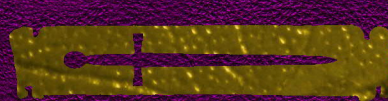
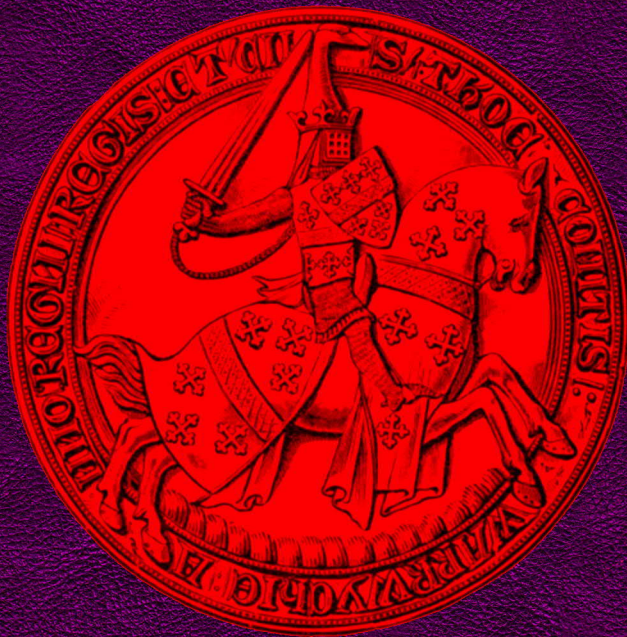
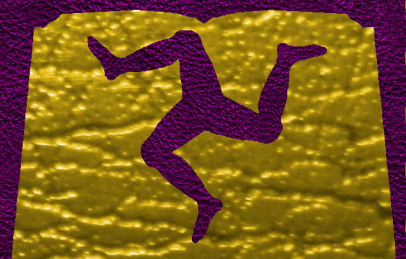


A GUIDE TO HERALDRY FOR ROLEPLAYERS



Shaun Hately





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by Shaun Hately



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Fundamental Understandings

As its title indicates, this book is intended as a guide to heraldry for roleplayers – primarily those GMing or playing games set in one of the many worlds, both commercial and home brewed that draw part of their inspiration and ideas from our own world's Medieval Europe. It is not intended to be a textbook on heraldry for other purposes and certainly is not intended to be any sort of academic treatment of what is a very complicated subject. It is hoped that this guide will be simple enough to be easily used by those who come to this subject with only a basic knowledge of heraldry to produce coats of arms that can be used in their own games without too much effort, but will also be detailed enough to help people develop quite complicated devices and to understand their features. For this reason while specific heraldic terms will be used at times, I will tend towards using plain English terminology wherever possible, with traditional heraldic terms listed in **underlined bold italics** for reference when they come up. A lexicon of heraldic terms will be found in one of the appendices to this document.

Some people may be surprised to learn that heraldry is a written art form, not just a visual one. Coats of arms are certainly intended to be presented visually, but their official description does not involve an image, but a written description using the language of heraldry.

As an example of this, the following is a visual representation of one of the most famous Coats of Arms in our real-world – the Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom, the arms of the Monarch of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (currently, Queen Elizabeth II):



The official description (called a **blazon**) of this Coat of Arms reads as follows:

Quarterly, first and fourth Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or armed and langued Azure (for England), second quarter Or a lion rampant within a double tressure flory-counter-flory Gules (for Scotland), third quarter Azure a harp Or stringed Argent (for Ireland), the whole surrounded by the Garter; for a Crest, upon the Royal helm the imperial crown Proper, thereon a lion statant guardant Or imperially crowned Proper; Mantling Or and ermine; for Supporters, dexter a lion rampant guardant Or crowned as the Crest, sinister a unicorn Argent armed, crined and unguled Proper, gorged with a coronet Or composed of crosses patée and fleurs de lys a chain affixed thereto passing between the forelegs and reflexed over the back also Or. Motto 'Dieu et mon Droit' in the compartment below the shield, with the Union rose, shamrock and thistle engrafted on the same stem.

This is a reasonably complicated Coat of Arms, and a reasonably complicated blazon and you should not expect to understand much of it at this point, unless you already have knowledge of heraldry. But by the time you finish using this guide, if you want to learn the terminology, you will probably find that you do understand most of it. The language is really not that complicated once you grasp the fundamentals. Throughout the guide when a coat of arms appears for the first time, I will include the blazon and in some cases, some notes about its history or traditions.

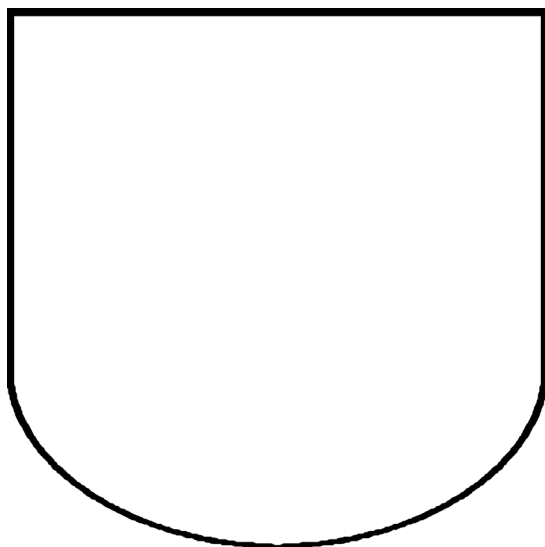
I have been playing roleplaying games for over thirty years, and my own interest in heraldry grew out of the games I have played. I do not claim to be an expert in all aspects of heraldry, just somebody who has learned enough to make it an important part of many of his own games.

In this guide there will be references to rules of heraldry. Right from the start, it should be understood that these rules are there to be broken – but they exist for a reason and should only be broken for a reason. Do not feel that you cannot design a shield that breaks the rules if it looks right to you, if it matches what you want – real world heraldry is full of designs that break the rules sometimes. This may be for historical reasons in some cases – some very old designs may have been created before certain rules came into effect, and they are preserved because of their historical value. In some cases, it may have been done deliberately to make a particular point that the person bearing a coat of arms was special in some ways. And in some cases, it may have simply been done because the artistic effect achieved was desirable – in simple terms, if a design looks good, sometimes it will be considered ‘good heraldry’ even though it is outside the normal rules of design. As in any roleplaying game, don’t let the rules get in the way of the game. They are there as tools to be used to make your game better – not to stop it from being as good as it can be.

It is important to mention that in the real world, heraldry is taken very seriously by many people including myself, and in many countries there are traditions and customs governing the use of coats-of-arms in real life. There are people who will be offended by the misuse of heraldry in a real world situation. Because this guide is intended as a guide for roleplayers, I will not be going into most of the intricacies of real world heraldic etiquette but because of this please avoid using this guide in ways it was not intended to be used – creating a coat of arms for ‘Sir Grisdome of Berghaven’ in your weekly campaign is very different from creating one for yourself to use in real life. This guide is intended for the former purpose.

As this is a guide for gamers, rather than those who are interested in the real intricacies of heraldry, some of the information is presented in simple form, that may not be absolutely accurate in fine details that are not relevant to a guide for gaming. And the guide is primarily based around the heraldic traditions of England, and the United Kingdom, more than around those of other parts of Europe. Most is the same, but there are nuances of detail in different places that are beyond the scope of this guide.

The Shield



Throughout this guide I will be making use of this simple shield design for the purposes of illustration and examples. It is a convenient shape for those purposes.

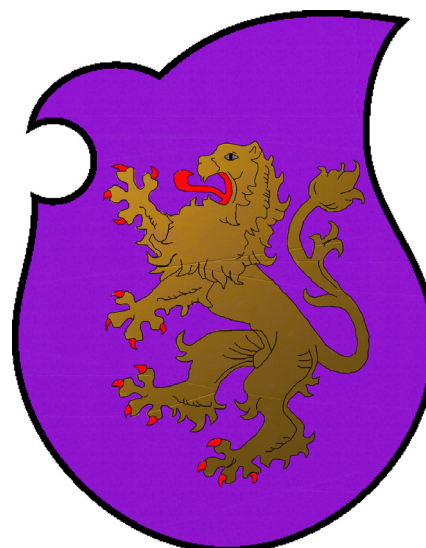
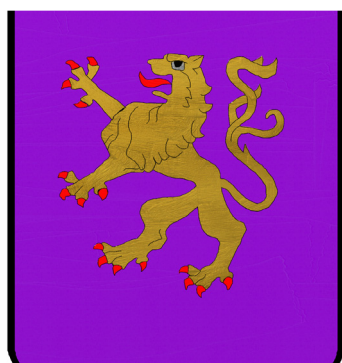
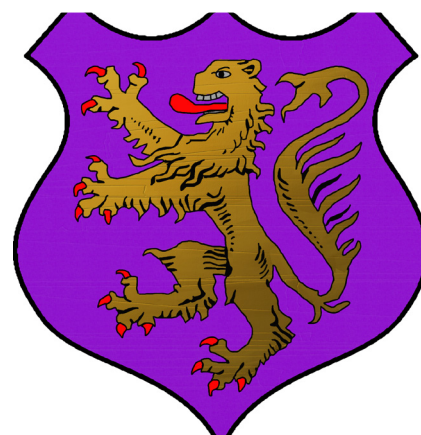
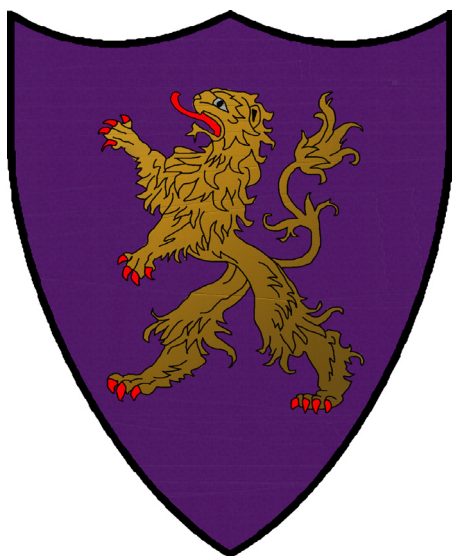
A variety of different shield shapes are used in heraldry – often depending on the period in which a shield was drawn (or the period which the artist may wish to invoke). And this brings us to the first point that I would like to emphasise – in heraldic terms each of the following images would be considered identical, all being versions of the blazon Purpure, a lion rampant Or, armed and langued Gules.

Even though the shields are different shapes, and each lion is slightly different, these four shields are heraldically identical (there are heraldically different forms for animals, but we will get to those later). An artist has a considerable amount of freedom

as to how they render a particular design – the simple shield I will be using most in this guide is an appropriate choice for educational purposes (which is why it is used), but might not be viewed as particularly decorative – and certainly might not be the best shape for a shield that is actually intended to be used in combat. Though modern heraldry has moved beyond this original purpose, it should be remembered that it has its

origins in the idea that a warrior needed to be able to identify his allies and his enemies in combat in an age where such people were often armoured so their faces could not be seen. In the roleplaying context, this is still an obvious consideration and the shape of the Knight's shield may be more influenced by the skills of the local armourer than by any aesthetic consideration.

In summary, the shape of the shield is not generally important in heraldry. A particular coat of arms may be drawn with different shield shapes for different reasons.



Colours


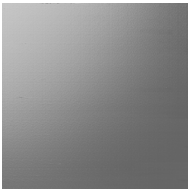
One feature of heraldry is that, for the most part, only a few colours are commonly used in creating a heraldic design. Once again, this is connected to the original purpose of heraldry – to identify a person in a battle situation. Subtle shades are difficult to distinguish quickly at a distance and so only the boldest and most distinct colours tend to be used.

It is traditional in heraldry to describe these colours as tinctures and to divide the tinctures into three separate groups – metals, colours and furs.

