

Coat of Arms and Letters Patent, University of Hong Kong



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The University Coat of Arms comprises the shield, the motto, the helmet and crest, and the supporters, which are the four essential elements of heraldry. The design of the Coat of Arms was assigned to the Governor of Hong Kong and Chancellor of the University, Sir Frederick Lugard, the first Vice-Chancellor Sir Charles Eliot, and S. H. Ixer of the Public Works Department of the Government, who drew the caricature of Francis Clark, the first Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the University in 1912.¹ A design was sent to the College of Arms in October 1912 with the suggestion that if more and distinctive

¹ University Document 1912, 'Calendar 1912', University Archives, HKU.

emblems were needed, then the University would like a clump of bamboos. The Court Minutes at the UA reads:

*'The Coat of Arms circulated among Members was approved and it was ordered that the design should be submitted to the College of Heralds for approval and ratification, in the event of their demanding any addition of distinguishing emblems, some bamboos to be introduced into the design.'*²

Arms, without bamboos, were granted by letter patent of 14th May 1913 with a blazon couched in the arcane phrases of heralds, quite inscrutable for the uninitiated 'per pale vert and azure an open book proper bound and edged or inscribed with Chinese characters sable on a chief gules a lion passant guardant or; but only after some trouble with the Chinese text.' The Chinese ideograms on the two pages of the open book (an Oxford book rather than a Cambridge book), which is closed, have caused comment, two of them being of unusual form. They are a combination of two phrases in the Confucius classic 'The Great Learning', which indicate broadly the Western concepts of moral and intellectual training. The characters are written in the old *lishu*, or clerical script, in vogue during the Han Dynasty and still favoured for the writing of inscriptions. There are several variants in this style for the two characters *ming* and *de* (to manifest virtue); the forms used were taken from some of the most highly regarded Han inscriptions. Shortly before the University opened, the Court had already selected *auspicium melioris aevi* (augury of a better age) as the official motto. However, the motto below the shield brought confusion with it until about twenty years later when the earlier motto was officially discarded. In the official Council Minutes it says:

² Court Minutes, Agenda Item 4, dated 18 Oct 1912, University Archives, HKU.

'The Council took note that the present motto of the University "Sapientia et Virtus" (Wisdom and Virtue) had never been formally sanctioned by the Court, the original motto having been "Auspicium Melioris Aevi". The Council recommended that the Court be asked to accept the change in the motto from Auspicium Melioris Aevi" to "Sapientia et Virtus".³

HKU has the distinction of being the only university in Hong Kong to have a complete Coat of Arms assigned by the College of Arms in London. The shield and motto were granted in 1913 by the College of Arms, while the remaining components of a full coat of arms were applied for in 1981 and granted in 1984.⁴ Unfortunately, the official blazon and all authentic colour copies of the Shield of Arms disappeared during the Sino-Japanese War. When the University was preparing in 1958 for the Golden Jubilee three years later, these were obtained anew from the College of Arms.⁵

³ Council Minutes, Agenda Item 14, dated 17 Oct 1930, University Archives, HKU.

⁴ Memories from the HKU Archives, (2013), p.79.

⁵ Bernard Mellor, The University of Hong Kong – an Informal History Vol.1 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press HKU Press (1981), p.30.