

The Association of British Counties

The Surrey Checks:
Development of a Traditional Emblem and County Flag

by

Philip S. Tibbetts

Dedication

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This essay is part of a series of investigations, on behalf of the Association of British Counties, looking into the history of county emblems. The purpose of this essay is to prove the validity of the famous gold and blue checks associated with the county of Surrey as the county emblem and make the case for their registration as a traditional county flag. To achieve that aim this report will investigate both the ancient origins of this symbol, its association with the county of Surrey and its continued modern legacy and tradition.

As with many county emblems, such as the white rose of Yorkshireⁱ, the checks that are so associated with Surrey come from the historic aristocracy of the county – in this case the famous de Warenne family. The de Warenne family originated in Normandy and were the first dynasty to hold the Earldom of Surrey from when it was created by William the Conqueror in 1088AD, through to the end of the FitzAlan line in 1415ADⁱⁱ.

The first evidence of the de Warenne usage of the famous checks comes from the heraldic ‘Glover’s Roll’ of arms. This roll dates from around 1253-8AD although it may have been based on an earlier, now lost, roll from around 1240ⁱⁱⁱ, which would make it one of the earliest rolls of arms and thus one of the first instances of formal heraldry. The roll itself does contain some tricked depictions of arms but those of de Warenne are described thusly: “Le Counte de Garenne escheque d'or & d'Azur”^{iv}.

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Rose_of_York

ⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_of_Surrey

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.internationalheraldry.com/rolls.htm>

^{iv} George J Armytage ed ‘Glover's Roll of the Reign of King Henry III’ (Smith, 1868) p1

This translates as ‘The Count [Earl] of Warenne, checks of gold and blue’, Garenne being an earlier form of the name Warenne^v, which is a clear description of the same pattern known today.

The de Warenne arms also feature in a number of other mediæval rolls of arms including: the Walford Roll (c1275AD), The Camden Roll (c1280AD), St George’s Roll (c1285AD) and The Falkirk Roll (1298AD)^{vi}.

However potentially the most intriguing and important appearance for the de Warenne arms in the context of a county flag is to be found in the Roll of Caerlaverock. This manuscript was a role of arms of the English attackers besieging Caerlaverock Castle, Dumfriesshire in 1300AD^{vii}. Unusually this roll of arms takes the form of a poem which regales the reader with both the armorial bearings and feats of bravery of the attacking force. For John de Warenne, 6th Earl of Surrey the poem talks of his leadership qualities, before stating: “De or e de asur ejhcquere, Fu ja baniere noblement”^{viii}. This translates as “his banner with gold and azure, was nobly chequered”^{ix}.

The interesting element in this passage is the mention of the checks being used in a banner, and thus that the emblem was not only worn as arms but also flown. The frontispiece of the Thomas Wright edited publication of the roll includes an illustration of the checks in banner form^x.



^v http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Warren

^{vi} http://www.briantimms.net/era/charles_roll/charles01/Charles01.htm

^{vii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caerlaverock_Castle

^{viii} Thomas Wright ed ‘The Roll of Caerlaverock’ (John Camden Hotten, 1864) p6

^{ix} Ibid

^x Wright ed, ‘The Roll of Caerlaverock’ frontispiece

This clearly shows that the emblem of the Earl of Surrey was being flown at least as early as 1300AD and proves the pedigree of the emblem as a flag. Indeed, whilst many county emblems have ancient origins, this reference to the checks as a banner may be one of the earliest examples of proof of a county emblem in flag form. In fact the only earlier, comparable, attested reference would be that of the striped banner that would form the basis of the Northumberland county flag^{xi}. The Northumberland design was later modified by the college of arms for the county council and it is this council banner, rather than the purely historical one mentioned by Bede that was registered,^{xii} which may leave Surrey as the oldest proven county flag.

Physical substance is added to the existence of the checks only a year after the siege of Caerlaverock through their appearance on the seal of John de Warenne, 6th Earl of Surrey^{xiii}.