There are two metals commonly used in heraldry – and perhaps, unsurprisingly, these are those two metals most identified as valuable throughout history – gold and silver. It is common in heraldic design for these two metals to appear in designs as yellow (in the case of gold) and white (in the case of silver). In the case of the illustrations in this guide, the following colours are used to represent these two metals.



A Guide to heraldry for Roleplayers

	ENGLISH NAME	HERALDIC NAME
	Gold	<u>Or</u>
	Silver	<u>Argent</u>


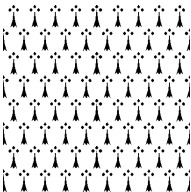
As shown in this table, the colours all have particular names used in heraldry. In this guide, I intend to use English language terms in most cases, but it may be useful to be aware of the heraldic terms as well. They are derived from the languages used in medieval times – Or comes from the Norman French term for gold, while Argent is derived from the Latin for silver.

Besides these two metals, there are five colours commonly used in heraldry.

	ENGLISH NAME	HERALDIC NAME
	Black	<u>Sable</u>
	Blue	<u>Azure</u>
	Red	<u>Gules</u>
	Green	<u>Vert</u>
	Purple	<u>Purple</u>

It is worth noting that, historically, the production of purple dye was very expensive, and so this colour tends to be used fairly rarely in heraldry, and is often used as a particular distinction to indicate royal or other elite heritage.

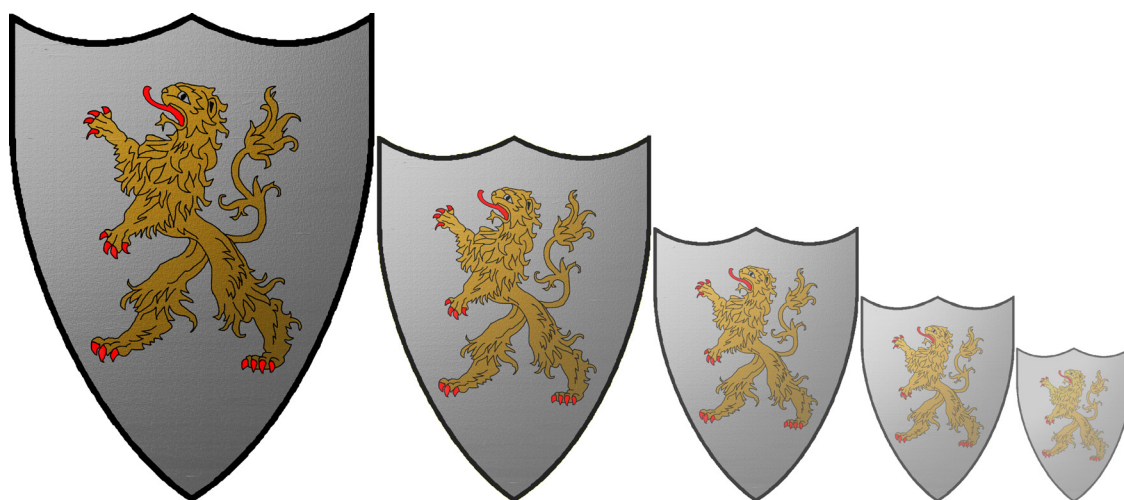
Finally, after the metals and the colours, we have the furs. There are two furs commonly used in heraldry. They are called furs because they are stylised representations of the winter coats of two common European animals – the stoat, and the squirrel. These patterns are used in the same way as the metal and the colours on the shield.

	HERALDIC NAME	ORIGIN
	<u>Vair</u>	Squirrel fur
	<u>Ermine</u>	Stoat fur

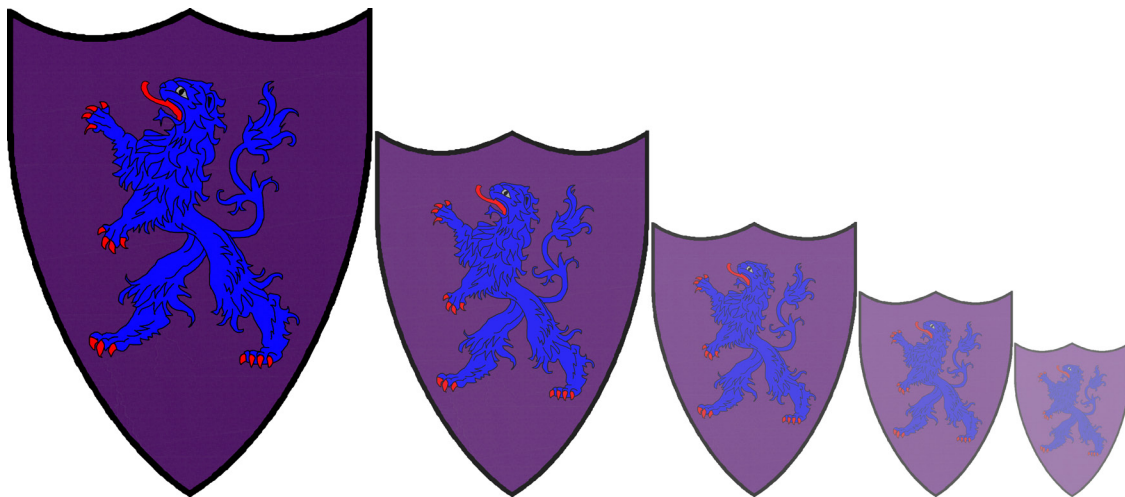
When referring to the furs in this guide, I will be using their heraldic names, as there are no modern English equivalents.

Having talked about these various colours and patterns, it is necessary to explain one very important principle of heraldry – sometimes referred to as the first rule of heraldry. And that is that a colour should not be placed on a colour and that a metal should not be placed on a metal. You place metal on colour, and you place colour on metal.

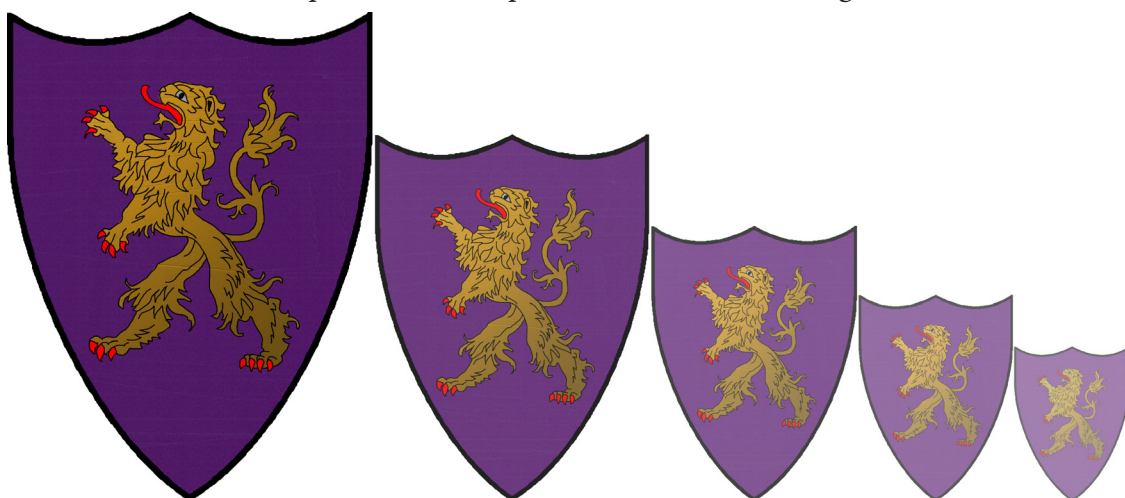
This rule (and like all rules in heraldry, it can be broken for good reason) is, once again, based on the original purpose of heraldry – allowing somebody to identify somebody else in battle. At a distance, it is more difficult to distinguish two overlapping colours, or two overlapping metals, than it is to distinguish a colour overlapping a metal or a metal overlapping a colour. The following illustration makes this clearer.



Argent, a lion rampant Azure armed and langued Gules.



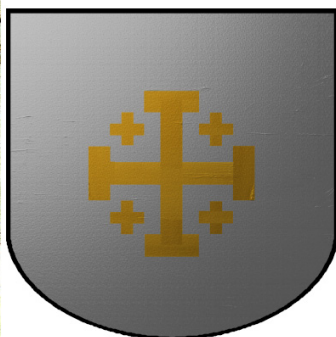
Purple, a lion rampant Azure armed and langued Gules.



Purple, a lion rampant Or armed and langued Gules.

This rule is easy to follow – always place a metal on a colour, or a colour on a metal.

There are exceptions to this rule – in particular, gold and silver together have historically been used on shields for particular revered religious institutions – perhaps to highlight their holiness. One example of this is the coat of arms of the Kings of Jerusalem during the Crusades with its five gold crosses on a field of silver.



Argent, a Cross potent between four plain Crosslets Or – Arms of the Kings of Jerusalem. Note the equivalence of white in the clothing, and silver on the shield.

In your own game world, you may wish to do the same.

There are a number of less common colours in heraldry, and I will lay these out here (in fact, we are dealing with one metal and six colours – some are old, just uncommon, others are recent additions. They may be useful in a fantasy world in either case. And you may wish to use other colours as well – but these colours should also serve to illustrate why the standard colours are used – some of them are quite close to the standard colours and are difficult to tell apart at a distance because of this.

	ENGLISH NAME	HERALDIC NAME
	Copper	<u>Copper</u>
	Mulberry	<u>Murrey</u>
	Blood Red	<u>Sanguine</u>
	Sky Blue	<u>Bleu Celeste</u>
	Flesh	<u>Carnation</u>
	Pink	<u>Rose</u>
	Ash Grey	<u>Cendrée</u>
	Orange-Brown	<u>Tenné</u>

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It should be noted that Carnation being described as the colour of “flesh” reflects the part of the world from which the heraldic traditions being written about in this guide come from. In a more diverse society, if particular colours exist specifically to reflect the common colours of skin, it is likely a greater range of colours would be heraldically appropriate.

There are occasions when none of these colours are used, but instead, the decision is taken to try and render an object (or charge) in its ‘natural’ colours – those that appear in the real world. This is generally done in a somewhat stylised fashion, but is more realistic than the use of heraldic colours is. When this is done, the object is said to be coloured proper. Consider these two examples – a lion rendered in gold (Or) and the same lion rendered proper.



Lion Rampant Or



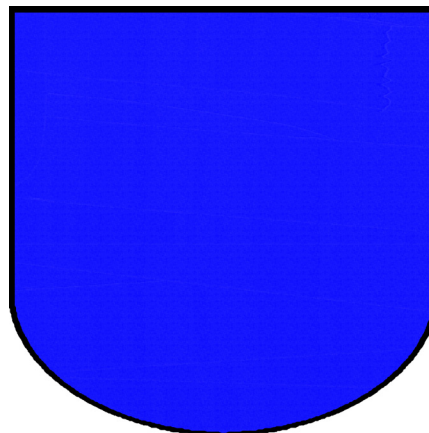
Lion Rampant Proper

In summary, heraldry generally makes use of a particular set of colours, and there is a general rule that you do not place a normal colour on top of another normal colour, or a metal colour on top of another metal colour, but that you place colour on metal, and metal on colour.

The Field

The simplest design on a shield would be one of a single colour with no design at all – perhaps a shield of plain blue, for example.

In a strict sense, there is no reason why this shield could not be considered valid, and in a particular fantasy campaign, there might well be good, in-game reasons, to allow for such designs in certain circumstances. But it is likely they would be limited to very exceptional people, or organisations. Because these designs are the simplest, they would likely be among the oldest – perhaps held by the ruling family of a powerful kingdom, or an organisation associated with a powerful religion. This is a determination that should be made by the GamesMaster and players of a particular campaign.



