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The Livery Collars of Edward IV

John Malden

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The use of ornamental collars as a sign of chivalry or service seems to date back to the 14th century. Emerging orders of chivalry, such as the Golden Fleece, incorporated an ornamental collar as part of the regalia of the order. A notable exception to this custom was the Order of the Garter which did not use a collar until the beginning of the 16th century. Not all orders of chivalry were instituted by the crown. There were a number of religious groups and guilds, some of whom used distinctive collars.

King Henry V (1399–1412) of England ordered an ornate collar for himself with the design of interlocking SS. Subsequently, he used this design as a livery collar for his household. There has been considerable debate as to the meaning of these letters, but in the original order for the collar, and on a much later ring of the 15th century found at Middleham in Yorkshire, it is clear that the letter S stood for 'Souvenez' or 'Remember me'.

By the reign of Henry VI (1422–1460), collars of SS were recognised as marking those in Royal service. The use of these collars continued until the removal of Henry VI by Edward IV (1460–1483). They reappeared in the reign of Henry VIII (1509–1546). Collars of SS are still used to this day by senior Officers of State in the United Kingdom, such as the Lord Chancellor and the Kings and Heralds of Arms.

When Edward IV seized the English throne in 1460, he introduced a totally different design of collar. As with the collars of SS, the new design had a religious basis, and helped perpetuate the legend of the Wars of the Roses, where Edward's Yorkist faction used a white rose, and Henry's Lancastrian faction a red one.

Edward chose alternating suns and roses as the design for his collar. The rose is one of the traditional symbols of the Virgin Mary, and so the collar indicates 'the Son of Mary'. During the fifteenth century, if not earlier, there were many different cults or religious groups venerating the Virgin Mary. It would be natural to use the rose symbol for these groups. The titular head of such a group would have been the Pope, and so a rose of a particular colour, let us say red, could have been readily associated with the cult of the Virgin supported by that Pope. The 14th and 15th centuries saw the Great Schism, with a Pope in Rome and an Anti-Pope in Avignon. Was it the case that some supporters of the Anti-Pope instituted their own cult of the Virgin Mary, still using the rose as their symbol, but choosing a different colour, let us say white? The most powerful families in the land could be expected to support the one or the other of these cults, with a natural progression to mutual animosity and warfare. Is this the origin of the Lancastrians using a red rose, and the Yorkists a white rose?

The use of livery collars and livery badges became widespread. It is not clear whether the collars were only used as a mark of service or as a reward from the King – an honour below knighthood, for example. Representations of collars can be found on alabaster effigies, brass monuments, stained glass windows and devotional paintings. Eighty-four examples of Edward IV's collars of suns and roses have been found in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Belgium.

These collars appear in two distinctive forms. The first seems to have been formed of small studs of alternating suns and roses on a leather or material backing. The second has large inter-

linked suns and roses without backing. Within these two distinctive forms, there are slight variations. This may be because the collars were made at different times by different craftsmen. It is not known what metal was used for the suns and roses, nor to what extent the elements might have been enamelled. That the roses were white can clearly be seen in the John Donne triptych in the National Gallery in London, where the two donors, Sir John and Lady Donne are both wearing a suns and roses collar with the white Lion of March as a pendant. This lion, the family badge of Edward IV, is the usual pendant that appears on the collar, though occasionally there are examples with a cross, a rose et cetera. The Donne triptych, which was almost certainly painted in Brugges, where Edward IV fled when Henry VI briefly regained the throne in 1470/1, clearly shows a collar of the linked type.

In Brugges, the grave of Jos de Bul, had a brass showing a collar of suns and roses with a lion pendant. Edward granted de Bul revenues from Southampton as a reward for unspecified services. At the same time Anselm Adornes, one of the leading merchants in Brugges, was acting as a diplomat with strong connections with the Scottish court of James III (1460–1488). James presented Adornes with a Unicorn collar formed of linked horse bridles and pendant unicorn. This collar is shown on Adornes' tomb in the Jerusalem Kirk in Brugges, and is the only known example of this collar. In the stained glass of the church, which is a later eighteenth century addition, presumably copying the 15th century original, the arms of Adornes are depicted surrounded by the Unicorn collar. Also in the stained glass are the arms of Adornes' wife, Margaret van de Bank, which are surrounded by a collar of suns and roses. It is likely that Margaret had close contact with Charles the Bold's wife, the sister of Edward IV.

Most of the 82 examples of suns and roses collars that have been traced in the United Kingdom and Ireland, appear on the alabaster tombs of senior members of Edward IV's household, with both forms being clearly shown. On effigies in Harewood Church, Yorkshire, the collar worn by a member of the Gascoigne family shows traces of the original paint. From this we can assume that the backing material was black – possibly leather or velvet – with white roses and gilded suns. The terminals attaching the Lion of March pendant are of special interest because they are engraved IHS. We know that this member of the Gascoigne family was also a member of the Corpus Christi Guild of York, which used this symbolism on their seal. It would appear, therefore, that some artistic licence was allowed – or taken – as to details and pendants used on these livery collars.

The possible religious theme is also shown in stained glass in Wingfield Church, Norfolk, where the image of Sir Richard Wingfield shows a suns and roses collar on a ribbon with a pendant stag within an enclosure. This image of the hart is widely assumed to be a personal badge of Richard II, and can be seen in the Wilton Diptych in the National Gallery in London. However, it is more likely to refer to a religious cult of the sacred heart – the animal punning the name.

Most alabaster effigies were originally fully coloured, as is shown by the fine example for Sir Richard Harcourt at Stanton Harcourt. He lies in the full robes of the Order of the Garter and wears a linked type collar of suns and roses. The finest example is in Arundel Church, Sussex, where the effigy of the Countess shows extensive traces of wax overlay detail and colouring. This remarkable survival shows a collar of the linked type, with the Arundel family badge of a sprig of oak leaves between the suns and roses. The pendant, for some reason, has been gouged out of the effigy. Examples of the collar can be found on effigies as far north as Millom, in Cumbria, and as far west as Dublin.

Richard III (1483–85) carried on using the suns and roses design, but with a boar as the pendant. Only two examples of this type of collar are known. The first of these boar pendants, on the wooden effigy of the Earl of Westmoreland in Brancepeth Church, County Durham, disappeared many years ago. Traces of the (wax/plaster?) collars of suns and roses that had been applied to the wooden effigies of the Earl and his Countess still remained. Both these effigies were destroyed recently when vandals set fire to the church and completely destroyed it.

The only surviving example of the boar pendant is on a Fitzherbert effigy in Norbury Church, Derbyshire, which contains two effigies from the 15th century. The first shows Sir Ralph Fitzherbert wearing the ribbon type collar with a lion pendant. What is more interesting, is that the weepers on the tomb are his children. His eldest sons, Nicholas and John,

are both shown wearing the suns and roses collar. The second effigy, to Nicholas Fitzherbert, clearly shows the collar with a boar pendant. John Fitzherbert was a leading administrator at the court of Edward IV.

Following the death of Richard III, Henry VI (1485–1508) attempted reconciliation with his former enemies by marrying one of Edward IV's daughters. His attempts extended to his livery collars which were composed of alternate red and white roses. There is an illustration of a Knight of the Bath preparing for his installation, wearing one of these collars. By the time of Henry VIII (1509–1546), the alternating roses were merged, one on top of each other into the 'Tudor' rose, and it is this design that Henry used when he introduced a collar for the Order of the Garter.

Address

John Malden
Try Malden Limited
5 Greenlaw Avenue, GB–Paisley PAI 3 RB
try.malden@virgin.net