The seal is from a surviving document from the 'Council of England' in reply to the Pope, protesting against his claim to feudal lordship over Scotland at the expense of King Edward, though the document was not ultimately sent^{xiv}. An even earlier instance of the checks appearing can be found illustrated in the margins of a 'Historia Anglorum' by Matthew Paris, representing the 5th Earl of Surrey and dating to about 1250-9AD^{xv}.

^{xi} Bede "Ecclesiastical History of England" (H. G. Bohn, 1847) p126

^{xii} www.ukflagregistry.org/wiki/index.php?title=Northumberland

^{xiii} Thomas Evelyn Scott-Ellis 'Some Feudal Lords and their Seals' (de Walden Library, 1904) p3

^{xiv} Scott-Ellis 'Some Feudal Lords and their Seals' pX

^{xv} <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=30908>



The de Warenne checks seem to have an even longer history than these instances of their use by the 5th Earl of Surrey during the mid-thirteenth century. It seems that the checks may have originated with the Vermandois family of France who bore identical arms^{xvi}. This would appear to have derived from the marriage of William de Warenne, 2nd Earl of Surrey to Isabel, the daughter of Hugh the Great, Count of Vermandois^{xvii} and probably indicated an alliance^{xviii}. A further older link to the Vermandois is supposed through the grandfather of the 1st Earl of Surrey, Gautier de St Martin, but there seems to be no evidence and may be considered as nothing more than speculation^{xix}.

It can be pointed out that Hamelin de Warenne the 4th Earl of Surrey is recorded to have used a completely different shield using an escarbuncle^{xx}. However Hamelin married into the de Warenne family after the 3rd Earl left Isabella as an heir. Hamelin, who was an illegitimate child himself then took the name and title of his wife. It is thus speculated that his son re-adopted the checks, with this fluidity in design not being uncommon in this early era of heraldry^{xxi}.

The theory that the checks are derived from an older source, the Vermandois, strengthens greatly when considering the use of the checks in other families that could claim links to the powerful French family. This connection to other families further reinforces the origin of the checks back to the Vermandois. In the book 'The Antiquities of Heraldry', William Smith Ellis illustrates this point clearly through a table that shows how the checked arms of de Beaugency, de Beaumont (Earls of

^{xvi} James Robinson Planché 'The Pursuivant of Arms, or Heraldry Founded upon Facts' (Oxford University, 1859) p61

^{xvii} Ibid

^{xviii} <http://www.baronage.co.uk/bphtm-03/stewart1.html>

^{xix} Henry Elliot Malden 'A History of Surrey' (E Stock, 1900) p103

^{xx} Charles Henry Ashdown 'British & Foreign Arms & Armour' (T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1909) p84

^{xxi} Malden 'A History of Surrey' p105

Leicester), de Clinton, de Newburgh (Earls of Warwick), Waleran (Earls of Mellent) and de Warenne (Earls of Surrey) all connect back to Vermandois through descent and marriage^{xxii}. It is worth noting that the only un-differenced use of the checks is by de Warenne and the Vermandois themselves, presumably as the first users of the checks in their respective nations. There is even a theory that the distinctive checks from the famous Stewart coat of arms may have a distant connection to those of the Vermandois^{xxiii}.

The idea that these families may have been copying an illusion, that the Vermandois did not actually use such a checked device, can be instantly disregarded. The Vermandois arms are recorded in French heraldic rolls roughly contemporary with the Caerlaverock Roll of 1300AD^{xxiv}. Even further back they can be found in the seals of Raoul de Vermandois between 1116AD and 1146AD^{xxv}, where it is even clear that Raoul is using the checks in the form of a banner^{xxvi}.



