

## A Court Leet Manorial Chain – Martin Goldstraw

On the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011 a jewel of historical and heraldic importance was sold at the auction house of Bonhams of Chester, the hammer falling at a more than respectable £13,200 including buyer's premium. Auction number 18870 saw Lot 342 described in the catalogue as "A 15ct gold and enamel Court Leet Manorial Chain by Elkington & Co., Birmingham 1912. Composed of four enamelled armorial crests [sic] for Booth, Ashton (with an added blue chevron), Grey and Ashton with two Red Roses of Lancaster between, connected by scroll links, the central panel with the Earls coronet supporting an enamel armorial for the Earl of Stamford and Warrington with depictions of the Mace and Sword behind, cased, weight 750gms".



This magnificent jewel is worthy of a closer examination and analysis. Let us start with the pendant jewel described by Bonhams as "enamel armorial for the Earl of Stamford and Warrington with depictions of the Mace and Sword behind". The date MCMXI indicates 1911 which would confirm the reported date of manufacture in 1912 by Elkington & Co however, if these arms are contemporary with their date, they would not be those of the Earl of Stamford and Warrington; the Warrington earldom became extinct in 1883 upon the death of George Grey 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Stamford and 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Warrington<sup>1</sup>. Upon George's death, his other two titles, the Barony of Grey of Groby and the Earldom of Stamford, passed to his third cousin once removed, the Revd Harry Grey, 8th Earl of Stamford who

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<sup>1</sup> Debrett's Peerage Baronetage Knightage and Companionage.

lived in Cape Colony in Africa<sup>2</sup>. Taking the date of 1911, this would then lead us to Roger Grey, 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Stamford and 11<sup>th</sup> Baron Grey of Groby who succeeded to the titles in 1910 at the age of only thirteen. The 10<sup>th</sup> Earl never married and with his death, in 1976, the titles became extinct; it is he who left his ancestral home and estate, Dunham Massey, to the National Trust<sup>3</sup>.



The arms illustrated so beautifully on the pendant jewel are Quarterly of four; 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, Barry of six Argent and Azure [Grey of Groby], 2<sup>nd</sup> Argent, three boars' heads erect and erased Sable, langued

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<sup>2</sup> Meet the family at Dunham Massey; National Trust

<sup>3</sup> Meet the family at Dunham Massey; National Trust

Gules [Booth of Dunham] 3<sup>rd</sup> Argent, a mullet Sable pierced of the field [Ashton]<sup>4</sup>. The crest, motto and supporters are those of the Stamford Earldom<sup>5</sup>. Behind the achievement we see a crossed sword and mace which, presumably, indicate governance and/or manorial office. Courts Baron and Leet were administered not by the Lord of the manor but by his jury presided over by the Steward<sup>6</sup> so this chain of office was perhaps worn not by the Earl himself but by his Steward who was chief official and acted as judge; it would be quite a show of wealth and status when worn, even if only ceremoniously.



Immediately above and supporting the pendant jewel is an escutcheon of the Ashton arms upon which sits the coronet of an Earl and, if it is correct that this is “A Court Leet Manorial Chain”, it may be that this achievement is central to the whole jewel because Ashton under Lyne (Lancashire) fell within the jurisdiction of the Court Leet held for the barony of Dunham Massey, and a separate court baron was held for this manor<sup>7</sup>. It is not immediately obvious to the writer why the Aston shield should of itself feature the coronet of Earl but all of the smaller escutcheons are quarterings of the main achievement.

<sup>4</sup> Heralds Visitations of Cheshire 1580 Harleian Society

<sup>5</sup> Debret's Peerage Baronetage Knightage and Companionage 1922

<sup>6</sup> The Practice of Courts Leet and Courts Baron, published from the manuscripts of Sir William Scroggs, Lord Chief Justice of England.

<sup>7</sup> A History of the County of Lancaster, Farrer and Brownbill 1911



The final coat of arms, that which is shown behind the wearer when worn, is another Ashton achievement but this one has Argent a chevron engrailed Azure as an escutcheon of pretence. These are the arms of Sir Thomas Assheton with the arms of Ralph Staley [Stayley of Mottram in Lang] in pretence. Sir Ralph Staley had no male heirs and after his death his daughter, Elizabeth Staley, married Sir Thomas Assheton, thus uniting the manors of Ashton and Staley. Elizabeth and Thomas had no sons. Margaret, the eldest of their two daughters married Sir William Booth of Dunham Massey<sup>8</sup>.



Stayley remained in the ownership of the Earls of Stamford until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century with the whole property being administered from the Ashton Estate Office<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> A History of the County of Lancaster, Farrer and Brownbill 1911

<sup>9</sup> Grey (Stamford) of Dunham Massey Papers: Sections 1-3 Reference Number: EGR1-3 Held At: The University of Manchester Library



The addition of the red roses leaves us in no doubt that this manorial jurisdiction was in the County of Lancashire<sup>10</sup>. We know that this jewel, or chain of office, bears the date 1911 and (I am informed) that it is hallmarked for the year 1912, but at that time the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Stamford was in his very early teens and would not begin to administer his vast estates until he reached his majority in 1917. It is perhaps then reasonable to assume that the object of our investigation may have actually been commissioned from Elkington & Co. by his father, the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl who died in his 60<sup>th</sup> year having only had the opportunity to spend four years in residence at Dunham Massey. The 9<sup>th</sup> Earl had great wealth and vast estates (Dunham Massey alone was over 3000 acres or 12 square kilometres) and he was Lord of a number of manors<sup>11</sup>; it would seem, from the arms displayed upon this chain, that some importance was placed in those manors inherited from Sir Thomas Assheton and it is quite possible that the Court Leet was that of the manor of Ashton which still held its manor courts every six months well into the twentieth century.

Staley, although administratively in Cheshire, was once a former hamlet in Ashton and its manor was owned by the Grey family until the extinction of the Earldom on the death of Roger Grey, 10th Earl of Stamford in 1976 when the family estates were all sold<sup>12</sup>. To this day, the connection with the family is marked with Stamford Street, Grey Street, Groby Street, Stamford Park, Stamford Golf Club and two Stamford Arms public houses in Stalybridge all being named after the Grey family<sup>13</sup>.

My thanks are extended to Bonhams of Chester for their permission to use the images and in particular to Andrew Spicer, Head of Department, North West England, Jewellery and Silver, who kindly dealt with my enquiries. Mr. Spicer would have us know that the item in question, unfortunately, has passed to a collector who does not reside in the UK so it is not available for public viewing.

Published in The Heraldry Gazette, the official newsletter of The Heraldry Society, December 2014.

<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Rose\\_of\\_Lancaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Rose_of_Lancaster)

<sup>11</sup> Grey (Stamford) of Dunham Massey Papers: Sections 1-3 Reference Number: EGR1-3 Held At: The University of Manchester Library

<sup>12</sup> Grey (Stamford) of Dunham Massey Papers: Sections 1-3 Reference Number: EGR1-3 Held At: The University of Manchester Library

<sup>13</sup> A-Z Big Manchester Street Atlas