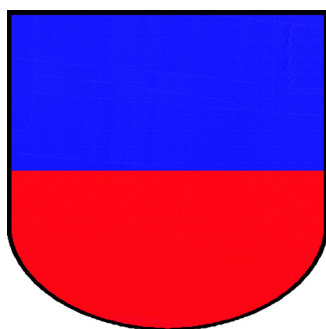
In general, though, most shields will have a more complicated design than this. There are three main elements in giving a shield a detailed design – the colours, already discussed is the first, the second is what is referred to as the field.

The field can be considered to be the background of a shield – in the simple example above, the entire field is blue (*Azure*). Though as I have said earlier, it would be extremely unusual for a shield to be completely plain, it is not rare for it to have a simple field like this. An example of this is the Coat of Arms of Ireland which consists of a golden harp with silver strings on a field of blue:

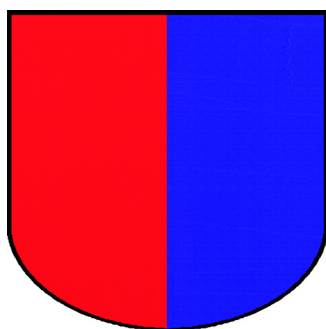


Argent, A harp Or, stringed Argent.

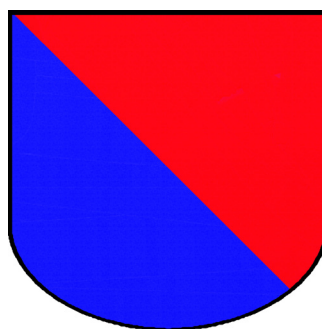
Even though this is not rare, it is more common for the field to be more complicated than this. The field is said to be divided in such a case. In this section, I will describe a number of common divisions. We will start with four simple divisions that divide the shield into halves. I will include the heraldic for each of these divisions, but we are primarily concerned with appearance rather than the names here.



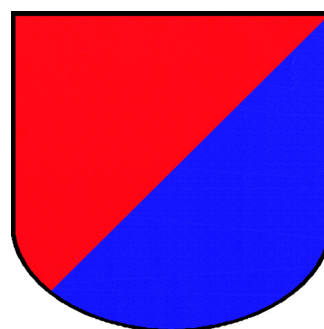
Party per fess



Party per pale



Party per bend

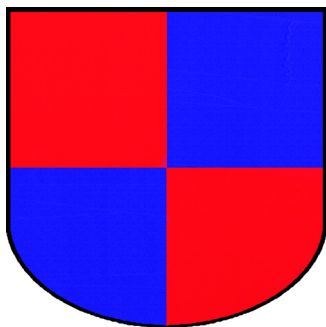


Party per bend sinister

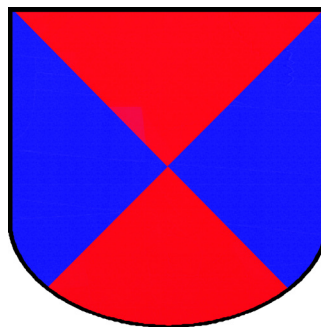
It is worth noting the term *sinister* in this last division. *Sinister* is drawn from the Latin word for left, and is commonly used in heraldry to indicate certain cases where something appears as a mirror image of its normally expected shape – so a *bend sinister* is as seen here a mirror image of a *bend*. The equivalent word for right is *dexter* but as a right facing is normally assumed in heraldry, it is the default and so does not need to be described unless there is scope for confusion, and so the term *dexter* appears less often than *sinister*.

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Besides these four divisions where the shield is divided in half, there are two standard divisions where the shield is divided into quarters. In heraldic terms, these halves and quarters are considered equal in size, even though the shape of the shield means this is not strictly true – what matters is that the divisions are done based on the midlines of the shield.

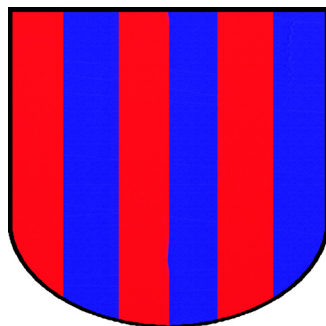


Party per cross

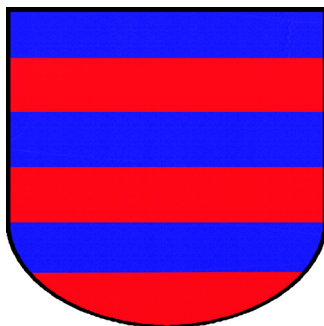


Party per saltire

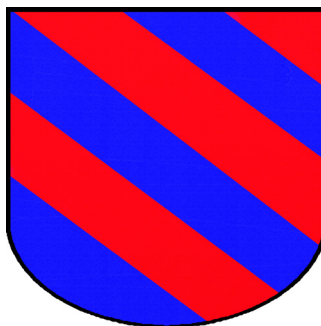
There are other more complex divisions as well, often based on the above. The following table shows some of the most common of these.



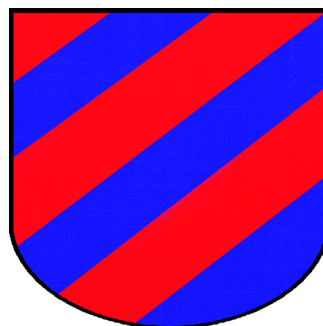
Party paly



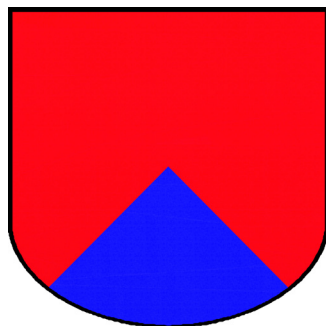
Party barry



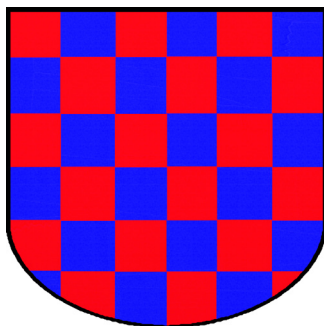
Party bendy



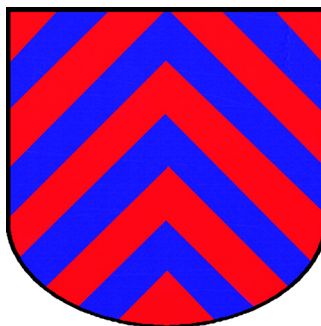
Party bendy sinister



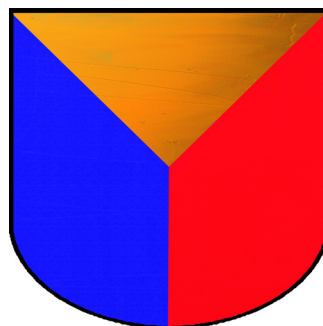
Party per chevron



Party chequy



Party chevronny



Party per pall

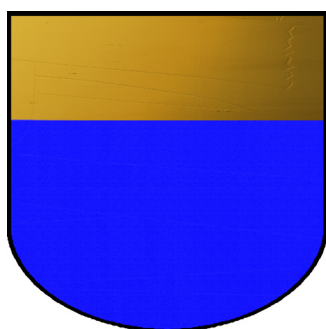
You will note that in the above examples, we have a colour - red (Gules) touching colour - blue (Azure). This is fine with divisions, but it is also perfectly acceptable for both parts of a division to be metals, and perfectly possible to have one being a colour and the other being a metal. In a case where a division requires three different colours, it would be normal for one of them to be a contrast as is seen in the last of the above examples – where the metal gold (Or) is contrasted with the colours red (Gules) and blue (Azure). Once again, consider what the shield would look like at distance – will the divisions still be reasonably clear.

In summary, while your shield may have a single colour or metal as a field, there are many other options that can be chosen. This section has presented some of the most common options.

Charges

After considering the field, we next come to the charges. In heraldry a charge is an emblem of picture that is placed on a field. Some shields may not bear any charges, but this is unusual. Most shields will have at least one charge on their field. We will look at two different types of charges – the first of these are the ordinaries.

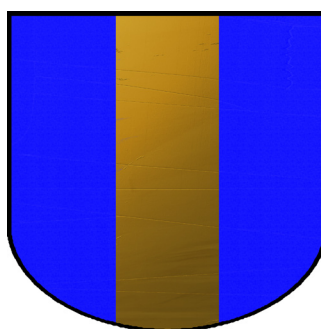
In heraldry, an ordinary is a simple symbol that is commonly used on a shield. In some books on heraldry, the term ordinary is only used for the most common of these symbols while the less common forms are called subordinaries. This is reasonably recent idea and many involved in heraldry disagree with it. For the purpose of this guide, I will not divide these charges into ordinaries and subordinaries but will instead group them as one category. The following table shows a variety of the ordinaries in gold (Or) on a blue (Azure) field, along with their heraldic names. Once again, the names are included for reference and you should not feel any need to try and learn them if you do not want to. This table does not contain every symbol that could be described as an ordinary but it does contain most, if not all, of the commonly encountered ones.