To continue with the sceptical approach it could be argued that the English aristocracy were simply emulating a powerful French line by copying their arms. However the use of the checks in the seal of Raoul de Beaugency^{xxvii} (as attested by none other than a former Lord Lyon) in the early twelfth

^{xxii} William Smith Ellis 'The Antiquities of Heraldry' (John Russell Smith, 1869) p179

^{xxiii} <http://www.baronage.co.uk/bphtm-03/stewart1.html>

^{xxiv} http://www.briantimms.net/era/charles_roll/charles01/Charles01.htm

^{xxv} Bruce A. McAndrew 'Scotland's Historic Heraldry' (Boydell Press, 2006) p11

^{xxvi} Germain Demay 'Le Costume au Moyen Âge, d'après les Sceaux' (Dumoulin, 1880) p111

^{xxvii} John Woodward and George Burnett, 'A Treatise on Heraldry, British and Foreign: Vol 1' (W and A. K Johnston, 1892) p47

century, or possibly in the late eleventh century^{xxviii}, would indicate the true antiquity of the design and their familial associations. De Beaugency is one of the earlier cited examples of the checks being linked back to the Vermandois in the family tree; in this case Raoul married Mathilda, the daughter of Hugh the Great, Count of Vermandois.

In fact it seems that Hugh the Great is, in ancestral terms, the common denominator for the later instances of families using the checks. Although the de Beaugency seal is the earliest evidence for the use of the checks it does in turn make it seem plausible that the checks themselves may stretch at least as far back as Hugh the Great in order for both his son and his son-in-law to adopt them^{xxix}. This idea gains further credence when considering that not only did seals exist in the age of Hugh the Great, as exemplified by the seal of King Philip I of France (which includes a fluer-de-lys in the design as an early example of heraldic symbolism)^{xxx}, but that Hugh the Great was King Philip's brother^{xxxi} and thus of a similar social stature and likely to have been exposed to the concept of seals. In fact, William Smith Ellis calls the de Beaugency seal "confirmation strong" that the checks relate back to Hugh the Great and therefore supports the idea that later families, including the de Warenne's, derived their checks from the Vermandois^{xxxii}. Even the usually sceptical Planché^{xxxiii} concludes that the theory is probably correct^{xxxiv}. It has been speculated that the Vermandois checks became so desirable not only due to the political power of the family but also to the Capetian and, especially, Carolingian blood that it boasted, possibly explaining why the checks would occasionally flow through the female line^{xxxv}.

^{xxviii} J. F. Jules Pautet 'Nouveau Manuel Complet du Blason' (Roret, 1854) p87

^{xxix} Ellis 'The Antiquities of Heraldry' p180

^{xxx} http://hubert-herald.nl/FulgerFleur.htm#_edn9

^{xxxi} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_I,_Count_of_Vermandois

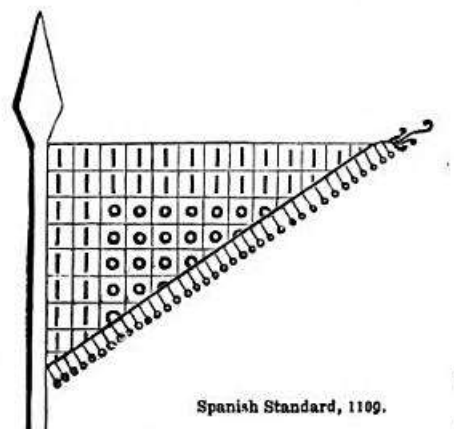
^{xxxii} Ellis 'The Antiquities of Heraldry' p180

^{xxxiii} Ibid

^{xxxiv} Planché 'The Pursuivant of Arms, or Heraldry Founded upon Facts' p61

^{xxxv} David Crouch, 'The Historian, Lineage and Heraldry 1050-1250' in Peter R. Cross and Maurice Hugh Keen (Ed.) 'Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England' (Boydell Press, 2006) p31

