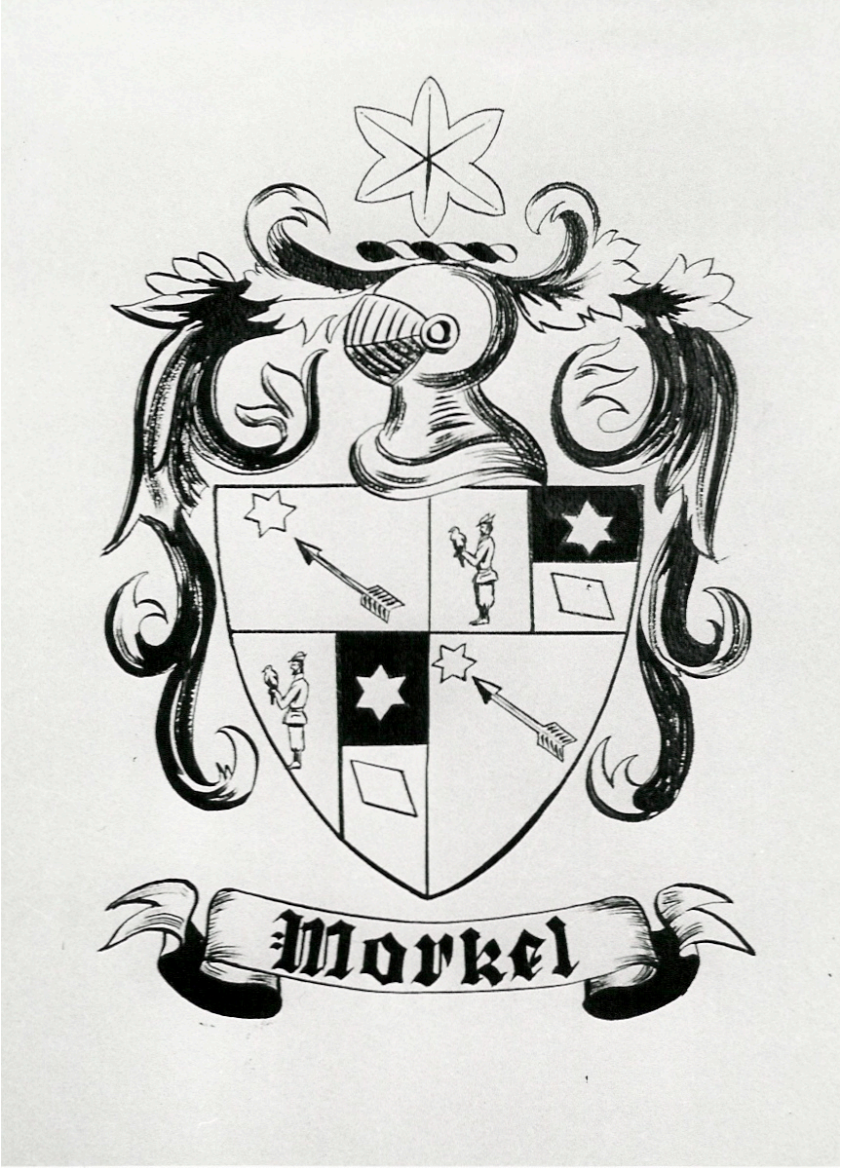
The Family Crest

I remember in the entrance hall of *Die Bos* there were some fascinating items from the old times. They included for example a poetic tribute to *stamvader* Philip, printed in 1725, for hosting shipwrecked sailors, a beautiful chest that comes from Philip's wife, Catharina Pasman, and other old furniture, including a large grandfather clock from the mid 1700s. On the wall was also the family crest or coat of arms, clearly from long ago. It is also reproduced in P.W. Morkel's 1961 book about the family (1).

The crest has the classical knight's helmet and shield, with the Morkel name in a ribbon (or whatever it is called) below. My knowledge of heraldry is weak but I am aware that the four quadrants of the shield denote family connections and history. The top left and bottom right quadrants, associated with the male patriarch, has an arrow pointing to a star. The top right and bottom left quadrants, associated with the wife, are more complex. They contained a falconer on the left and a star above a parallelogram on the right.



