

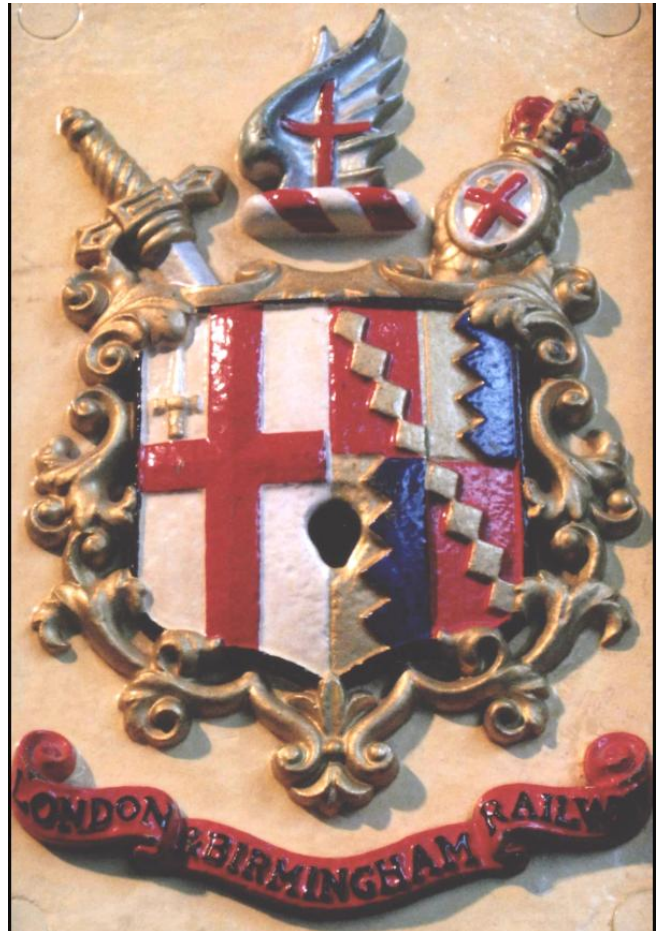
Some notes on the Arms of the London & Birmingham Railway Company and why in terms of the first carriages there is a problem with the accepted arms!

By Tom Nicholls

There are definite questions as to whether the impaled shields of the city of London & Birmingham, long assumed to represent the company, were actually the form of the corporate arms of the London & Birmingham. While this design is not out of keeping with the forms of arms used by railway companies just prior to the 1840s, scant evidence of its use has survived and some doubts must be considered given other evidence.

Some of the earliest railway companies did not include city shields on their seals, the Liverpool & Manchester being early in the trend. This became normal for a time around the late 1830s and early 1840s, where a railway joined two notable population centres, to utilise the two shields side by side.

The London & Blackwall railway seal, 1836, had the city of London shield at the centre. The London & Greenwich in 1836, divided their shield with the London arms and Kent, this form known rather painfully as impaling, reflects the London & Birmingham design. The L&G replicated the design on both tickets and their seal. The London & Croydon railway in 1835 settled on using the London dragon wing for their seal and the London arms for their carriages. London railway companies clearly felt it appropriate to raise the London arms in status and display them prominently.



Restored casting from the gates at Euston – note that the usual type of motto underneath has been replaced with company name.

The Manchester & Leeds arms c.1836 are presented in two forms, an impaled form on French shields and as ovals. The Grand Junction railway represented their three termini of Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool one on each carriage door but not on their company seal. In 1837, the Liverpool & Manchester, in response to the GJR, followed suite adding Liverpool & Manchester shields to their carriages. When the GJR reached Chester in 1840, they added a fourth shield and came up with a quartered design with all four devices on one shield. This design is predated by the Midland Counties design of 1839, also quartered. The North Midland divided its shield in three rotating the upper device depending on the location of the arms. There after a number of railways contained multiple shields sometimes in a circle.

It should also be noted that railway heraldry was often borrowed from existing city and town arms. This meant that the early railway companies themselves were not granted formal heraldic devices from the College of Arms. This may account for the variety of presentations on occasions. It seems that applying and granting of formal arms became more important towards the end of the 1800s by which time the designs were much more diversified.

Two aspects are clear prior to 1840, companies in London strongly favoured the arms of the City of London in their heraldry but also that the form of shields or escutcheons [oval, heater (pointed), French (English variant), or decorative] was quite fluid. The same arms being represented in several different forms in different contexts. It is also clear that the impaled form amongst railway arms was present in this period.