As a brief aside, it is often contested that heraldry cannot have origins dating this far back as heraldry itself does not exist yet^{xxxvi}. It is certainly true that heraldry when defined as a system rose with the first grant of arms in England in 1127AD^{xxxvii} and developed into a proper system after the introduction of heraldic rolls in 1240AD. Nonetheless it seems impossible to rule out the idea that nobles would not use symbols or devices which were meaningful or unique to them. Indeed in previous investigations in this series of county emblems we have seen in the case of Caernarfonshire that Owain Gwynedd was associated in his lifetime with eagles^{xxxviii}, and that these eagles may have been a symbol for earlier Welsh legends or the Roman heritage of the area^{xxxix}. The Roman eagle itself is an obvious example of a pre-heraldic, yet symbolic, emblem^{xl}. Simple emblems certainly would be easy enough to develop and adopt without the need for a formal heraldic system and the Vermandois checks would rank amongst the simplest. Planché not only supports this sentiment but even illustrates it with an example of the checked Vide Standard from Spain in 1109AD^{xli}.



As we have seen happen in the de Warenne line, the rules of heraldry were fluid before its formal establishment through the Middle Ages. However that is not to say that the art itself was not developing. The eleventh and twelfth centuries have many examples of items bearing what would

^{xxxvi} James Augustus Montagu 'A Guide to the Study of Heraldry' (W. Pickering, 1840) pp14-15

^{xxxvii} Anthony Wagner 'Heraldry in England' (Penguin Books, 1946) p6-7

^{xxxviii} Philip Tibbetts & Jason Saber 'The Caernarfonshire Eagles: Development of a Traditional Emblem and County Flag' (Association of British Counties 2012 (1st ed 2011)) pp6-7

^{xxxix} Ibid

^{xl} [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquila_\(Roman\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquila_(Roman))

^{xli} Planché 'The Pursuivant of Arms, or Heraldry Founded upon Facts' pp61-2

come to be seen as hallmarks of heraldry; the banners seen flying in the Bayeux Tapestry depicting the events of 1066AD^{xlii}, and the use of emblems and shields in seals as we have already discussed.



Perhaps we can consider these Vermandois/de Warenne checks having developed in an ‘embryonic’ or ‘gestative’ phase of heraldry. This may have been before the birth of heraldry but it seems clear that some of the elements are already forming.

The pedigree of the Surrey checks appears to be one of the oldest and noblest of all county emblems and possibly of all heraldic emblems. However by 1415AD the de Warenne line had followed the Vermandois’ into extinction, meaning that the use of the un-difference gold and blue checks similarly died out both in the aristocratic heraldry of France and England. However, the checks did not have to wait long to live on through association with the county that the de Warenne’s had been earls of.

In the very year that the last of the House of Warenne passed away, the men of Surrey were reputed to be carrying a banner of gold and blue checks into the Battle of Agincourt in honour of the 1st Earl of Surrey. Michael Drayton records this in his work 'The Battaile of Agincourt' in 1627 with the line “The men of Surrey, checky blue and gold, which for brave Warenne their first earl they wore”^{xliii}.

^{xlii} <http://www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk/Bayeux30.htm>

^{xliii} Michael Drayton “The Battaile of Agincourt” (Charles Whittingham, 1893 (first published 1627)) p29

Interestingly Drayton must be unaware of the Vermandois link, which was not made until the marriage of the 2nd Earl of Surrey.

Whilst Drayton does mention several unlikely county banners in the rest of his 'The Battaile of Agincourt' work, some symbols do hold up owing to the pre-existence of the described device in the county in question. As we have seen in previous investigations, Caernarfonshire is one such example^{xliv} and Surrey is now clearly another. In these cases, amongst others, it is clear that Drayton did not invent a new device but he employed one with a clear and demonstrable link to the county. Even if there is a level of doubt as to the veracity of Drayton's account of the flag being used in the fifteenth century it is certainly true that by the time of his writing in the early seventeenth century this valid historical symbol had obviously gained acceptance as the emblem for the county.

The association of the checks would continue and further reasons for how deep-rooted this bond would become might be found in de la Motte's work compiling the ancient arms of families. Firstly the phrasing of the de Warenne title has always been variable, with Earl de Warenne and Earl of Surrey both having been used, with the former probably preferred owing to the wider power base the family enjoyed. However de la Motte's book shows that by its publication in 1803AD the title now seemed to be retro-actively styled as "Earl Warren and Surrey"^{xlv}. Other sources in this period show this styling for the de Warenne's to have been common elsewhere in the country too^{xlvi}. This terminology may have helped strengthen the bond from the de Warenne checks to the word Surrey and consequently to the county.