Morkel Family Crest at Onverwacht.

Source: P.W. Morkel (2)

Where did this crest come from? Did Philip bring it along from Germany or was it a recent acquisition? While we cannot be certain of its provenance, the windows of the 2nd church of Stellenbosch give some clues. The first church was burned down in the big fire of 18 December 1710 when at the height of the dry mediterranean climate summer, and driven by a gale force South Easterly, a fire swept through the thatched roofed buildings of the town. Rebuilding the church went through many delays and it was completed only in 1723 (2).

There were 17 painted oval window-panes of crests of prominent members of the church (they would have paid for the privilege) fixed in the leadlight windows of the church. When the church was rebuilt for the 3rd time in 1862, the windows were thrown on the builders' rubble. Daniel Johannes O'Flinn Morkel (1836 – 1903) happened to walk by and saved two of them. They have been preserved and are in the Stellenbosch Museum.

One of the windows is a simple inscription surrounded by baroque angels: *Philip Morkel, Heemraat, Anno 1723.* (A *Heemraad* was the equivalent of a town/district councillor.) The other window contained an elaborately embellished family crest with the inscription Sibella Pasman, *Weduwe van* (widow of) *Jan Lobsten. A 1723.* Sibella Pasman was the sister of Catharina, Philip's wife and married to Jan Loubser (2)

Sibella's crest is interesting – it is almost identical to the top left and bottom left quadrants in the Morkel crest, showing the falconer, star and parallelogram. The falconer part comes from the Cloete family (a prominent family at the Cape). Catharina and Sibella's maternal grandfather was a Cloete. The parralellogram as a measuring device was for the Pasman name – (*pas* is a Dutch word to fit or measure).

Window panes from Stellenbosch Church 1723 – 1862

Source: Hugo & van der Bijl, p 64a. (2)

Thus, Philip did not have a crest at the time the windows were commissioned, and he had to endure his sister-in-law's crest every Sunday during the long sermons. It was a time to have a crest prepared, with a Morkel emblem on the top left and bottom right combined with the Pasman emblems as in Sibella's crest.

I found a compendium of Dutch bourgeois *(burgerlike)* family crests in a library years ago. It was printed during the 1800s. The closest name to ours was 'Merkel' and there it was - an arrow pointing to a star, just like in the family crest.

Thus it seems that Philip had it prepared sometime after 1723. It is unlikely that his son Willem, (or later descendants) would have commissioned it, because then the Malan emblem of his wife would have formed part of the crest.

Cor Pama's *Die Groot Afrikaanse Familieboek. (3)* gives a description of this crest. It also displays another crest without the Pasman part, showing only the arrow-pointing-to-the star theme. Unfortunately he does not provide a reference of its origin.

Morkel Crest

Source: Cor Pama. Die Groot Afrikaanse Familieboek (3)

In the British tradition, a crest is governed by heraldic rules. It is limited to aristocracy, and specific to an individual, not a family. Europeans, such as the Dutch, Germans and French had a broader approach. Not only aristocracy, but also middle class families had crests. These traditions stretched back hundreds of years and the crests were associated with families rather than individuals, and not subjected to the strict rules or heraldry. When the Dutch settled the Cape in 1652, crests were common. Those who did not have crests when they arrived, had them designed as they moved up the social ladder. In Cor Pama's book there are more than 400 crests for South African families. There is a niche industry which caters for the need of families to have and display crests. For a fee they will find whether a crest exists, and then produce a nice coloured portrait to hang on the wall. I suspect that a crest is always found (even if concocted) and it is a nice little business. Because of public interest, a Bureau of Heraldry was established in South Africa to assist in the design of crests and to form a registry for such designs, under authority of the Heraldry Act.

For some, a family crest smacks of vanity, even if harmless. For others it is part of the history and a feeling of kinship and pride in being part of the family. While one need not flaunt it, there is much pleasure in a family crest which we can trace back to *stamvader* Philip Morkel in the 1720s.