From the 1830s into the 1840s company heraldry increased in importance. Arms appeared in stone above some stations: Liverpool Lime Street (L&M) 1836, London & Birmingham Curzon Street (L&B) 1838, Derby Trijunct (North Midland, Birmingham & Derby Junc., Midland Counties) 1839, Leeds (North Midland) 1840 to name a few examples.

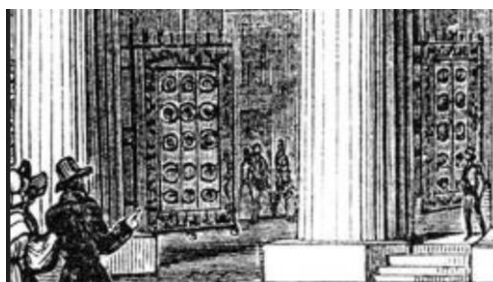
Almost all first class carriages of railways in late 1830s and early 1840s carried heraldic devices on their sides. In the time of the L&M, GJR, and North Union for example these were still represented by each of the shields of the main termini. Other companies with more complex devices decorated centre doors with a single device but outer doors, in the time of three compartments, might have used a crest or a monogram.

The London & Birmingham and London & Croydon railways adopted the City of London arms for their initial carriage liveries, in 1836 and 1838 respectively. The Croydon used a company monogram on the outer carriage doors while the London & Birmingham used the dragon wing crest. Interesting the Midland Counties retorted utilising the griffin wing on the outer doors, the griffin becoming synonymous with the Midland Railway thereafter.

So where does this leave us with the London & Birmingham Arms. The answer is pretty fluid. The following examination shows both that they 'impaled' London & Birmingham arms may have been present in the early years but they were not the definitive form and they were unlikely to have been used on the early carriage livery prior to the 1840s. The locomotives and carriages carried a much simpler form. If it is correct that the Birmingham shield was absent from the carriage side, it may have had something to do with the economic dominance of London. It would also be true that since the Grand Junction already carried the Birmingham shield, only having the London shield would also avoid confusion for passengers at the Birmingham terminus.

What follows is an attempt to evaluate the evidence available. What is interesting is that there appears to be only one definite early representation of the Impaled form and that may be open to question as to date.

Artefact



Source & Notes

Station Gates, London & Birmingham Railway. Gates from 'Doric Arch' of Euston Station. Heavy wrought iron with ornamental locks bearing L & BR crest. NRM Object Number: 1976-7035 also Object Number: 2014-7049.

These plates are likely the earliest use of the impaled form of the London & Birmingham company logo but even their date is not certain.

While the gates are dated to 1838, manufactured by the inventor and locksmith J J Bramah, it isn't definite that the plates known as lock guards are original to this date? Given the evolution of locks it would seem likely that the locks were changed over the years but these guard plates could also have been replaced.

A possibility needs to be considered here, that the impaled arms were contrived by the maker of these plates to enable both shields to fit within the narrow rectangle of the space. These are also the likely source of the later renditions such as on the Queen Adelaide carriage below.



Queen Adelaide's Saloon, No. 2

Made: 1845, NRM Object Number: 1983-7001

The Queen Adelaide carriage was repainted from its faded LNWR livery to its current Wolverton restored livery in **1904**. It would seem likely that the design from the Euston gates was used as a template for form of the arms used in the carriage's restoration.

Left: Arms as rendered on the Queen Adelaide carriage. Right: Casting from the Euston gates (note the rivets in the top corners)



London & Birmingham Railway, Crest of L&BR commemorating the construction and opening of the Great Hall, Euston, Dimensions: 63"x48" NRM Object Number: 1987-8647

This representation appears to date from the 1950s. In consultation with the NRM it would appear that the design and style fits with at the earliest 1900s, but the photographic evidence suggests mid **1950s**. It is not present in photographs of the hall in 1953 but is featured in the Railway Magazine in 1955 and evidence in a photo in 1962.

So what about contemporary sources?



There are several versions of the arms from oval to plain shields and varying in supporters and decoration.

The shields are in their 'Oval' or lozenge form, still 'accollé' but in the rarer form of overlapping at the base. The Dragon is reduced to a wing crest above.

Curson Street, Birmingham
c.**1838**



Company crest of the London and Birmingham Railway
Date: c.**1833**

Note that the shields are adjacent not overlapping and that London dragon wing crest is absent, instead are staffs of office.



