

# N. Ramsay (ed.) *Heralds and Heraldry in Shakespeare's England*

Shaun Tyas, Donington (2014), £40. Available at a discounted price from [www.early-carving.com](http://www.early-carving.com)

Since coats of arms are often used to date or identify owners of objects, many of the twelve chapters of this book by a group of heraldry specialists will be of potential interest to RFS members.

Grants of arms peaked between the 1560s and 1610s. This is attributed to alarm about social disorder by Richard Cust in his chapter 'Heraldry and the gentry community in Shakespeare's England and to the rise of 'new men' seeking social recognition by Roger Kuin in his chapter 'Colours of continuity: the heraldic funeral'. But the heralds who were responsible for drawing up coats of arms were cross-pressured; unless they could find 'evidence' of the entitlement of a family to a coat of arms they were not paid. The result is that, as John Baker points out in his chapter 'Tudor pedigree rolls and their uses', carefully drawn up pedigree rolls represent claims not facts. For Richard Cust, having arms was a symbol of virtue and an expression of differentiation within the gentry. Tara Hamling's chapter 'Wanting arms': heraldic decoration of lesser houses' is of particular interest. It discusses heraldic decoration on walls, ceilings and windows at Chastleton (where they are bogus), Gilling Castle and Canons Ashby and decorative textiles, bedsteads, plate and books. She emphasises that the use of royal arms was a sign of good citizenship, not of royal ownership or connection. There are also three chapters on references to heraldry in Shakespeare.

The book usefully describes the social context of heraldry. It is lavishly produced on art paper and has 80 mainly colour illustrations. Its message is that coats of arms have to be viewed with caution; their symbolic function was greater than their descriptive accuracy.

*Chris Pickvance*