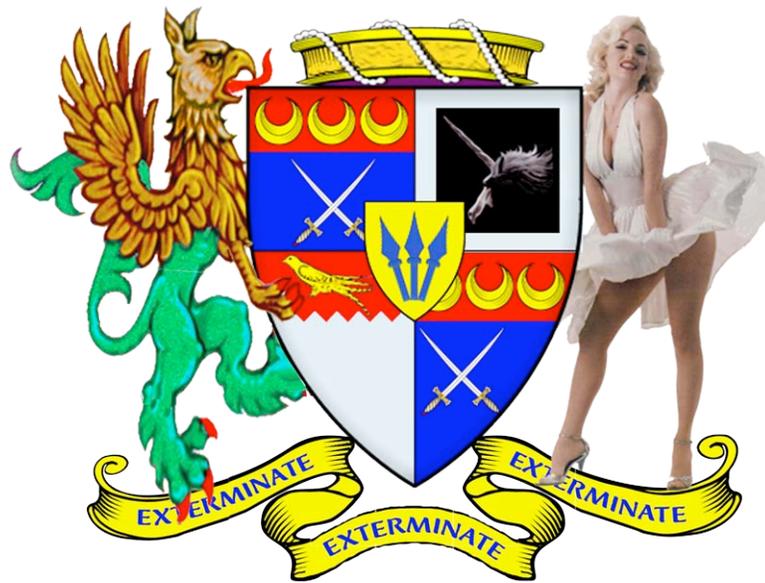


The Colonel's Supporters

Katherine Campbell



The Supporters of Colonel Baron Xavier-Xavier Forbes Houdemont de Sapinberg

Because supporters are restricted in the British Isles to Peers, Knights Grand Cross and equivalents, and to a limited number of Scottish feudal barons, their possession carries a great deal of prestige and thus they deserve to be chosen with great care. Colonel Houdemont de Sapinberg, as a feudal baron in France, used only his arms and a seigneur's coronet when heraldry was needed, but on elevation to [the vPeerage](#) in England, which brought the expectation that his heraldic achievement would in future feature supporters, even if he continued to neglect his right to a crest, he recognised that serious thought was necessary and he discussed his options with the Editor of The Baronage Press.

The first consideration was basically mechanical. No compartment was to be granted to vPeers and thus the supporters had to be capable of standing on a motto scroll, but the Colonel's choice of his Dalek motto for this ensured the scroll would be sufficiently wide. The immediate candidature of a gryphon was obvious, for his work in gryphon research had made him uniquely famous in this field, and thus his favourite, the Bactrian orvert gryphon, was chosen as his dexter supporter. It is not always understood that this breed, despite a fearsome reputation for both valour and strength (it being often reported in ancient times as capable of carrying a

pair of oxen yoked for the plough), is fundamentally a gentle creature, as indeed, thought the Editor, judged as an academic rather than as the brave warrior he had been in the war, the Colonel was also (indeed, "as kind a man as ever slit a throat" it has been said).

The sinister supporter was a rather more difficult problem, as there were so many candidates to consider. The Editor favoured the meringue, partly because it would be an interesting addition to the heraldic bestiary, partly because it belonged to an adventure he and the Colonel had shared ([as related elsewhere](#)), and partly because he felt the preservation society dedicated to the orang-outang with the mermaid tail needed the publicity. The Colonel preferred to have a kelpie and once this had been agreed there was some vigorous discussion on the type. The Editor preferred the type illustrated here, although it is becoming quite rare, but the Colonel insisted it should be the Marilyn type he had identified in Loch Ness as working for the Scottish Tourist Authority in the guise of Nessie, and it is the Marilyn manifestation that has been blazoned.

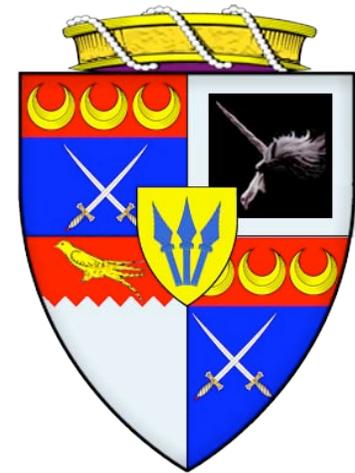


The “Exterminate! Exterminate! Exterminate!” as his motto recognises the Colonel’s expertise in Dalek, for which he is retained as a consultant by the BBC, and it also, in its repetition, nods to the three spears on the Constable of Sapinberg inescutcheon, these being for the defence against the humbugs, blatherskites and poseurs whose numbers are now rising exponentially as we tumble into the twenty-first century.

The Houdemont arms in the first and fourth quarters are quite extraordinarily attractive, so attractive in fact that they have prompted suggestions of being the invention of a Hollywood film producer, but this is not so. They were first borne by Antoine de Soreau who held the seigneurie of Houdemont in the late seventeenth century after long service with the Emperor’s army, and it has been suggested (not by the Editor) that the three crescents in chief may possibly refer to war against the Turks.

The origin of the “unicorn’s head by twilight” in the second quarter has been [described elsewhere](#) as the commemoration of the Colonel’s capture on film, in Tannou-Touva, of the rare silver unicorn, and thus it is not of great interest here. The third quarter, of course, is the one that intrigues historians, as it does not claim direct descent from Sir John de Mandeville, the great gryphon hunter (although there is a collateral descent), but the Hertford Mandeville arms as arms of affection.

Naturally, the Colonel has always been hugely proud of this family link to the ancient research into his own subject and to the courage of a great mediæval explorer, so he was not entirely happy to learn of the Editor’s new study of Sir John de Mandeville and his life after leaving England. It now appears that an element of fiction may have been introduced into the records of this renowned scholar’s life. Fiction, of course, is an idea one would never associate with the Colonel.



Sir John’s own account of his life places his birth and childhood in St Albans, the beginning of his long exploration in 1322, and the year of his compilation of the account of his travels as 1356. These details of the man described in 1631 as “the British Odysseus” have never been disputed, and there are written references to him in church records not long after his death, but no one until recently has linked him to a historically documented person. However, there are records in the Belgian city of Liège referring to a vanished tombstone below which lay the noble Johannes de Mandeville, *ad barbam*, Lord of Campdi, an Englishman who died in 1372 after travels all over the world. It is possible that this was Jean de Bourgogne, a known writer, who may

have written with de Mandeville as *nom de plume* and may have chosen to be buried as him.

The link between the two men is literary. Another writer, Jean d'Outremeuse, cleric and notary, who died in 1399, mentioned that Jean de Bourgogne *à la barbe* of whose will he was executor, "on his deathbed disclosed that his real name was Jean de Mandeville, count of Montfort, lord of the island of Campdi and of the castle of Perouse." He claimed further that as a young man in England he killed an aristocratic rival in a duel, fled England and travelled very widely before settling in Liège. He is known to have died in 1372 and, as also was the noble Johannes de Mandeville who, too, died in 1372, was buried by the Vilemites (*Guilelmitarum*). However, more suggestive than the coincidence of the year and place of the two burials is the literary legacy of Jean de Bourgogne, in which his famous treatise on the plague was found to have one copy bound together with the oldest preserved copy of Sir John de Mandeville's *Travels*.

Jean de Bourgogne was unquestionably a historic figure in mediæval Liège, known as a physician with a wide knowledge of philosophy, astrology and physics. Was he also the Englishman, Sir John de Mandeville, of the family from whom the Colonel descends, or was this only the name under which he wrote of his travels and his famous, much quoted comments on gryphons?

