

SYMBOLS OF SOVEREIGNTY

Douglas J. Blain

In Canadian legislative chambers there are displayed, by ancient tradition, two symbols of sovereignty. The first, vital to the existence and function of a legislative chamber is the mace, symbol of royal and legislative power. The second symbol which is complementary to the mace but without its popular significance is the Arms of Sovereign. Although they are less well known, arms and seals reflect principles of Canada's past and continuing constitutional development. This article describes a recent Alberta experience relating to the display of the Arms of the Sovereign.

In 1980 to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Province of Alberta the City of Edmonton presented to the Legislative Assembly an arched canopy to the Speaker's Chair. In order to install this very handsome gift it was necessary to remove the Royal Arms which, in the form of an enamelled plaque in high relief, had been displayed above the Speaker's Chair since 1911. It was accordingly decided that this plaque should be replaced by a carving of the Royal Arms mounted on the arch of the presentation canopy as an integral part of the structure. The question then arose as to what Arms were proper to be displayed and an opinion was sought by the Speaker from the Officers of the Assembly.

Research and inquiry by the Table officials indicated that the Royal Arms are displayed in the majority of, if not all, Canadian Legislative Chambers. The officials also concluded that provincial Legislative Assembly Chambers are Royal Chambers in that the Speaker's Chair is the Throne of the Lieutenant Governor representing the Sovereign and thus presumably of the Sovereign herself so that it is only proper that the Sovereign's Arms should be displayed. After close scrutiny it was established that the Arms installed above the Speaker's Chair in 1911 were *the Royal Arms of General Purpose* borne for Canada from 1837 to 1921 as described by Dr. Conrad Swan, York Herald of the College of Arms of the United Kingdom, in his book *Canada: Symbols of Sovereignty*.

Further reference to Dr. Swan's book established that in 1921 the present Arms of Canada properly described by the York Herald as *Armorial Bearings of Dominion and Sovereignty and General Purpose* were approved by His Majesty King George V. These arms were assumed by the present Sovereign on her accession as Queen in right of Canada. It was the Table Officers' view, therefore, that upon removal of the old arms then displayed in the Legislative Chamber they should be replaced by these *Armorial Bearings of Dominion and Sovereignty and General Purpose* which would be incorporated in the carving of the presentation canopy for the Speaker's Chair.

In order to support these conclusions two conversations were held with officers of the College of Arms in London. The first, by telephone with Mr. Glyn-Jones, Blue Mantle Pursuivant, elicited concurrence in the conclusion described above. A subsequent letter of confirmation, however, was not completely unequivocal. A meeting was then arranged between the author and Dr. Swan.

I was warmly received by Dr. Swan and was able to place before him in detail and at leisure, the circumstances prompting my visit. Dr. Swan listened attentively to all I had to say. Before giving his opinion he asked two questions: Was the location of the existing arms such that they could, for purposes of history, be retained as part of the arch? Was the colouring or composition, of the existing arms such that they would not clash with

Douglas J. Blain is Clerk Assistant in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. This article is based on a paper delivered to the annual meeting of Canadian Clerks-at-the-Table in Charlottetown in September 1980.

the structure of the arch? My answer in both instances was in the negative.

On receiving my reply, Dr. Swan gave his opinion that as it was necessary to replace the existing arms that it was proper that they should be replaced by the arms proclaimed by King George V in 1921 and assumed by the present sovereign on Her accession. His opinion was unequivocal and he emphasized it by stressing that these arms are borne by the Sovereign as Queen in right of Canada.

Dr. Swan then reviewed with me the relevant portion of his definitive work on symbols of sovereignty and drew my attention to a point which I had overlooked in my own research. On the accession of Queen Elizabeth II the new Great Seal of Canada displayed the same

arms as those incorporated in the arch above the Speaker's Chair as did the Great Seal of Canada of King George VI.

In view of the definitive opinion rendered by Dr. Swan, invested as it is by the authority of his position as York Herald, I concluded that the original analysis was correct in every detail and that the Arms now displayed above the Speaker's Chair are true and proper to be so displayed.

The conclusions of the Officers of the Assembly were accepted by the Speaker and the *Armorial Bearings of Dominion and Sovereignty and General Purpose* of Queen Elizabeth II are now incorporated in the canopy above the Speaker's Chair.