It is possible that crests evolved from an earlier tradition of housemarks. These were used to identify property at a time when most people were illiterate. It is still used to brand cattle and other livestock and the tradition continues in the logos, such as the Mercedes star, and trademarks used in commerce. We are fortunate to have an example of a housemark in the Morkel family, dating back to the sixteenth century. Emmerich Morkel, a younger mayor (*jüngerer burgemeister*) in the German town of Butzbach had a housemark in 1535 shown below.

House -mark (Hausmark) 1535 of Emmerich Morkel
Source: Melchior 1982 (4).

André T. Morkel
November 2012

Notes and Sources

1. Morkel, Philip William 1961. *The Morkels. Family History and Family Tree.* Cape Town. Published Privately.
2. Hugo, A.M. & J. van der Bijl, *1963. Die Kerk van Stellenbosch. Tafelberg Uitgewers. p 64a*
3. Pama, Cor. 1983. *Die Groot Afrikaanse Familienaamboek.* Human & Rousseau. CD 2001 Contentlot.
4. Melchior, Erich 1982 – 1983. "Butzbacher Familien: Marckel (Markel und Morckel)". *Hessiche Familienkunde Band* 16, 1982 – 1983, pp 252 – 256.
5. Koch, Rudolf 1955. *The Book of Signs.* New York Dover Publications.

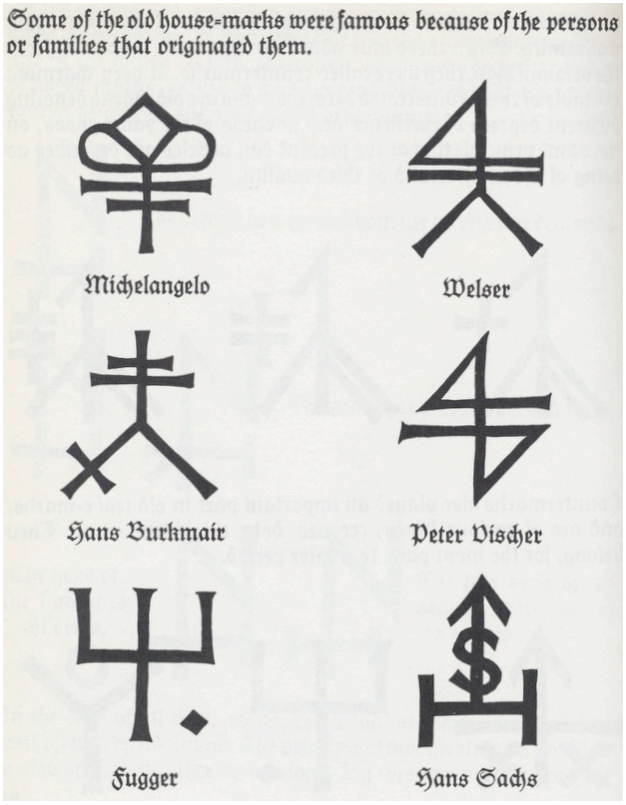
A Note On House-marks.

A book by Rudolf Koch (5) on signs used in medieval times in Germany and Europe has a section on house-marks. They were at first, private signs of peasant proprietors, and their use was originally confined to their holdings, with all movable property distinguished by the holdings-mark.

The holdings-mark was displayed:

By being punched into floated timber for sorting out at the end of the run;
By being snipped into the ears of domestic animals and the feet of web footed animals;
By being clipped into the coats of horses;
By being painted in sacks and on the fleeces of sheep;
By being cut into the upper bills of swans;
By being ploughed into the surface of fields;
By being carved on trees and on stocks for drawing lots;
By being embroidered on rugs and cloths;
By being punched or branded into the iron or wooden parts of agricultural implements;
By being branded into the hides and horns of domestic animals.

At a later date house-marks came to be used as personal signs, and often underwent modifications at the hands of different members of the family. Later they were used as trade-marks and the marks of craftsmen and artists. The simplest signs were made up of notches and straight lines arranged in crosses of various shapes. Curves were used much later, and presupposes a different method from that of carving and snipping, more in the nature of painting or printing.



Some famous names with house-marks
Source: Rudolf Koch (5) p90.