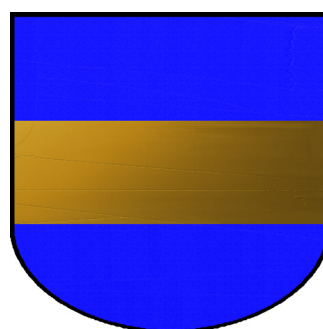
Chief



Bend



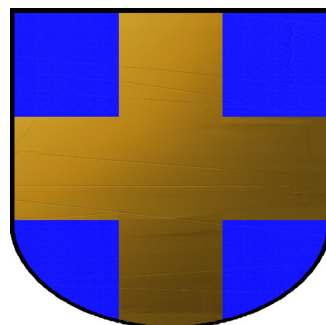
Pale



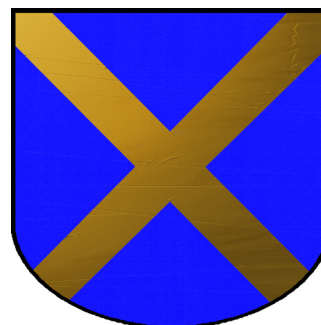
Fess



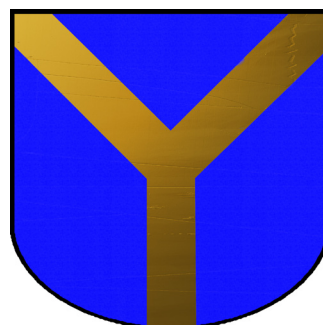
Chevron



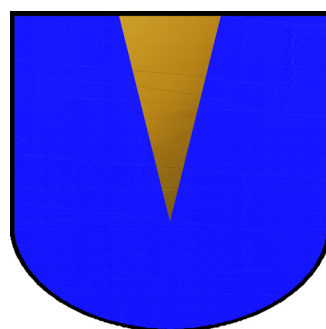
Cross



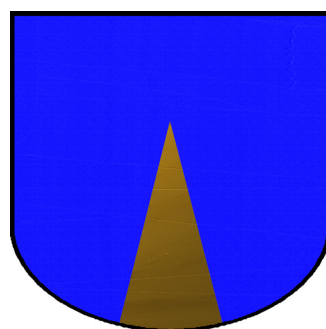
Saltire



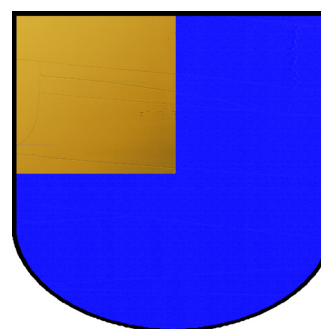
Pall



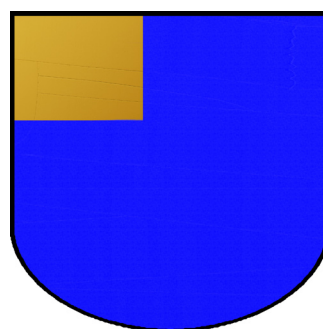
Pile



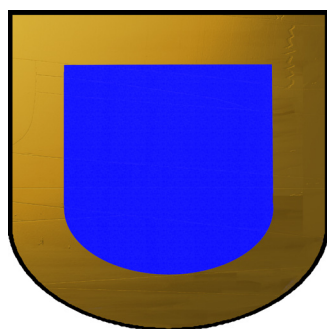
Pile reversed



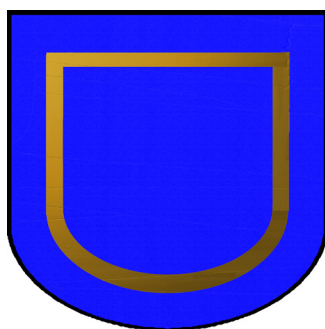
Quarter



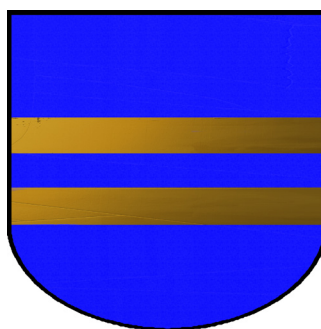
Canton



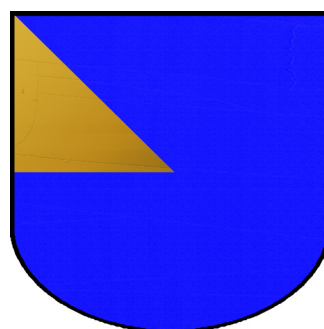
Bordure



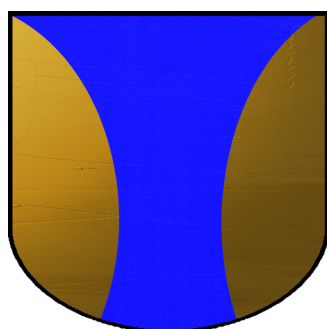
Orle



Bars (Two Bars)



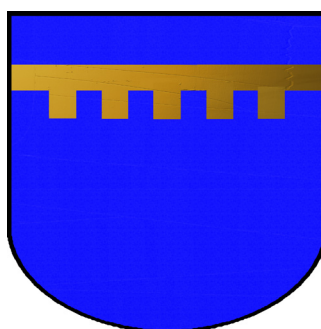
Gyron



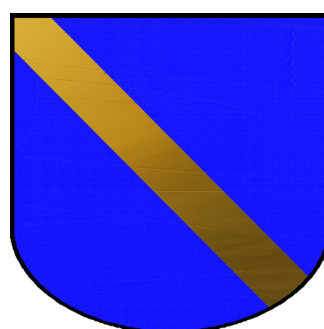
Flaunches



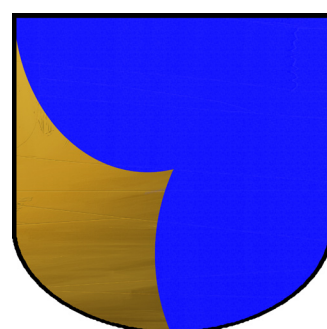
Fret



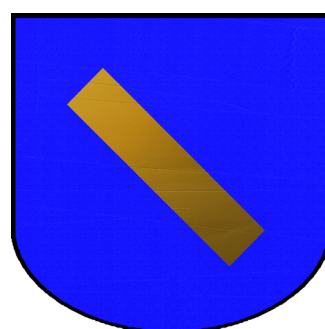
Label (of five points)



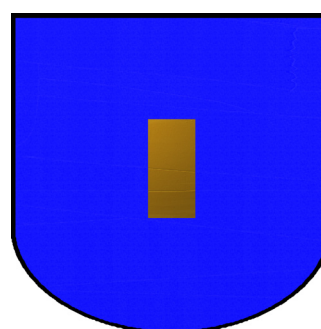
Bendlet



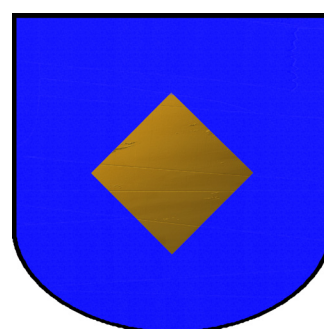
Gore



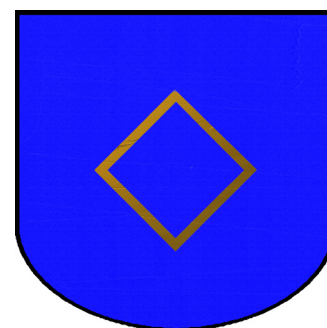
Baton



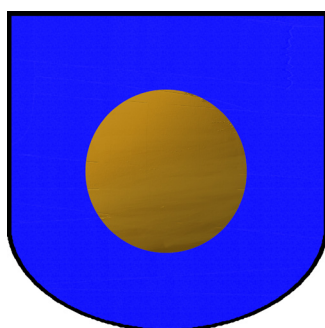
Billett



Lozenge

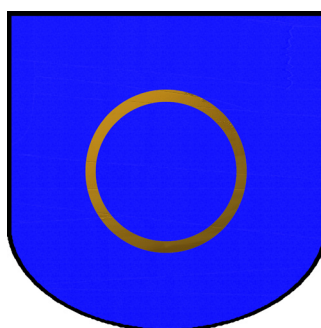


Mascle

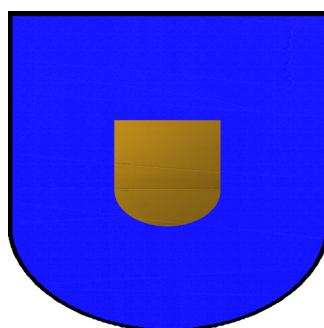


Roundel(Bezant)

(Roundels have individual names depending on their colour)



Annulet

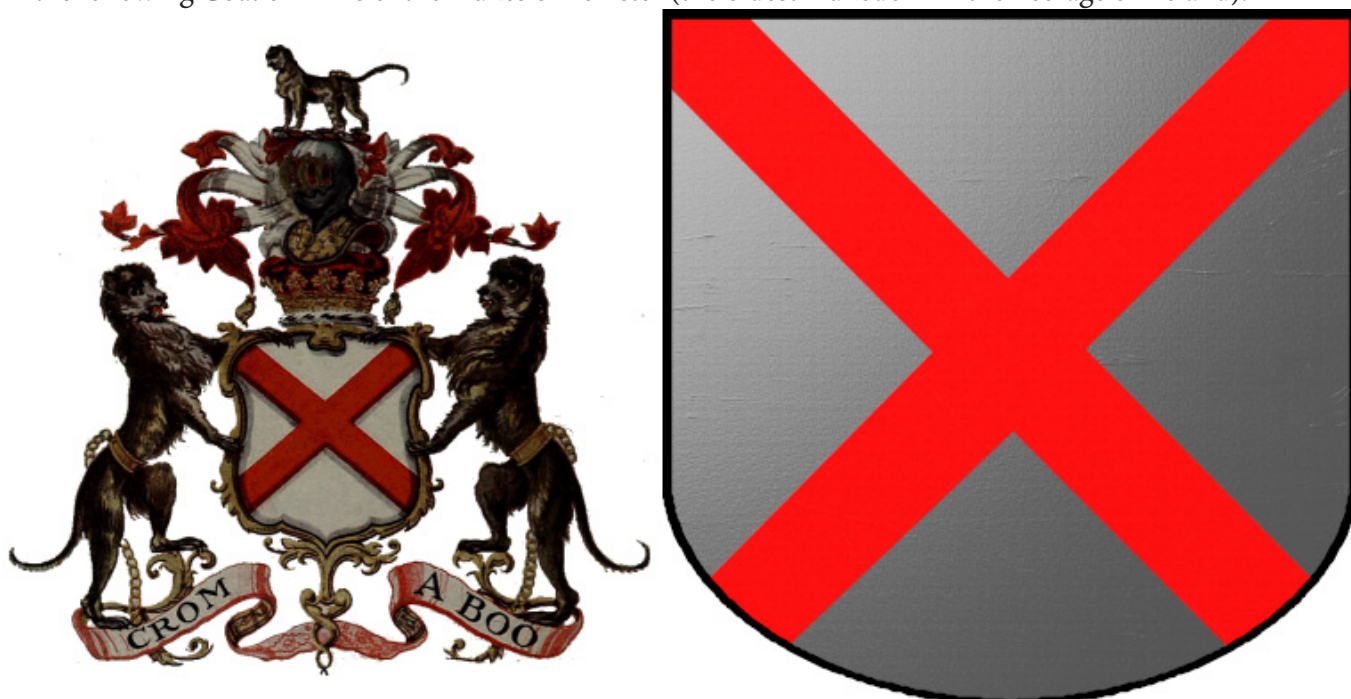


Inescutcheon

Note that the ordinaries are shown in the form of a metal (Or) on a colour (Azure) –this reflects the fact that charges do normally follow the rules of metal on colour, or colour on metal.

This is not a complete list of all the ordinaries – such a list would be almost impossible as opinions differ as to what should and should not be considered an ordinary – but it does include all or nearly all of those that would be regarded as common. All of these can be used on shields, but it is worth noting that a few of them have special significance in heraldry and it might be wise to use these for those purposes. In particular, the label is commonly used to denote the eldest son and heir of a person (more details on this will be found later in the guide in the chapter called Cadency) while the bordure, the bend sinister, and the baton sinister are commonly used to denote illegitimacy (more details on this will be found later in the guide in the chapter called Marks of Illegitimacy). In your own games, you may want to reserve other common charges for special purposes.

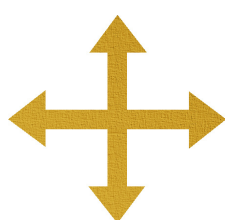
All of the shield shown above – with a single coloured field and one charge (in this case, an ordinary on it) are perfectly valid heraldic shields. As a real world example of this, note the shield (Argent, a saltire gules) contained in the following Coat of Arms of the Dukes of Leinster (the oldest Dukedom in the Peerage of Ireland):



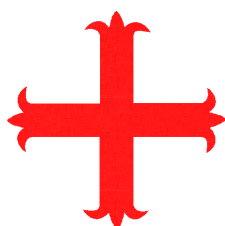
Argent, a saltire Gules; for a crest, upon a Ducal coronet, a peer's helmet, thereon a monkey statant proper, environed round the loins and chained Or; for supporters, two monkeys proper environed round the loins and chained Or. Motto 'Crom a Boo' in the compartment below the shield - Arms of the Duke of Leinster

But even though a shield can certainly be this simple bearing a single, simple charge, there is also room for considerable complexity. We will come back to this later.