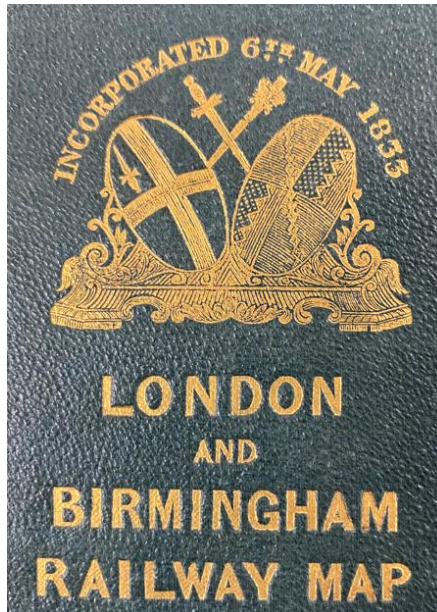
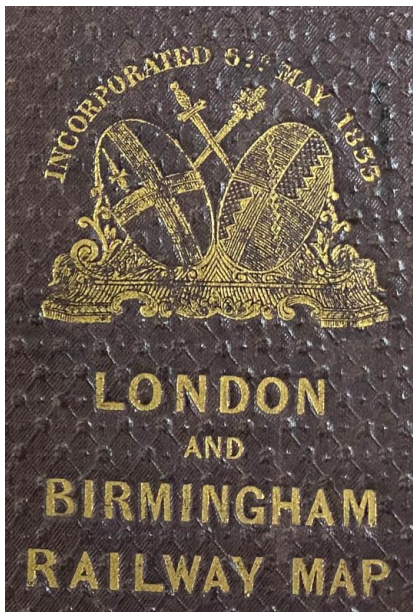
I can say in my observations of the company records at the National Archives and elsewhere I have never seen a dedicated coat of arms used on any letterheads.

During this period 1833-1846, documentation and company paperwork would have the only lettering declaring the company name. Although block prints could be inserted it seems that simple logos weren't used. Many letter heads were in Gothic or Old English Font.

The company seal being the only representation in this use and only on specific company business as here on a share certificate.

Copies of Cheffins' maps of the London & Birmingham Railway, **1838** (TNA RAIL 1030 43 / 44). It is of interest that Cheffins displayed the 'Oval' form of arms on the cover of their maps as if these were the 'company arms' especially given the date.

Interestingly C.F. Cheffin's maps were sole 'by authority' and produced both in London, and by 'Wrightson and Webb, Birmingham' so would have had sight of Curzon Street edifice if they weren't aware of the company seal.

