

## ORIGINS AND DISTRIBUTION

who married a descendant of Rhirid Flaidd. In the poem he compares the coats of arms of the two families as follows:

From Gwyneth there is gain for you,  
From the two Gwents arms in the same form,  
Three arrow-heads have gone overall,  
Three wolves' heads of one stock were best.

The last two lines in Welsh show the play on words better:

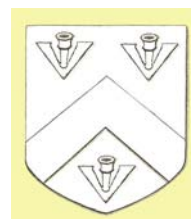
Tri phenn saeth a aeth uwch oll.  
Tri phenn blaid unwreid oedd well.<sup>39</sup>

Bearing in mind the date of the Welsh and the problems of translating poetry, the third line can mean that the three arrowheads are the uppermost charge on the shield ('overall'). This implies three levels, which are from the bottom up: a) field, b) ordinary and then, c) charges, in this case three arrowheads. It does not tell us what this ordinary is (e.g. bend, cross, chevron), and in any case this uncertainty is compounded by the statement two 'arms in the same form'. Since the arms of Rhirid Flaidd are given with an ordinary in the blazon, which is a chevron between three wolves' heads, this would imply that Adam Gwent bore a chevron between three arrowheads, as in Coat 2.

Working on the 'overall' basis and using a chevron as the ordinary, as in versions of Rhirid Flaidd, the form of the arms would look like the next example coat, Coat 3. This confusion is made worse since the form of arms of Rhirid Flaidd given by two other bards does not mention the chevron.<sup>40</sup> In this case, if Adam Gwent's arms were in the same form, we would see three arrowheads directly on the field, as in Coat 4. Either way there is a difference between this blazon and that shown by Bradney where the arrowheads or phaeons are on a bend.<sup>41</sup> This is the coat (Coat 5) said to belong to Adam ab Ifor of Gwent. I have found no indication that the two Adams are linked in spite of this use of arrowheads and I do wonder if the epithet 'Gwent' applied to Adam ap Iorwerth, the Steward, is the result of a confusion with Adam ab Ifor of Gwent. The difference between an arrowhead and



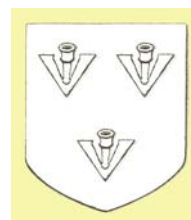
Coat 1



Coat 2



Coat 3



Coat 4

<sup>39</sup> Siddons, vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> Siddons, vol. 2, p. 485.

<sup>41</sup> Bradney, vol. 3, part 2, p. 218.



Coat 5



Coat 6



Coat 7

a phaeon in heraldic usage is that the phaeon is a specialist form of arrowhead in which the inner edges of the barbs are indented, as shown in the ab Ifor arms. Whether this distribution would have been consistently made in the period we are interested in is questionable. Confusion has, perhaps, resulted because of the use of ‘phenn’ in Lewis Glyn Cothi’s ode, which in both translations, as used by Siddons and Bradney, is translated as ‘head’. We may, perhaps, scent some poetical licence or mistranslation. Possibly this use of arrows or phaeons relates to some tradition of common descent from Bleddyn ap Maenyrch who died in 1093 and whose arms are therefore retrospectively attributed. Perhaps, also, this is the root of the apparently mythical Bleddyn Broadspear? The coat ‘most borne by his descendants’<sup>42</sup> is in the form of a chevron between three spearheads, similar to the form we have described above, with the substitution of spearheads for arrowheads. However, there is a link in another direction, as the family of Thomas of Bertholey did use three arrows (Coat 6) and we remember the presence at Bertholey of Griffin ap Meurig ap Adam.<sup>43</sup> As another possible hint of links to south-west Wales, Siddons refers to the Adames family of Cardiganshire as carrying three spearheads, argent.<sup>44</sup> In this merry-go-round of tradition and fact we find Bradney reporting that this Thomas family has a descent from Williams of Trefaldu. We then find on the opposite page the arms of Kemeys of Bertholey with arms ‘in the same form’ (Coat 7).<sup>45</sup> We also learn from Bradney that the wife of Stephen de

Camais may have been a daughter of Adam Gwent and that the Kemeys family may have adapted Adam’s coat of arms!<sup>46</sup> Coat 7 is one of three recorded by Siddons,<sup>47</sup> so the Kemeys family have used this version, one with a chevron between three phaeons and a third with just three phaeons and no chevron, thus covering all ‘forms’ we deduced from Lewis’s ode. Perhaps they had the same trouble interpreting the poem! This blazon is a field, vert (green) and on a chevron, argent (silver) three phaeons, sable (black). Clearly, when we are looking at the late medieval period most of the available heraldic information presents us with a quagmire of tradition and fiction. We are best to treat this with extreme caution and as no more than folklore in which we may hunt for a possible grain of truth.

<sup>42</sup> Siddons, vol. 2, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> See Family Tree 1, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Siddons, vol. 2, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Bradney, vol. 3, part 2, p. 155.

<sup>46</sup> Bradney, vol. 3, part 2, p. 174.

<sup>47</sup> Siddons, vol 2, p. 302.