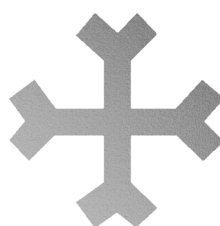
In the heraldry of our own, real world, one of the most common charges encountered, in many different forms is the cross – a few examples of which are shown here:



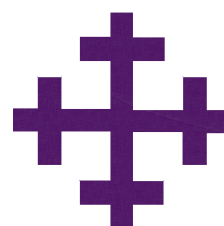
Cross Barby Or



Cross Fleury Gules



Cross Fourchy Argent



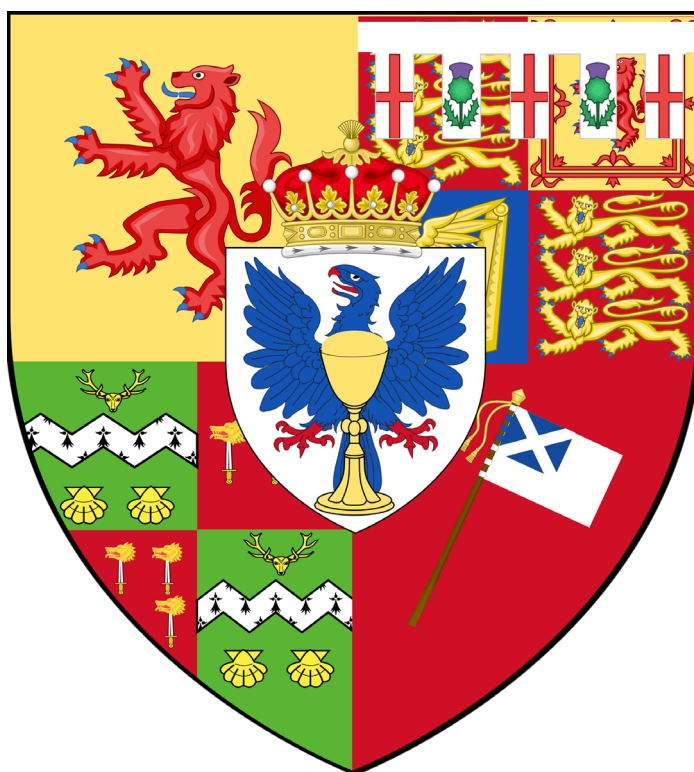
Crosslet Purpure

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While it is likely that the cross, being a simple geometric shape, would occur in any heraldic system, it certainly must be acknowledged that its ubiquity in our own world's heraldic system is directly connected to its symbolism in the dominant religion of the area where these heraldic traditions developed. In a world where the cross has no religious significance, it is likely to be less common – but by the same token, the symbols of any local religion may well come to be a common part of heraldry especially if they can be represented in a relatively simple form.

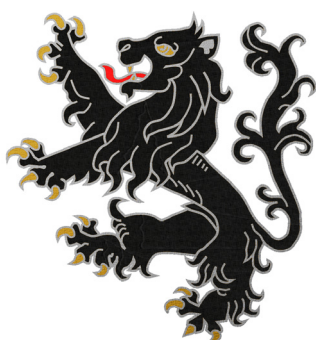
Besides the ordinaries shown above, there are a range of other charges. One of the most common types of charges is one we have seen already in this guide – the heraldic beasts. A beast in heraldry is simply an animal, whether it is an animal that truly exists, or an animal that only exists in legend and mythology – and as this is a guide for roleplaying purposes and in many of the worlds in which we roleplay, beasts that only appear in our real world mythology and legends are real, the simplest way to consider a beast is as any animal, real or imagined. Generally in heraldry, birds and fishes are treated separately from other animals, but again for our purposes we will consider them together.

The shield of the Dukes of Fife gives us an interesting illustration of a range of animals as charges on a single coat of arms. We have two different types of lion, the stag, the wolf, and the eagle all represented

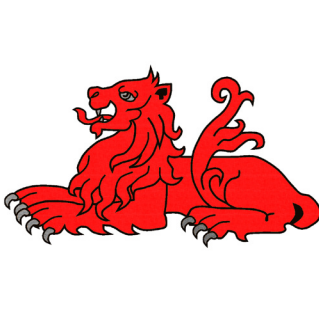
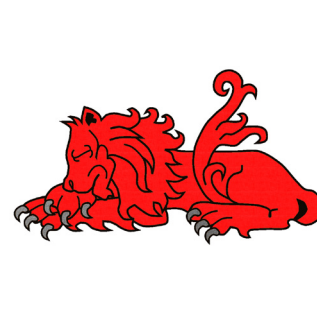


Quarterly, first, or, a Lion rampant gules armed and langued Azure; Second, the arms of the United Kingdom as borne by HM King Edward VII differenced by a Label of five points Argent the points charged with two Thistles between three Crosses of St George Gules; Third, grandquarterly, first and fourth, Vert a fess dancetty Ermine between a hart's head cabossed in chief and two escallops in base Or; Second and third, Gules three skeans paleways argent hafted and pommelled or surmounted by as many wolves' heads couped of the third; Fourth, Gules a banner displayed Argent charged with a canton Azure a saltire of the second; over all ensigned of an Earl's Coronet proper an inescutcheon argent an Eagle displayed Azure armed beaked and membered Gules on its breast an antique covered cup Or – Arms of the Duke of Fife.

Any animal can appear on a coat of arms, although some are more traditional than others – the lion being a prime example. But there are many ways in which the animal can be depicted – first of all, it can be depicted in any of the heraldic colours:

Lion Rampant GulesLion Rampant SableLion Rampant AzureLion Rampant VertLion Rampant PurpleLion Rampant OrLion Rampant ArgentLion Rampant Proper

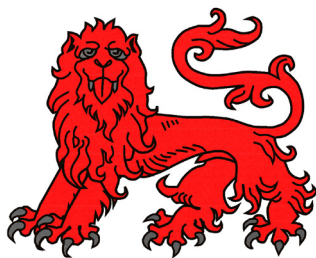
But there are also a range of standard poses or attitudes used in heraldry by beasts in heraldry. These can be seen below:

Erect
Lion RampantLeaping
Lion SalientWalking
Lion PassantStanding
Lion StatantSitting
Lion SejantSitting Erect
Lion Sejant ErectLying
Lion CouchantSleeping
Lion Dormant

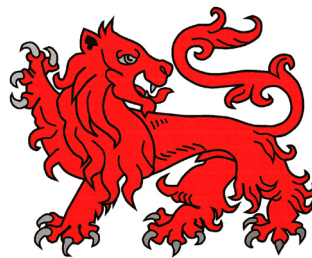
Note that the lions are all facing to the left (dexter). This is typical in heraldry and can be assumed of animals unless we are told otherwise. But other poses are certainly possible.



Erect and
facing right
*Lion Rampant
in Sinister*



Standing and
facing forward
*Lion Statant
Guardant*



Walking and
facing rearwards
*Lion Passant
Reguardant*



Whole body
facing forward
Lion Affronté

Again, this is not a completely exhaustive list of attitudes – just the most common ones encountered in heraldry especially when it comes to land animals.

Birds have their own particular attitudes.



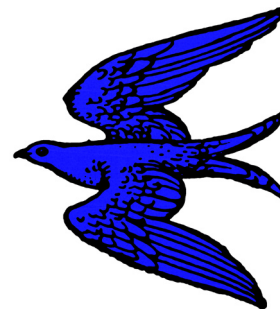
Underside of
wing showing
Displayed



Standing
Overt

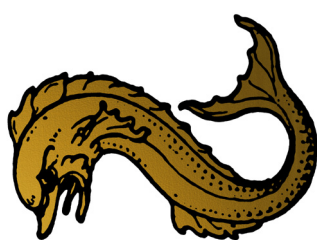


About to
take flight
Rising

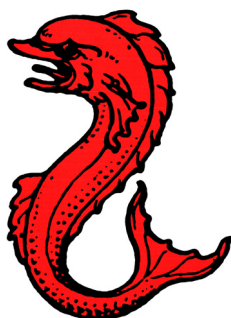


In flight
facing forward
Volant

And so do creatures that dwell in the water (including birds and animals that enter the water).



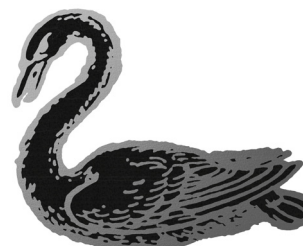
Swimming
Naiant



Upright
Hauriant



Head Down
Urinant

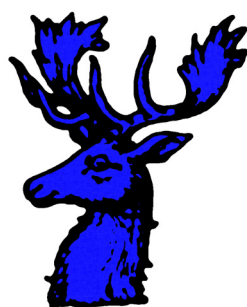


Swimming
Naiant

While the entire animal can be used as a charge, there are plenty of cases where only part of an animal is used. Most commonly, it is the head of the animal that will be used:



Griffins Head
Erased Argent



Bucks Head
Couped Azure



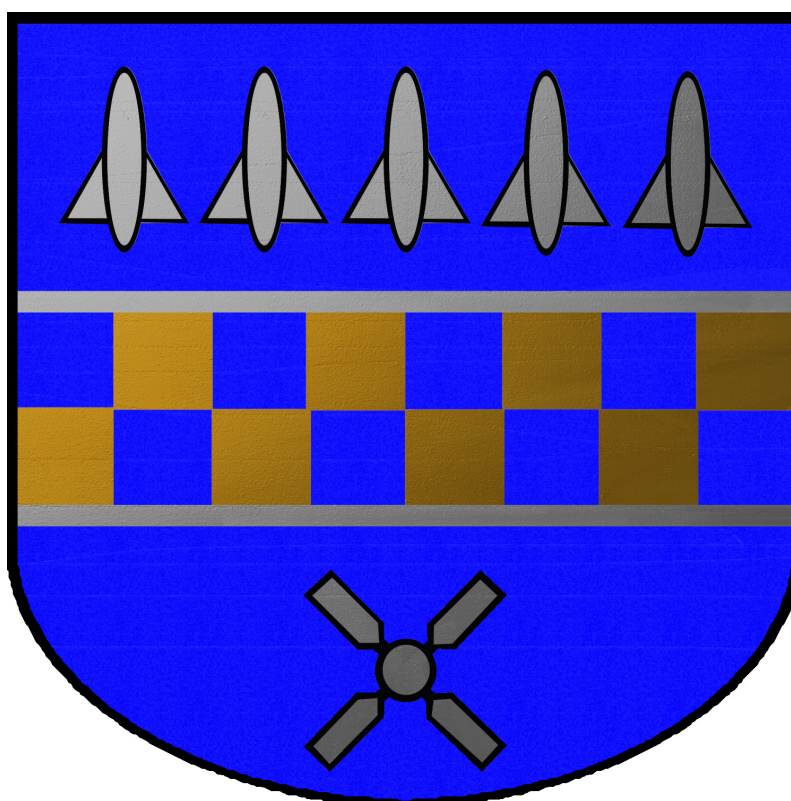
Leopards Head Erased
and Affronté Or



Bulls Head
Caboshed Gules

Note that, for the most part, the heads face left (*dexter*) unless otherwise described – although the bull is an exception. Exceptions like this pervade heraldry and are learned on a case by case basis, if necessary. Also note the different descriptions used to describe where the heads have been ‘cut off’ at the neck. If they are shown in a way that suggests they were simply ripped off, they are described as *erased*, but a clean cut is, instead, *couped*. Where the neck is completely absent, the head is *caboshed*.

Having dealt with the *ordinaries* and the *beasts*, we come to a third category of *charges* – which can be broadly described as ‘everything else’. These are objects – and they are an incredibly diverse category. Virtually any object you can imagine could appear on a shield – normally drawn in a stylised way, but the sky is literally the limit. The following real world Coat of Arms, granted to Sir George Edwards, a British aircraft designer is too modern to be of much use in a game based in a medieval mindset, but it illustrates that any object can become part of heraldry:



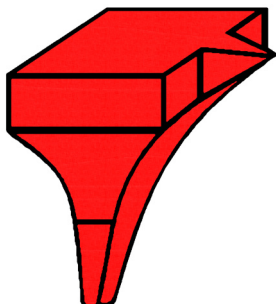
Azure, a fess chequy Azure and Or fimbriated Argent, between five Concorde Argent and an aeroplane propeller Argent – Arms of Sir George Edwards OM CBE FRS DL.

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There are examples of arms bearing rolling pins, cheese graters, sewing machines, automobiles, board games, tennis racquets... in essence, any object can be turned into a charge if wanted. Some examples follow - but these are merely examples of some common charges.