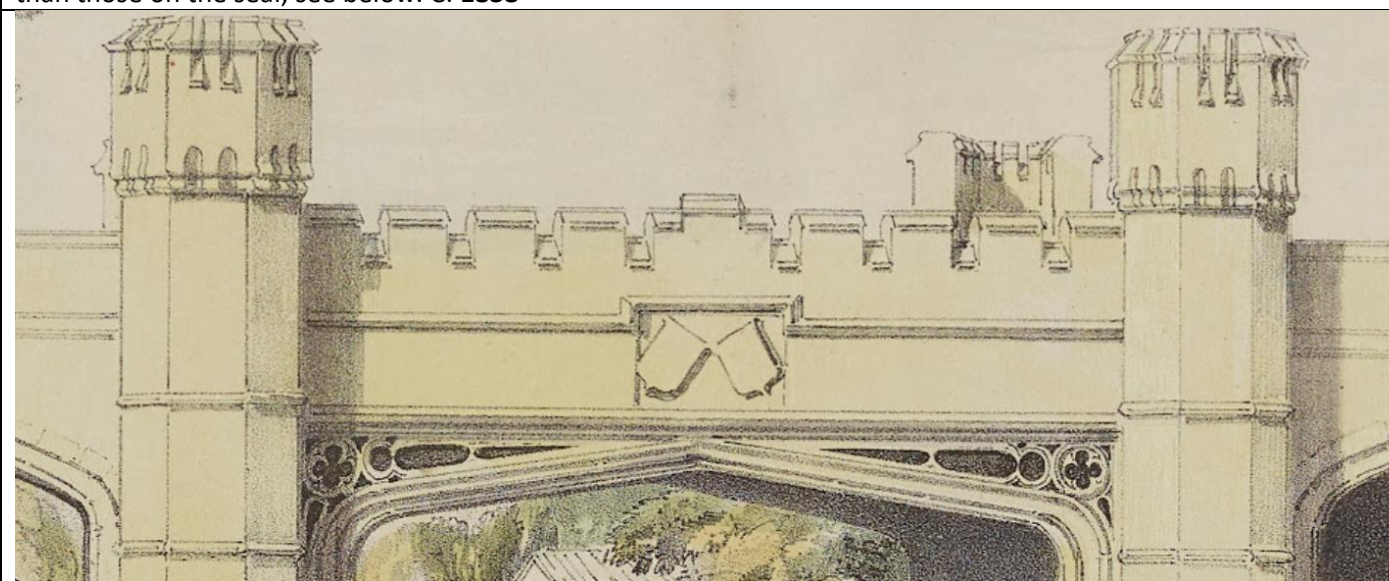


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Shield form variations



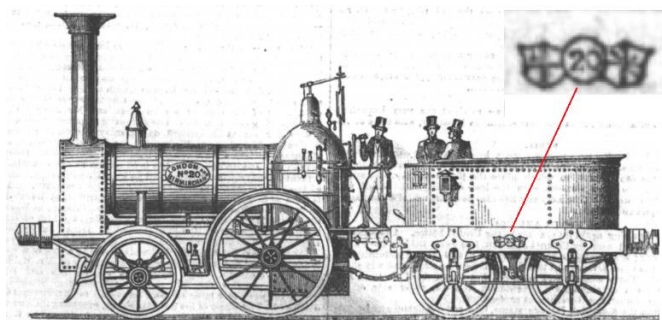
These are displayed on the fore page of the origin plans found in the National Archives (Rail 384 192) and show a variation most likely the work of the draftsman. Note that the London Shield is given prominence and also a supporter, London Dragon while Birmingham is partially hidden the florid foliage. Note the 'accollé' position of the shields. Note the city of London Motto "Domine Dirige Nos," which translates to "Lord, guide us" The shields are very decorative, reflecting the style of the overall design. They are closer to the form found on the engine tenders than those on the seal, see below. C. **1838**



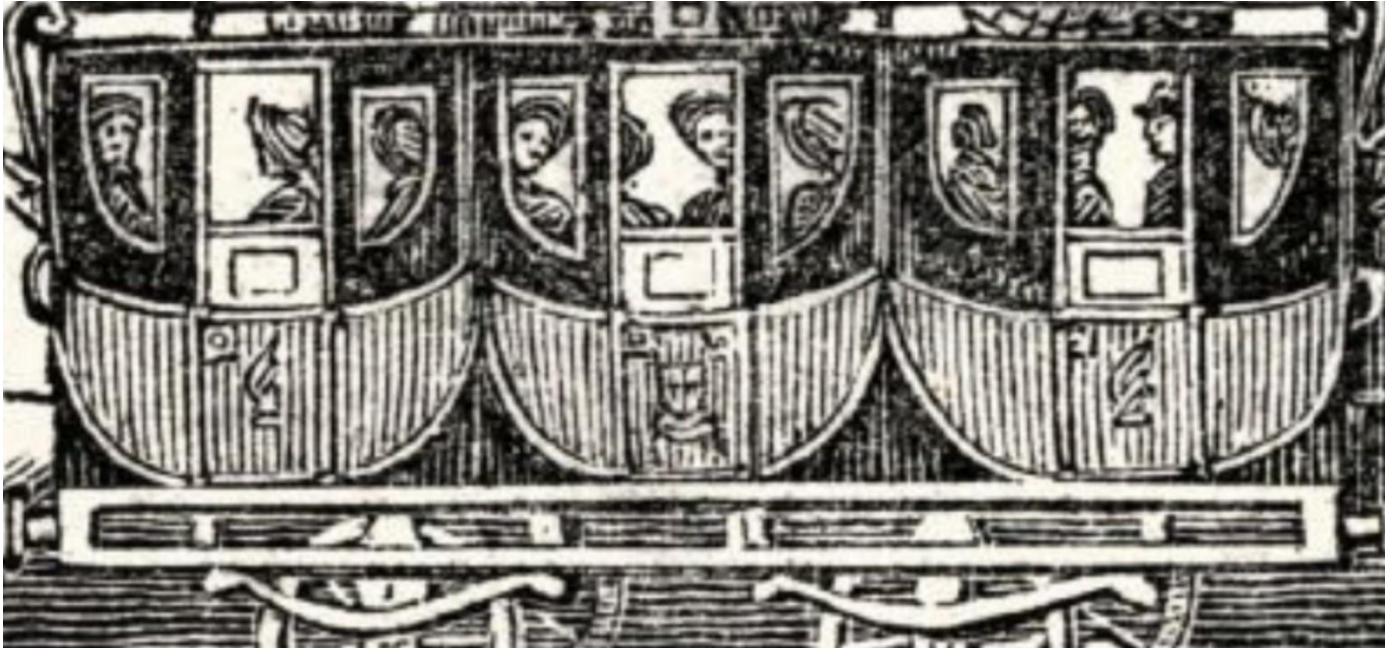
J C Bourne's depiction of the original railway bridge adjacent to Rugby station **c.1837** – showing two shields of the French form but in the English variant of 'winglets'. Whether these got painted, I am not aware.