^{xliv} Tibbetts & Saber 'The Caernarfonshire Eagles: Development of a Traditional Emblem and County Flag' p10

^{xlv} Philip de la Motte 'The Principal, Historical, and Allusive Arms, Borne by Families of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with their Respective Authorities' (J Nichols & Son, 1803) p435

^{xlvi} Sir Thomas Clifford and Andrew Clifford 'A Topographical and Historical Description of the Parish of Tixall' (M. Nouzou, 1817) p215

De la Motte also makes reference to a de Warenne custom that appears to have survived the family and been a tradition until at least the early nineteenth century. The legend runs that at the time of conferring the Earldom of Surrey upon the de Warenne family, William the Conqueror also gave them the right to licence the sale of ale. Inns and public houses who were thus obliged to pay the de Warenne's, painted their door posts in the gold and blue checks of the family^{xlvii}. Apparently the right passed to the successors of the Earls of Surrey, namely the Earls of Arundel, and the painting of the door posts survived until "the present day"^{xlviii}. However, ale historian Martyn Cornell refutes this legend^{xlix} and refers the earliest recorded instance of the Earls of Surrey connection to the checks being found in an issue of Gentleman's Magazine from September 1794¹. Cornell further cites Mark Anthony Lower, who attacked the theory in 1844 and claimed that the pub checks come from an older practice of symbolising ale-houses through lattice decorations^{li}. Cornell points out that the checks were common, and concedes some instances may have been the de Warenne checks, given how many pub names and signs honour the local, historic gentry^{lii}. Despite the uncertainty of the true origins of the pub checks it seems safe to conclude that the tradition did exist, and that in the traditional lands of the Earls of Surrey the checks may have been valid references to them. Even if this isn't the case it was a common assumption at the time. This means that the checks seem to have been in the public eye continuously, even if it was mistakenly, until the mid-nineteenth century.

^{xlvii} de la Motte 'The Principal, Historical, and Allusive Arms, Borne by Families of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with their Respective Authorities' p435

^{xlviii} de la Motte 'The Principal, Historical, and Allusive Arms, Borne by Families of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with their Respective Authorities' p436

^{xlix} <http://zythophile.wordpress.com/2009/11/09/the-check-is-on-the-post/>

¹ Sylvanus Urban 'The Gentleman's Magazine: Vol LXIV; September 1794' (John Nichols, 1794) p797

^{li} Mark Anthony Lower 'English Surnames: An Essay on Family Nomenclature, Historical, Etymological and Humorous' (Kessinger, 2005 (First published, 1844)) p161

^{lii} <http://zythophile.wordpress.com/2009/11/09/the-check-is-on-the-post/>

By the nineteenth century the association that the checks had with the county seems to have been strong enough that they begin to formally represent the county of Surrey. The earliest example of this comes from the emblem of the Surrey Archæological Society^{liii}.



The document that this seal is taken from was published in 1858AD, so the device can be no younger than that. However the emblem itself includes a date of 1854AD, which was the foundation of the society. As such it seems likely that the seal was adopted either immediately or certainly very early in the society's existence, further proving how appropriate and obvious the Surrey checks were as a county emblem even at this early time. It is also worth noting that the checks have remained as the society emblem to the present day^{liv}.

Shortly after this we find the first evidence for the adoption of the checks in the formal, albeit unofficial, heraldic devices of authorities within the county. In 1863AD the Borough of Reigate was founded, and it adopted for itself a device which pointedly includes the Earl of Surrey checks^{lv}. Only a year later the borough formed a police force (that would later become a founding member of the Surrey County Police Force) which gives us physical evidence of the device, and thus the checks, in 1864AD^{lvi}.