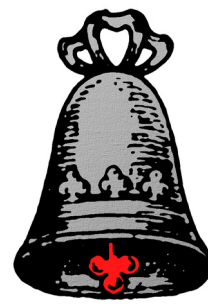
Anchor Gules



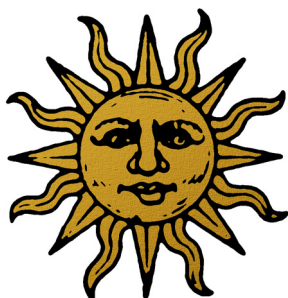
Anvil Gules



Battle-Axe Sable



Bell Argent with
clapper Gules



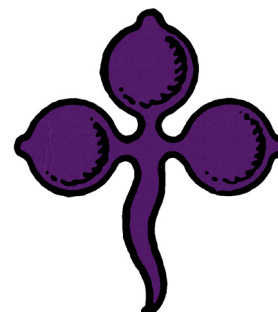
Sun in Splendour Or



Sword Argent



Tower Vert



Trefoil Purpure

One more category of charges should be mentioned – the use of human figures as charges. This is relatively rare but it does happen. It should be stressed that because of the historical nature of heraldry, some traditional charges may be potentially offensive to modern sensibilities – in particular, the crusades lead to the use of a ‘Saracen’s Head’ as a charge in some coats of arms, and various indigenous people of non-European areas could also be used. It is entirely up to you as to how to proceed with these issues in your games. Your game world may be more enlightened than ours was, or it may be a place where such prejudices still exist. Again, as well as the whole body, body parts might also be used alone.



Dexter Hand Gules



Womans Bust Or



Saracens Head Proper

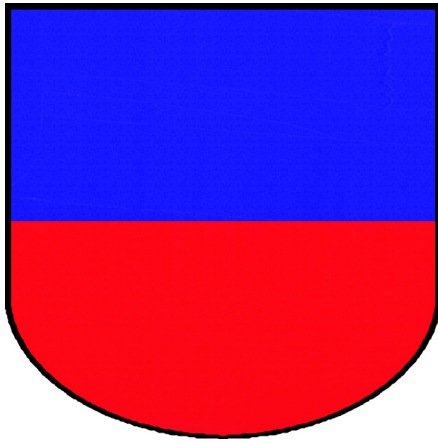


Wildman Proper With
a Vestment of Leaves

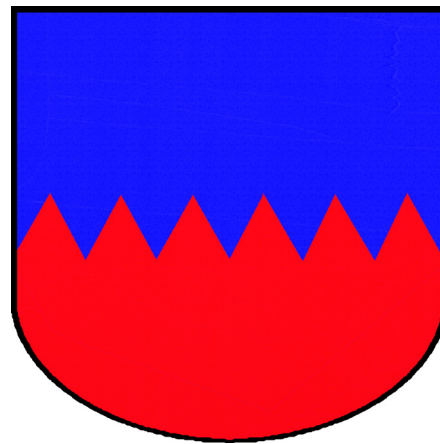
In summary, many objects –traditional symbols, inanimate objects, animals, and humans – can appear on a coat of arms in the form of charges.

Variations of Partitions and Charges

Both straight lines of partition and the simpler straight edged charges can be varied in heraldry by certain common variations. Two examples can be seen below.



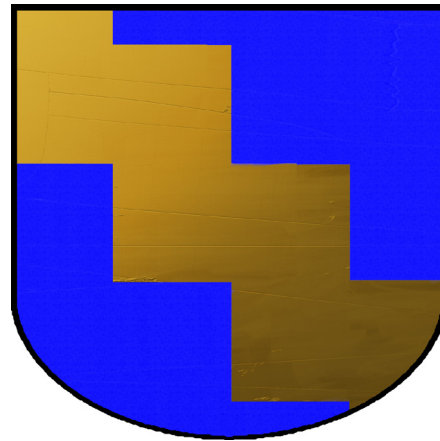
Party per fess



Party per fess indented



Bend



Bend dancetty

The following are the most common of these variations:



Dancetty



Dovetailed



Embattled



Engrailed



Flory-Counter-Flory



Indented



Invected



Nebuly



Potenté



Raguly



Rayonné



Wavy

In summary, the lines that are contained in charges or in the lines that divide a shield into different parts do not have to be straight lines. There are set of clearly understood variations that can be used to add distinction and variation to these lines.

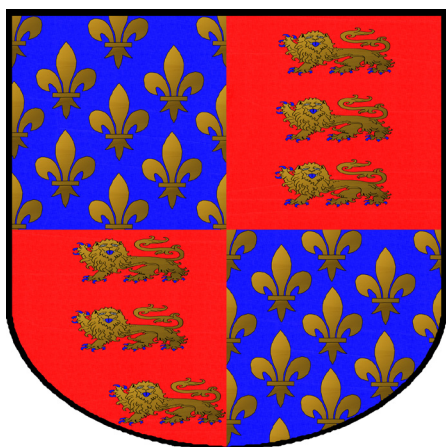
Cadency

In traditional heraldry of the type being discussed in this guide, one important rule and understanding is that a coat of arms belongs to one individual person. It is commonplace to refer to families having a coat of arms and there is nothing wrong with this being true in your game world – indeed, there are some very famous fantasy worlds in which this is definitely true – but you may also want to follow the tradition that a coat of arms belongs to one individual. If so, the idea of cadency may be one you wish to incorporate into your world.

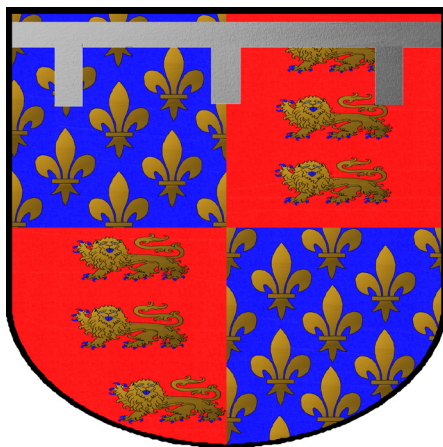
Cadency involves the use of particular charges to denote the relationship of one person to another on a coat of arms. Two similar examples of this can be seen in this painting:



If you examine the painting you will note that the man second from the left bears a coat of arms that is similar, though, not identical to the that on the banner a little to his right. Both of these are variants of the Royal Arms of the Kingdom of England, at the time which were the personal arms of the King of the time, Edward III. This is because the man wearing these arms is the third son of King Edward III of England, John of Gaunt, while the banner is that of the eldest son of King Edward III, Edward, The Black Prince (who is seen wearing a red cloak, but not a tabard bearing his arms, near the centre of the picture). As sons of the King, they wore his arms, differenced by marks of cadency:



Left: Quarterly, first and fourth Azure semée of fleurs de lys Or, second and third Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or armed and langued Azure. Arms of King Edward III of England.



Centre: Quarterly, first and fourth Azure semée of fleurs de lys Or, second and third Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or armed and langued Azure, overall a label Argent. Arms of Edward of Woodcock KG, Prince of Wales (called The Black Prince).

Right: Quarterly, first and fourth Azure semée of fleurs de lys Or, second and third Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or armed and langued Azure, overall a label Argent of three points Ermine. Arms of John of Gaunt KG, 1st Duke of Lancaster.

The Black Prince, as the King's eldest son bore a silver label on the King's arms – and the label remains the traditional charge of cadency to mark an eldest son. John of Gaunt, as another of the King's sons also bore his arms differenced – although later practice, which I will describe in a moment tends to difference younger sons in a different way (although the British Royal family continues to use various types of labels for children and grandchildren of the sovereign – an illustration of the fact that all 'rules' in heraldry can have exceptions for special cases).

There are nine standard charges used, by tradition to difference the arms of a bearer's sons. These are:



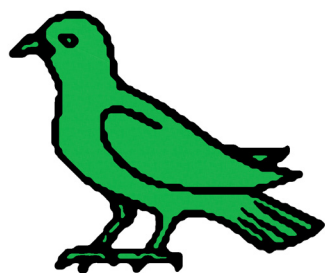
Eldest Son
Label



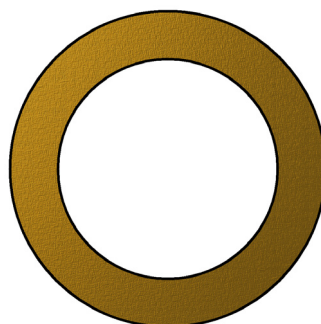
Second Son
Crescent



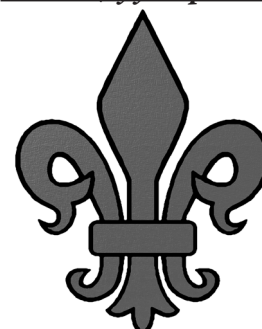
Third Son
Mullet (of five points)



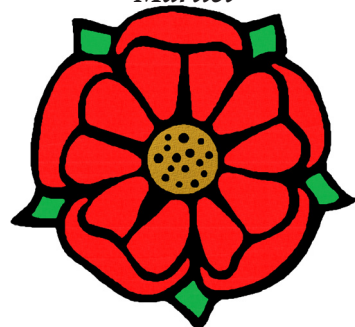
Fourth Son
Martlet



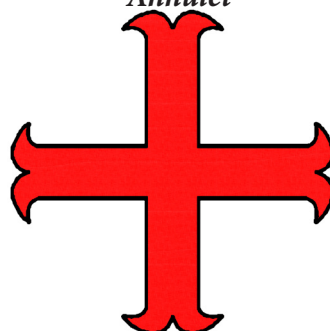
Fifth Son
Annulet



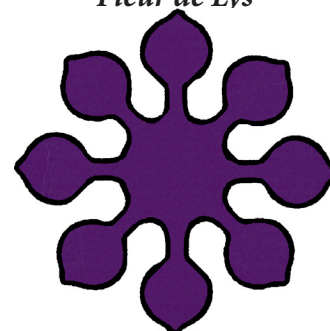
Sixth Son
Fleur de Lys



Seventh Son
Rose



Eighth Son
Cross Moline

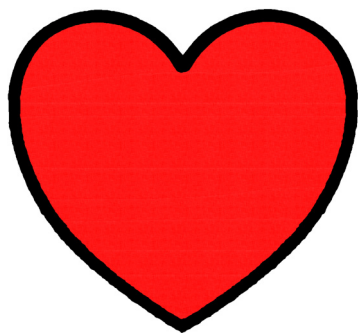


Ninth Son
Double Quatrefoil

But what of daughters? In traditional heraldry, cadency marks were not used for females in most cases, but traditional heraldry is a product of a male dominated society where females were routinely treated differently from men. While this would remain true of some societies in roleplaying settings, and in these

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settings it might still be appropriate for the trappings of heraldry to be different for the different sexes, other games show much more equal societies and in such a world, it might be entirely reasonable for *cadency* marks to be used without regard to sex. Alternatively, in our world, Canadian heraldry has recently introduced a separate set of *cadency* marks specifically for women, and these may be useful. They are shown here:



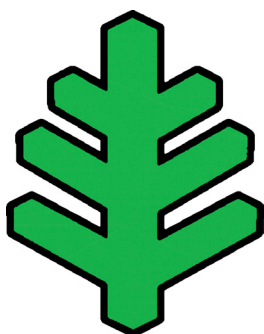
Eldest Daughter
Heart



Second Daughter
Ermine Spot



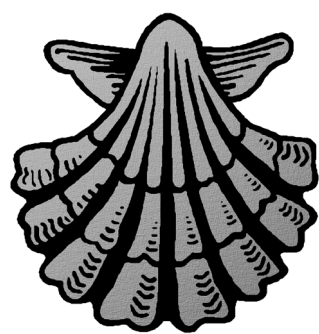
Third Daughter
Snowflake



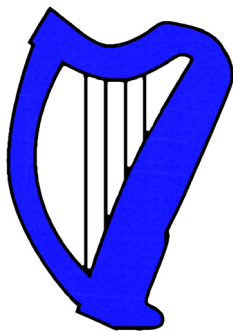
Fourth Daughter
Fir Twig



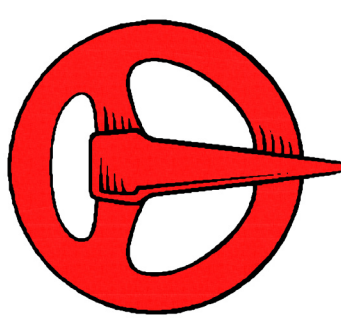
Fifth Daughter
Rook



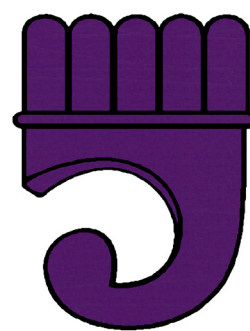
Sixth Daughter
Escallop



Seventh Daughter
Harp



Eighth Daughter
Buckle



Ninth Daughter
Clarichord

As with any *charge*, the *colour* does not really matter. The *label* and *heart* when used as a *cadency* mark for the eldest son of daughter would normally be placed in the top third of the shield (*in chief*), while other *cadency* marks would generally be placed in the middle of the shield (*in fess*).