Evidence on Vehicles

Source



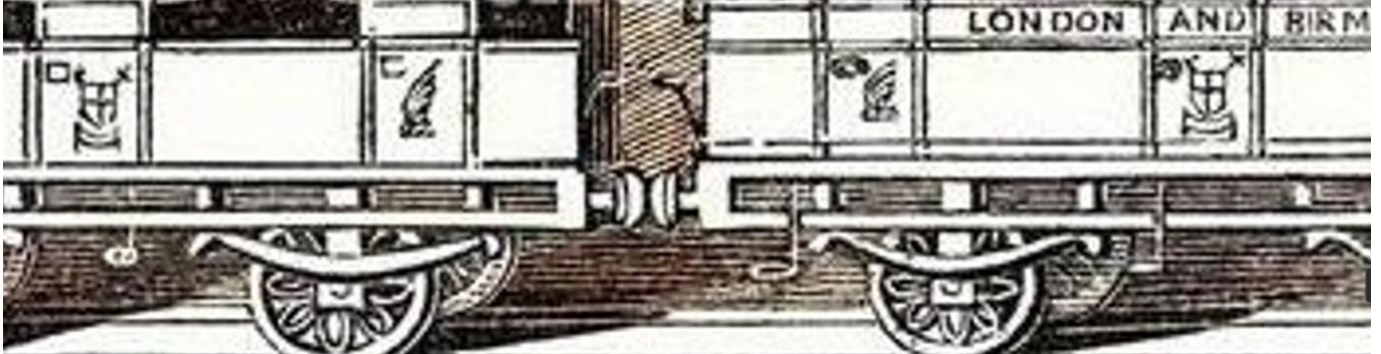
One of a number of representations of the Edward Bury engines that worked London & Birmingham for a number of years. This illustration is from December **1843** (illustrated London News). The shields design likely originates from January 1837.