^{liii} Surrey Archeological Society 'Surrey Archeological Collections: Volume I' (Lovell Reeve & Co, 1858) frontispiece

^{liv} <http://www.surreyarchaeology.org.uk/>

^{lv} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/surrey_ob.html

^{lvi} <http://www.surrey.police.uk/about/history.asp>



The formal relationship of the checks to the county itself was cemented when Surrey County Council came into being in 1888AD and at some point in its history adopted and used gold and blue checks as part of its emblem. This is recorded in C. W. Scott-Giles's 1933 'Civic Heraldry of England & Wales'^{lvii} where the device of the county council is described as containing “three shields placed within a trefoil. The topmost shield bears the arms of the Earls of Surrey, namely gold and blue chequers. Below are the arms of Kingston-upon-Thames and Guildford”. Although there is not an accompanying illustration provided by Scott-Giles, physical proof of such a seal does exist in the Surrey County Museum records^{lviii}.



Interestingly when the County Council do formally apply for, and receive, a coat of arms in 1934AD the checks are only referenced through the livery colours of the new arms and do not feature themselves^{lix}. The reference to them is further diluted when the Council is granted a second coat of arms in 1974AD having had its territory vastly diminished in a government shake up of

^{lvii} Charles Wilfred Scott-Giles 'Civic Heraldry of England and Wales' (Dent, 1933) p91

^{lviii} http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/GetRecord/EPSBH_8205

^{lix} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/surrey_ob.html

administrative areas^{lx}. This change in 1974AD provides the clue to why the checks don't fully feature in the 1934AD arms either. When the county council was set up in 1888AD it lost control over large swathes of the county as the administrative County of London had simultaneously been set up. It appears likely that the checks were played down in the College of Arms designed 1934AD council badge to reflect the fact that the council did not cover the whole of Surrey. This is illustrated by the fact that upon being established in 1888AD Surrey County Council had to find a new headquarters owing to the fact that the traditional Surrey County Hall at Newington now lay in the administrative County of London^{lxi}. In fact the modifications in both formal Surrey county council arms are an attempt to represent the new administrative focus of the county council by using elements from Guildford, Godalming^{lxii} and Chertsey^{lxiii}.

However, despite this the checks become the standard way of referencing the county of Surrey in the civic heraldry of the traditional county both before and after the administrative changes that are reflected in the county council arms. This happens as early as 1901AD with the use of the checks in the arms of the Wandsworth Metropolitan Borough^{lxiv}, closely followed by the Lambeth Metropolitan Borough in 1922AD which was also outside administrative Surrey. Wimbledon Borough, which was within the administrative scope of Surrey County Council at this time was also an early recipient of the checks, in a stylised border form, in 1906AD^{lxv}.

^{lx} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/weald_downs.html

^{lxi} http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/places/county_hall_kingston

^{lxii} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/surrey_ob.html

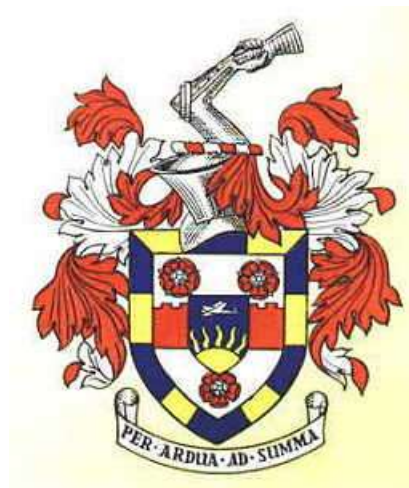
^{lxiii} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/weald_downs.html

^{lxiv} <http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/lcc.html>

^{lxv} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/surrey_ob.html



All these arms were from the time before the formal grant of arms to Surrey council removed the checks in 1934AD. However only three years later Beddington and Wallington Borough was granted arms featuring the checks in the same border style as those of Wimbledon Borough^{lxvi}.