When a bearer of arms dies, it may be normal for his heir (normally his eldest son (or daughter in cases where inheritance laws does not discriminate based on sex) to take over their coat of arms by removing the cadency mark and instead using the arms *undifferenced* from then on.

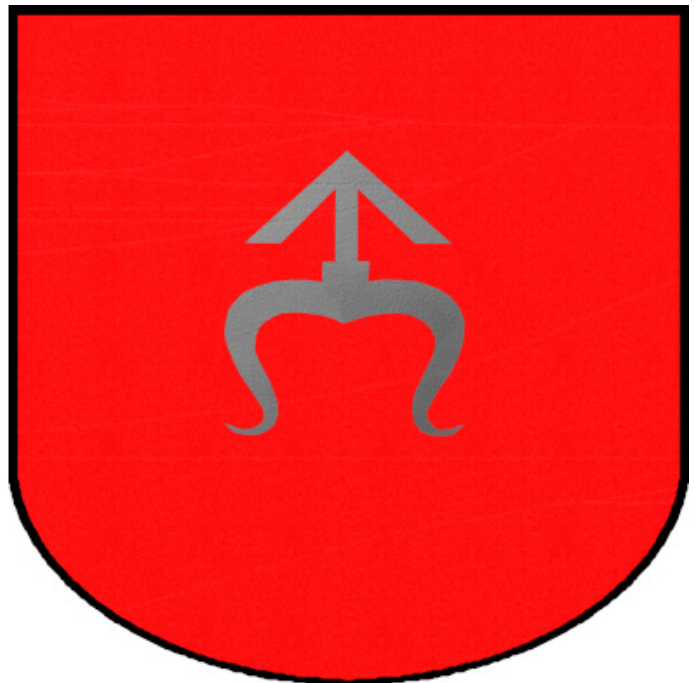
In summary, in many heraldic systems a coat of arms belongs to an individual, and so when other family members wish to use much the same coat of arms, it is necessary for it to be individualised for their needs. A system of well understood marks of *cadency* is one approach that can be used to allow somebody to be clearly identified as related to the holder of the original coat of arms, without the suggestion that they are using them in a way that they are not entitled to.

Augmentations

In most societies where heraldry was present (and, in fact, our own society today) the ‘right to bear arms’ – in this case, literally, the right to have a coat of arms – is generally not available to everybody – this does not mean that a person **cannot** create their own symbols and call them a coat of arms, rather it means that they are not formally acknowledged as valid by those who are in authority – normally agents of the King or other ruler of the area in which the person lives. The right to have a coat of arms might be granted as a reward for some action, or an acknowledgement that a person was too powerful to be denied.

If the coat of arms was granted as a reward for some great act, it might be specifically designed with symbols specifically intended to symbolise the act for which it was awarded – or somebody who already had a coat of arms might be allowed to add specific symbols to acknowledge a new act that was seen as worthy of recognition.

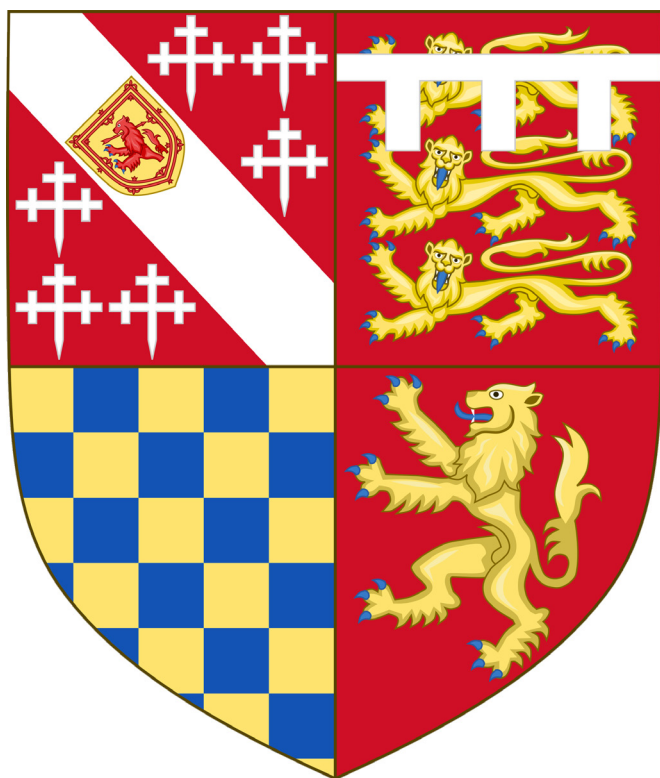
Some of these **augmentations** can be rather esoteric. A personal favourite is a Polish coat of arms granted to the Odrowąż family in the mid-14th century:



Gules, an arrow in pale point to chief, the base double sarcelled and counter embowed, Argent. Arms of the House of Odrowąż.

By tradition, this unusual **charge** was granted in recognition of a knight cutting the moustache of an opponent in battle in two with an arrow.

An example of an **augmentation** being added to an existing coat of arms can be seen in the arms of Dukes of Norfolk, The Earl Marshals of England, the **augmentation** in this case is a variation of the historical Royal Arms of Scotland:



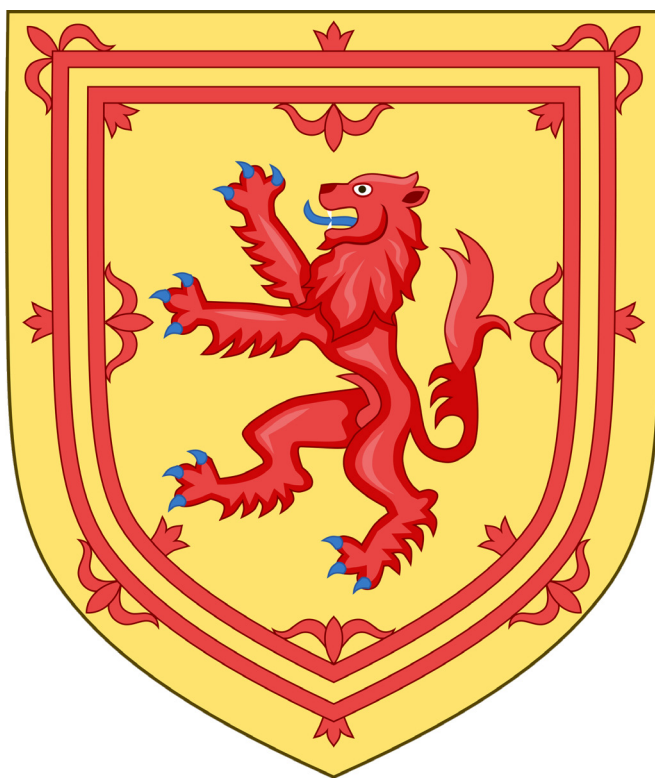
Quarterly first, Gules on a Bend between six Cross-crosslets fitchy Argent an Escutcheon Or charged with a Demi-lion rampant pierced through the mouth by an arrow within a Double Tressure flory-counter-flory of the first; Second Gules three Lions passant guardant in pale Or, Armed and Langued Azure, in chief a Label of three points Argent; Third Chequy Or and Azure; Fourth Gules a Lion rampant Or, Armed and Langued Azure. Arms of the Dukes of Norfolk, Earl Marshals of England.

This **augmentation** showing an arrow piercing the Royal lion of Scotland was granted to Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk by King Henry VIII of England after Howard successfully defeated a Scottish invasion of England at the Battle of Flodden in 1513 (a battle in which King James IV of Scotland was killed).

In passing, it is worth noting the white (actually, silver, **Argent label**) in the top right quarter of the shield of the Dukes of Norfolk. This is a mark of **cadency** that has remained on their shield until the present day, reflecting the fact that they are descended from King Edward I of England through his son, Thomas of Brotherton, 1st Earl of Norfolk – Thomas bore his father's arms (the three lions of England) differenced by this label and passed them to his descendants).

When designing coats of arms for use in your own games, you may wish to make use of **augmentations** both in the original designs – using symbols that relate to why a character (or their ancestor, if the arms are inherited) received the arms, or perhaps a character could be granted an **augmentation** to an existing coat of arms during the course of a campaign, as a symbol of their achievements.

In summary, a tradition exists in heraldry of augmenting arms with particular emblems and symbols intended to recognise special achievements or to visually reward those who have rendered particular services to those in charge of the granting of arms. In a roleplaying campaign, careful use of augmentations can allow characters to identify the achievements of others, and to be recognised for their own achievements.



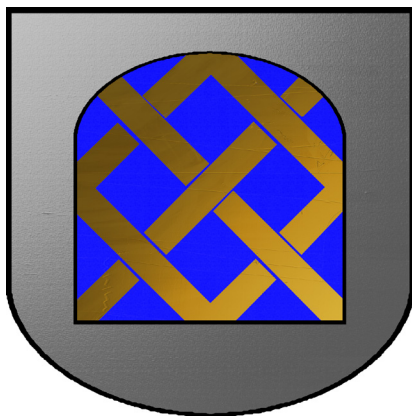
Or, a lion rampant within a double tressure flory-counter-flory Gules. Royal Arms of Scotland from the reign of King William the Lion until that of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Abatements

When we come to abatements we move away from historical heraldry as it was actually practice in the direction of an idea that appears in many histories of heraldry but which is largely a creation of more recent writers – if the eighteenth century can be termed recent. Abatements are represented in these histories as being similar to augmentations but in reverse – just as a coat of arms could have some symbolism added to it to acknowledge or reward achievements or recognise great honour by an augmentation, it was suggested that acts of dishonour or betrayal could similarly be marked with a visible sign on the coat of arms – a visible sign for all to see that a bearer of arms had behaved unchivalrously or dishonourably that might even be transmitted by descent to their descendants.

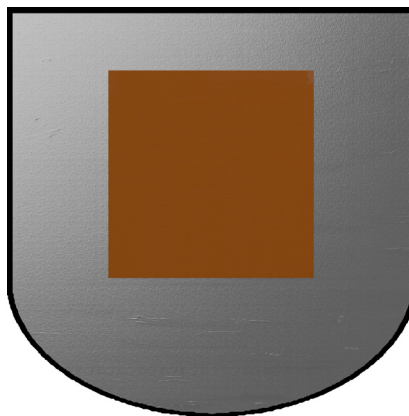
In practice, while there were rare instances where something similar to this did occur, in most times and places, there was no real requirement for somebody to display their coat of arms – so why would anybody choose to display such symbols of their dishonour? They would simply choose not to wear a coat of arms that dishonoured them in that way, rendering such symbolism fairly pointless. It was simpler to simply strip somebody of their right to bear a coat of arms at all. The issue might be forced for a short period of time – perhaps a nobleman who was facing execution for treason might be forced to display some perversion of their arms on the way to their execution as a further sign of their dishonour, but in the long term, this really does not seem to be part of history.