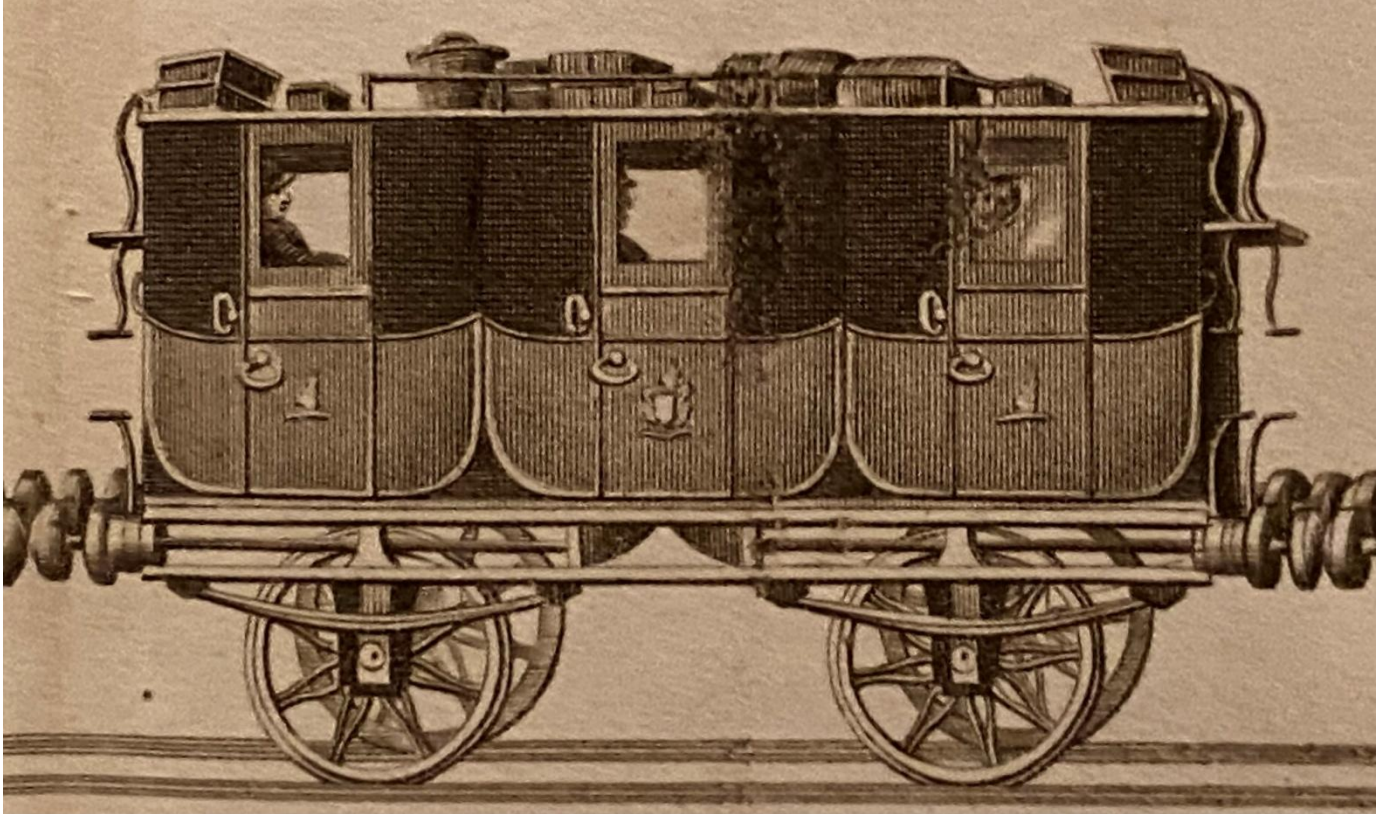


The Mirror illustration from **1837** requires a careful interpretation. The original observations are limited to a small section of the plate, and concern of the London & Birmingham carriages is surrounded by images taken from the much older Ackermann Liverpool & Manchester so called 'long prints'.

The London & Croydon also used the City of London arms on their carriages. The arrangement of the London arms and separate dragon wing crests is reflected in for example the livery of the first Midland Counties Railway carriages reflecting the London & Birmingham livery.

(The Mirror or Literature, Amusement, and Instruction, July 22 1837)





In terms of the carriage design, Samuel Williams' illustrations in the Osbourne guides are unrivalled in their near accuracy amongst artistic sources. Published in **1840** the London & Birmingham first carriage shows what might be a slightly developed version of the arms as the dragon wing appears above the shield. Are these slightly later carriages with a modification to the original set of London arms, given the 1840 publication date? Moving the crest to the centre door might relieve the necessity of repeating it on the adjacent doors saving cost.

So what conclusions can we draw?

Firstly, I think there is sufficient evidence to question whether the impaled arms were used at the time of the company's existence. However there no conclusive evidence to confirm that it was not. The form was not an unfamiliar one in the time period but there are no confirmed and dated references to its use. Perhaps in the future a closer examination of the Euston Gate lock plate might confirm the date of that plate's creation. Certainly in the early days of the company the 'oval' form of arms was certainly used in a number of contexts as shown in these notes.

Secondly, locomotive and carriage livery diverged from later practice. Minutes of the Non Resident Director show that on the 18th of January 1837 'Mr Rathbone reported that he had referred Mr Bury's proposed drawing of Engine Plate for the Company's arms to the Carriage Committee, who had the style of the arms for the Carriage under

consideration.' The arms were it would seem dropped from the engine plate itself but accompanied the engine number on a design on the tender.

The first fifty first class carriages of the London & Birmingham railway were built by Joseph Wright in partnership with his coaching partner William Horne. On the 26th of November 1836 the Sub Committee for Carriages in minute 47 Ordered 'That they [Messrs Wright & Horne] be desired to lay a design for the arms to be painted on the Coaches before the Sub Committee at their next meeting.' This I believe to be the form illustrated above.