The gold and blue checks have since been granted to a large number of councils across the traditional extent of Surrey. These include the London Borough of Wandsworth (1965AD) and London Borough of Lambeth (1966AD)^{lxvii} outside of the Surrey County Council area as well as the following from within: Reigate Borough Council (1951AD), Dorking Urban District Council (1954AD)^{lxviii} and Reigate & Banstead Borough Council (1975AD)^{lxix}. Whilst the arms of Mole Valley District Council (1975AD) and Elmbridge Borough Council (1976AD) also use the checks as inspiration for

^{lxvi} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/surrey_ob.html

^{lxvii} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/great_london.html

^{lxviii} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/surrey_ob.html

^{lxix} http://www.civicheraldry.co.uk/weald_downs.html

gold and blue livery colours in the same manner as the County Council^{lxx}. This tradition continues right up to modern times with the granting of the checks in the arms of Cranleigh Parish Council in 2007AD^{lxxi}.



Not only does this symbolise the continued widespread association of the checks in the heraldic world, but it has the obvious knock on effect of keeping the tradition of the Surrey checks alive with the public whenever these councils display their emblems (such as outside civic buildings). In the case of the areas of Surrey that now lie within Greater London this is particularly important. Fortunately there are some particularly good examples of the continued use of the checks in this way, such as their appearance through the Lambeth arms on street signs and street furniture^{lxxii}.



Finally when the badge for the Surrey Herald Extraordinary was being designed in 1981AD it was evidentially deemed by the College of Arms that nothing was more fitting than the pattern of gold and blue checks to be applied to a heraldic tabard^{lxxiii}.

^{lxx} Ibid

^{lxxi} Ibid

^{lxxii} <http://en.etapes.com/south-london-by-alistair-hall>

^{lxxiii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrey_Herald_Extraordinary



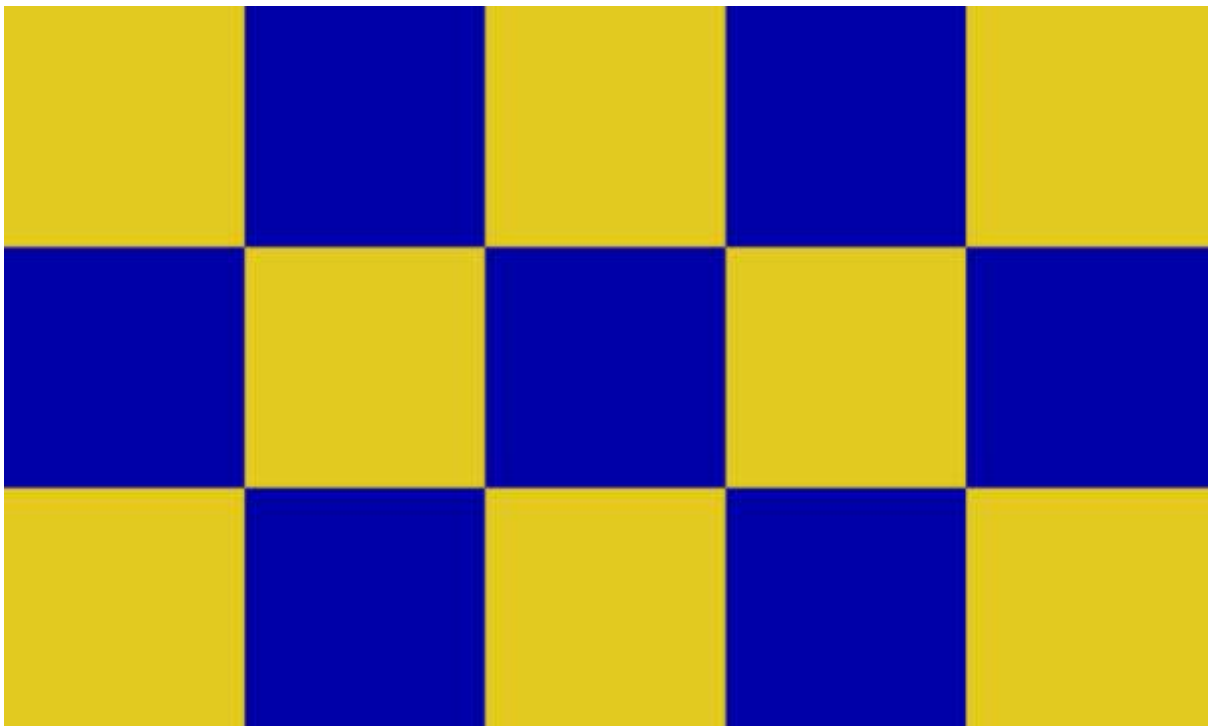
In summary, it is clear to see that the checks have been the symbol of the county for a particularly long time, stretching back to at least the writings of Drayton in the early seventeenth century if not to the fifteenth century events he was describing. Furthermore the association the checks enjoy with the county stretch even further back owing to their origin as the arms of the county's Earls.

