would have appeared on the mantelpiece in the room over the porch.

The quartered arms of Brereton with Bulkeley in pretence, from the window in the Great Hall.

A version of the Moreton arms as displayed in the windows of the Great Parlour



The arms of Peperell and Palmer as shown in the window of the Chapel.

GLOSSARY OF SOME COMMON HERALDIC TERMS.

Argent – The colour/tincture of silver (represented as white).

Azure – The colour/tincture of blue.

Badge of Ulster – a small shield displaying a red hand granted to baronets.

Blazon – A written description of a coat of arms in heraldic terms.

Canton – a small square in the top-left corner of the shield.

Chevron – An inverted V shape.

Escutcheon of pretence – a small shield containing the arms of an heraldic heiress displayed during the time of marriage. Subsequent generations then quarter the arms.

Gules – The colour/tincture of red.

Impaled – The placing of two coats of arms side by side to indicate a marriage.

Label – A bar with descending tags placed at the top of a shield to denote a first son of the family.

Or – The colour/tincture of gold (yellow).

Pale – A broad vertical stripe.

Quarterly – The dividing of a shield into four or more parts each indicating a marriage to an heiress.

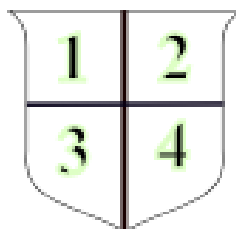
Sable – The colour/tincture of black.

Vert – The colour/tincture of green

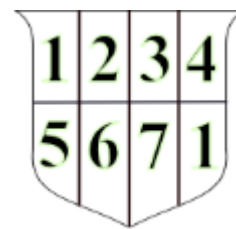
For those not familiar with heraldry with impaled arms the husband's coat of arms is to the left. With a quartered coat the principal family is always top left and sometimes repeated bottom right with the wife as heiress in the second and third. With numerous 'quarters' each will represent heiress back through time and various preceding heiresses and the arms of each of their fathers' ancestors in order of acquisition. For the purposes of symmetry in a multi-quartered shield, the first quarter is often repeated as the final quarter. Sometimes a quarter itself may be impaled or quartered to show two or more coats.



Example of an impaled coat of arms.



Example of a quartered coat of arms.



Example of a multi-quartered coat of arms.

ⁱ I am indebted to Jill Owen of the National Trust, archivist and researcher at Little Moreton Hall, for reviewing this article, making some valuable remarks and providing the photograph which is courtesy of the National Trust.

ⁱⁱ Ormerod gives a greyhound *statant*, but those are the arms of Holford of Holford, see G. Ormerod, *History of the County Palatine of Chester*, vol III, p.50.

ⁱⁱⁱ J.P. Rylands (ed.), *The Visitation of Cheshire*, Harleian Society (1882), p. 182.

^{iv} J.W.Papworth, *An Ordinary of British Armorial* (1874), p.470

^v J. Burke, *General Armory of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1847).

^{vi} Papworth, p.35

^{vii} Ormerod, III, p.50 (footnote)

^{viii} The marriage was subject to a covenant in 1329 and a further agreement in 1433, Ormerod, III, pp. 50, 479.