RUMSEY COAT OF ARMS

Steve Rumsey

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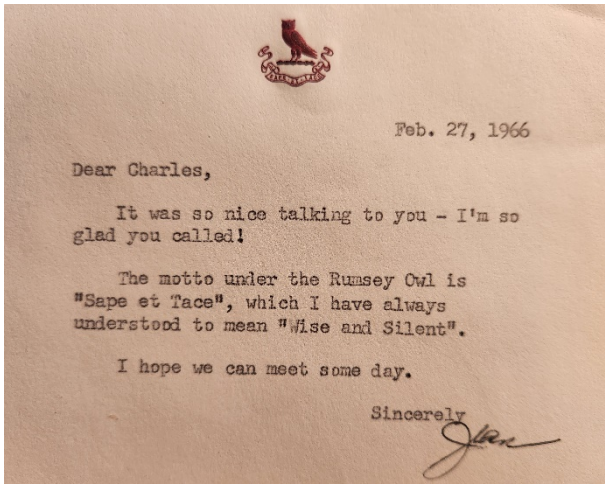
On Feb 28, 1966, my Dad received a note from Jean Rumsey. He had contacted her regarding a Rumsey coat of arms, which he wanted to mount over our fireplace in Ohio, along with Wallace Woodmancy's civil war sword. Jean replied with two references. Her note card featured a horned owl with a motto "Sape et Tace"—wise and silent.



Feb. 27, 1966

Dear Charles,

It was so nice talking to you - I'm so glad you called!

The motto under the Rumsey Owl is "Sape et Tace", which I have always understood to mean "Wise and Silent".

I hope we can meet some day.

Sincerely

A coat of arms belongs to knights—the King's warriors. There are a few knights in our history, but we were largely not a military family. However, with a family as old as ours, it's likely that one or more coats of arms were awarded over time.

Jean did not reveal where the owl and motto come from, but the following note that she enclosed would seem to call them into question. In a 1955 letter, H. St. John Rumsey writes:

> "The last recorded Rumsey Arms (at the College of Arms) were those of William Rumsey of Bykston (1481-1549). These were 'Argent, a fesse gules, in chief a label of 5 points azure'
>
> There is no authority for a crest. In a letter from the College of Arms to Dr. James Rumsey of Amersham (1778-1855) written on May 22nd 1826, they say: 'The Talbot crest is altogether an assumption'. Nor indeed is there any evidence to support the use of a horned owl."

That's intriguing. We know that our branch of the family owned Bickton Manor from 1421 to 1503, when it passed to another branch by the heir's death as a young boy. The William Rumsey referred to here would be the right age as a possible heir. Of course, there were likely other Rumseys living on or near the estate at the time, so even if not an owner, William may have resided there. Unfortunately, he remains a mystery, not listed on the ancestry websites.

Jean's second reference is from an article in "The Australian Genealogist" by Herbert Rumsey. Again, we see only description of some cloth bands, with no crest or owl.

> "An English gentleman once wrote to me that he envied the Rumseys their coat of arms; its simpleness denoted its great antiquity. It is described as 'argent a fess gules' (silver with a red band). The red band denoted a scarf or belt of honor given by the King during active service, which the warrior just tied around his body, later, round his shield. In more recent years, when sons or grandsons wished to distinguish their family from that of older generations, a mark of cadency was added as a charge. The 'label' was a piece of silk or linen, with several pendants hanging from it. The Royal princes put a label of three points or tassels during the life of the King, one of five points while the grandfather is still living."

I think that we can safely assume that there are one or more Rumsey coats of arms. Probably all of the features were included in one or more of the versions. My dad went for all of the options and had a plaque made. It has the red stripe, 5 points of azure, a horned owl, and a crest. Why not? The truth is in that plaque somewhere.