Yet it is crucially important to see that despite the administrative re-arrangements of the recent decades that the checks have not only remained as the premier heraldic symbol of the county but have done so even in areas outside the remit of the current county council. Indeed even in areas of 'Greater London' the checks representing traditional Surrey can still be seen every day in the hundreds of locations where the arms of Wandsworth and Lambeth boroughs are displayed. The checks remain as strong a symbol of traditional Surrey today as ever.

Not only do the checks make the perfect flag for the county in a symbolic context but they also could not be any better from a flag design perspective. The checks are simple, elegant and bold – much like the similar lozenges of Bavaria that have become famous across the globe. Furthermore, despite the checks widespread use across the institutions of Surrey, and as a quarter in the arms of the Dukes of Norfolk (modern successors to the de Warenne Earls of Surrey), the arms do not survive anywhere in their original un-differenced form; thus leaving the way open for their adoption and registration as the county flag of Surrey.

Indeed it seems particularly fitting to restore the un-differenced checks to official representation of Surrey. This sentiment is further reinforced when considering that such a county flag would be reinstating one of the oldest and continuously used symbols in the world. A symbol with a pedigree that stretches back to the earliest origins of heraldry and a symbol which has an attested heritage as a flag dating back over seven hundred years.

This essay concludes by calling for the design of gold and blue checks to be recognised as the valid traditional flag for the historic county of Surrey in light of the sheer weight of evidence as to its ancient origins, continued tradition and long-standing association with the historic county.



Appendix: Timeline

1057AD – Hugh, Count of Vermandois is born

1104AD – First evidence of the Vermandois checks in the seal of Raoul de Beaugency

1118AD – The 2nd Earl of Surrey marries Isabel Vermandois

1240AD – First record of the checks representing de Warenne in Glover's Roll

1250AD – First illustration of the de Warenne checks

1300AD – The checks are recorded flying as a banner at the Siege of Caerlaverock Castle

1301AD – Physical evidence of the checks in the seal of the 6th Earl of Surrey

1415AD – The banner of gold and blue checks supposedly flown by the men of Surrey

1627AD – Drayton records the former battle

1803AD – Checks commonly featuring in pub decoration and erroneously believed to refer to the Earls of Surrey

1854AD – Surrey Archaeology Society founded and begin uses the checks in their emblem

1863AD – Borough of Reigate formed and a year later are using a device incorporating the checks

1888AD – Surrey County Council formed and go on to use the checks in their seal

1889AD – Surrey County Council find a new county hall after losing administration of a portion of the traditional county

1901AD – Wandsworth Metropolitan Borough use the checks, despite being removed from administrative Surrey

1934AD – Formal grant of arms to Surrey County Council forgoes the checks as it focuses on symbolism within the reduced administrative area

1937AD – Checks nonetheless appear in the Beddington and Wallington Borough arms. They continue to be a common feature of Surrey civic heraldry

1974AD – Surrey County Council loses control of a further portion of the traditional county.

1981AD – Checks featured in the badge of the Surrey Herald Extraordinary.

2007AD – Checks make their most recent appearance in civic heraldry with the arms of Cranleigh Parish Council

2012AD – Call for registration

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