



The Methodist Church of New Zealand
Mission Resourcing



Information Pack

Methodist Heraldry

Behind the Scallop Shell

There has been an increasing interest over the last year or so in the use made by the Methodist Church of New Zealand of the scallop shell as a symbol. It occurs in the Coat of Arms used as a letterhead on official Connexional and much Divisional and District correspondence, as well as on the cover of the Laws and Regulations. The letterhead of the Administration Division has it in another form, along with symbols of Maori **tukutuku** and a dove. The official seal of Conference, devised about 1934, and affixed to all legal documents needing to be signed under seal, also includes the scallop shell.

The use of the scallop shell is of ancient origin. Practically speaking, the scallop shell was a traveller's aid – a practical and natural artifact that could be put to good use on a long journey, especially as a drinking vessel. It became a symbol for those who had made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in north-west Spain. From about the 12th century, it was even more commonly used in the medieval baptismal service.

To understand why it is used by Methodists one needs to explore the history of the Wesley family. Their origins are to be found in the West Country of England, Dorset and Devon, in particular.

It is probable that they were originally connected with the Wellesley family, from the same part of England. That branch moved to Ireland and from it came Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington. It was the Wellesley's who used the scallop shell, and a seal from the 14th century includes a shield with a cross and five scallops.

The more immediate connection with John Wesley goes back to a time near the end of his life, in December 1787 when his portrait was painted by William Hamilton. Almost immediately after an engraving was made, and this enabled the painting to have a very wide circulation. This was done by Thomas Fittler the following year, and in it he included a coat of arms.

He was an imaginative creation incorporating a shield with twelve scallops quartered, surmounted by a heraldic beast known as a wyvern, and with the motto **God is love** underneath. It is not a coat-of-arms that has any formal authenticity, having never been authorized of the College of Hearalds.

Fittler's coat-of-arms, however, continued in use throughout the 19th century, and into the 20th, despite it never having official approval from either the English or the New Zealand Conference. A lead was taken by the Trustees for Methodist Purposes (the body responsible for Connexional property in England) to obtain a formal coat of arms, and this was done in 1948.

Bearing in mind that it was for property purposes and incorporates a castle, the main feature is a shield with twelve scallop shells quartered, the quarters being formed by a cross. This remains, as far as is known, the only coat of arms with such official authorization.

In New Zealand, Conference in the 1930's decided there should be an official seal. It is likely the design was in the hands of the then Connexional Secretary, M.A.Rugby Pratt. He

appears to have relied on Fittler's invention, since it, too, incorporates two hardly recognizable wyverns, as well as the scallops.

At a different level, the English Methodist Conference in 1954 adopted a scallop-shell badge, simply as an emblem by which one Methodist **might easily recognise** another. The New Zealand Conference followed suit the following year, and supplies were sold through the Epworth Bookrooms. In making this move, the Conference perpetuated the myth that the scallop was part of a 'Wesley coat-of-arms'.

The Church's **official** coat-of-arms, was devised over twenty years ago. It is used primarily for communications from Conference, and throughout the years the President and Vice-President have it on their letterhead.

It consists in a shield divided into four quarters by a cross, with one quarter containing three scallop shells. The other quarters have a dove, an open Bible, and the Southern Cross. Surrounding the shield is a badge with the words **New Zealand Methodist Conference**.