Having said all that, in a roleplaying campaign, things might be very different, and so the idea of abatements might have value in your campaign. I have used it in some of my own campaigns, where the campaign world included a system of heralds who did have the power to enforce their wills on all but the most powerful of nobles and could compel somebody to bear an abatement on their arms because wearing dishonoured arms was still better than bearing no arms at all – in this case, it was seen as the lesser punishment than being stripped of lands, titles, and arms all together, so I will here lay out one common system of abatements that has been published over the years. It is really quite simple – there are a series of charges that can be overlaid over an existing coat of arms. Interestingly, these charges when used as abatements make use of some of the rarer colours of heraldry mentioned earlier in this guide – particular sanguine (blood red) and tenné (orange-brown).



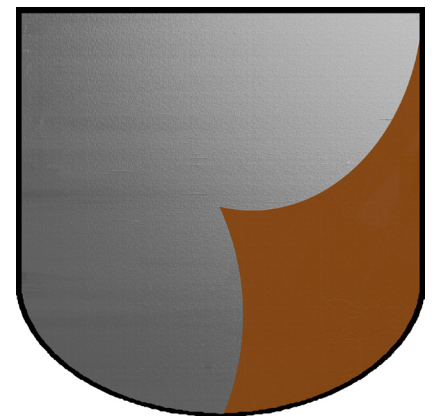
Arms Inverted

For treason



A Delf Tenné

For withdrawing a challenge
out of fear of defeat



A Gore Sinister Tenné

For cowardice in
the face of an enemy



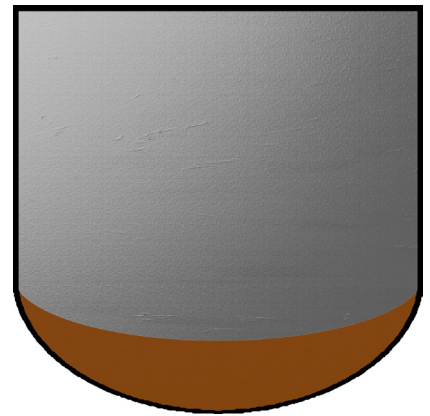
A Gusset Dexter Sanguine

For drinking to excess



A Gusset Sinister Sanguine

For womanising to excess



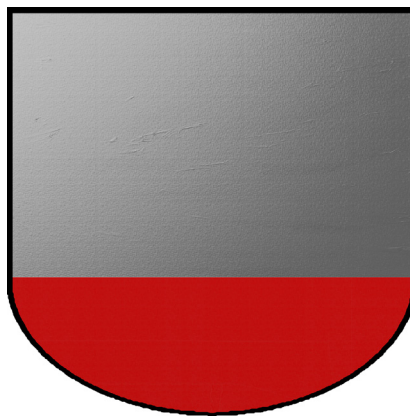
A Point Champaine Tenné

For killing a prisoner after
accepting their surrender



A Point Dexter Parted Tenné

For arrogance and arrogance
about one's combat ability



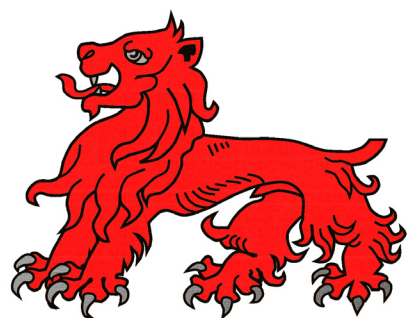
A Plain Point Sanguine

For dishonesty and lying



A Lion Couard

A lion with his tail
between his legs
For Cowardice



A Lion Diffamée

A lion with no tail

For cowardice



A Lion Morné

A lion with no claws or teeth

For cowardice



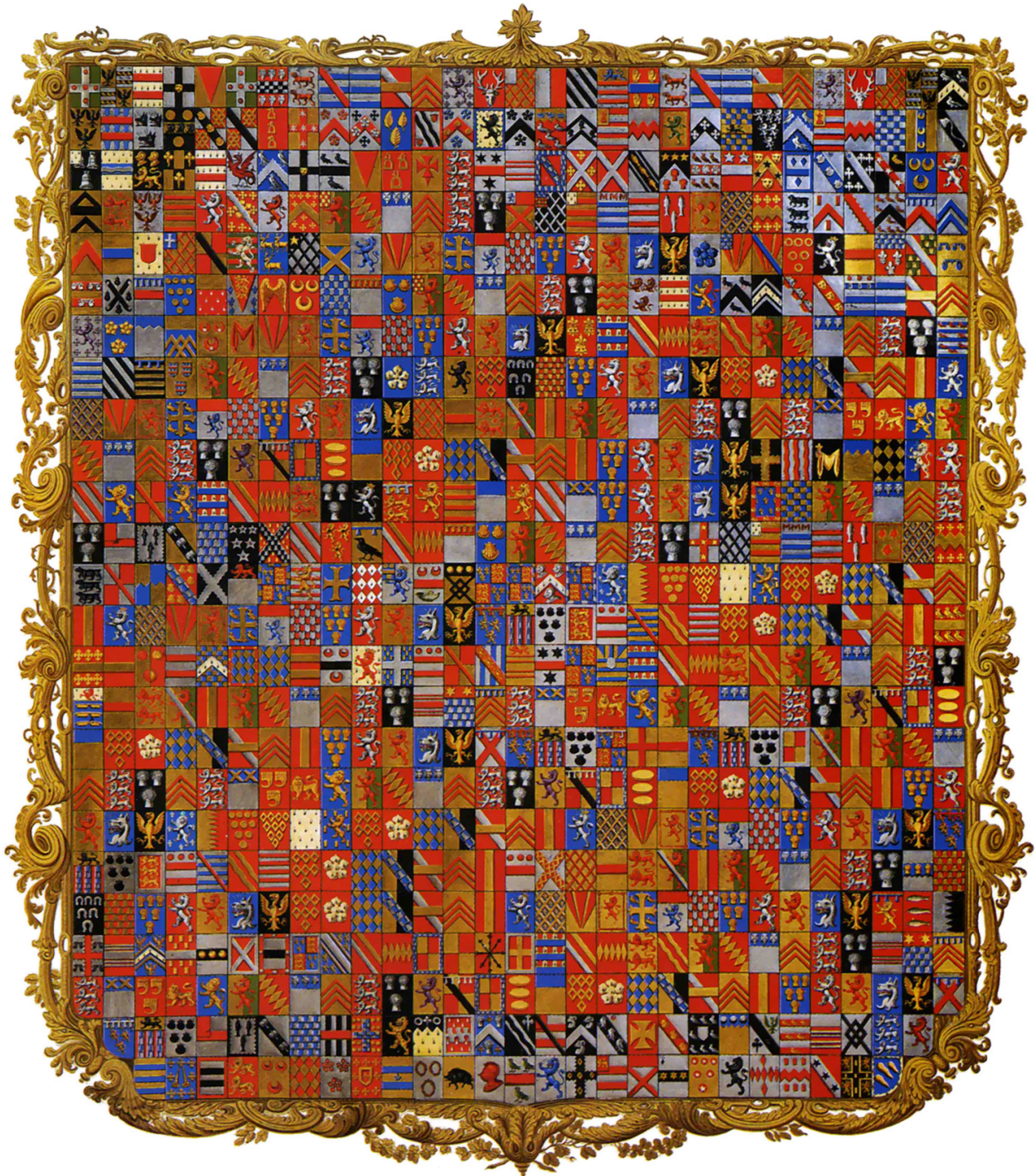
A Lion Diffamée and Morné

A lion with no tail,
claws, or teeth
For cowardice

With regards to the first eight of these abatements the colour of the *field* is irrelevant, but the colour of the *charges* is important. The four lions may be rendered in any *colour* or *metal*.

Finally, if those responsible for determining a person's arms wished to punish them in some way, they might simply be required to remove some object from their shield – a less obvious mark of displeasure, but one that could be noticed by those who pay attention to heraldry.

In summary, although *abatements* have little veracity in the history of heraldry, in a campaign world, you may wish to make greater use of such devices for purposes of roleplaying and flavour. The examples given here are certainly valid choices but can also be ignored if you do not believe it makes sense for people to bear such devices on their coats of arms.

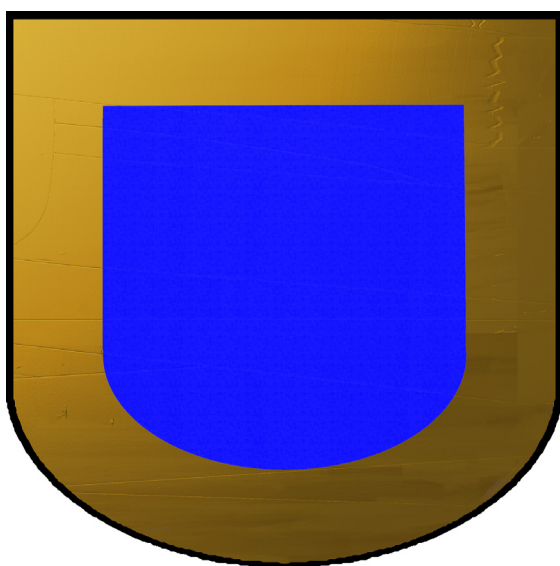


Arms of the 1st Marquess of Buckingham (as seen in the Stowe Armorial) - see pages 39 - 41

Marks of Illegitimacy

As heraldry is often used to show the relationships between various people and as a particular coat of arms could often be passed down to one's heir, the question of legitimacy of birth versus illegitimacy – bastardry – was something that had to be considered in heraldry. Some people have included certain marks used to denote illegitimate birth in the abatements considering them to be a mark of dishonour. Though it is certainly true, that in some contexts, illegitimacy was seen as less than honourable – or perhaps more fairly that the act of fathering an illegitimate child showed a lack of honour, it was not automatically seen in a particular negative light. If a father failed to acknowledge their child, it is quite likely that the child would have no claim to the father's heraldry at all – but many men would acknowledge a bastard for various reasons and might wish to pass on their heraldry to that child. This was particularly true of powerful nobles and Kings.

As with cadency there are certain charges commonly associated with illegitimacy. These are the Bordure, the Baton Sinister, the Bend Sinister, and the Bendlet Sinister.



Bordure



Baton Sinister



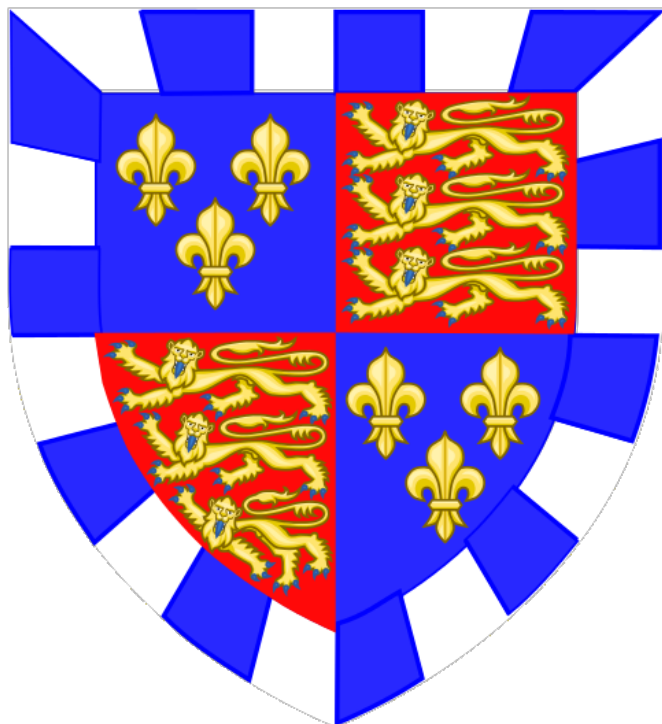
Bend Sinister



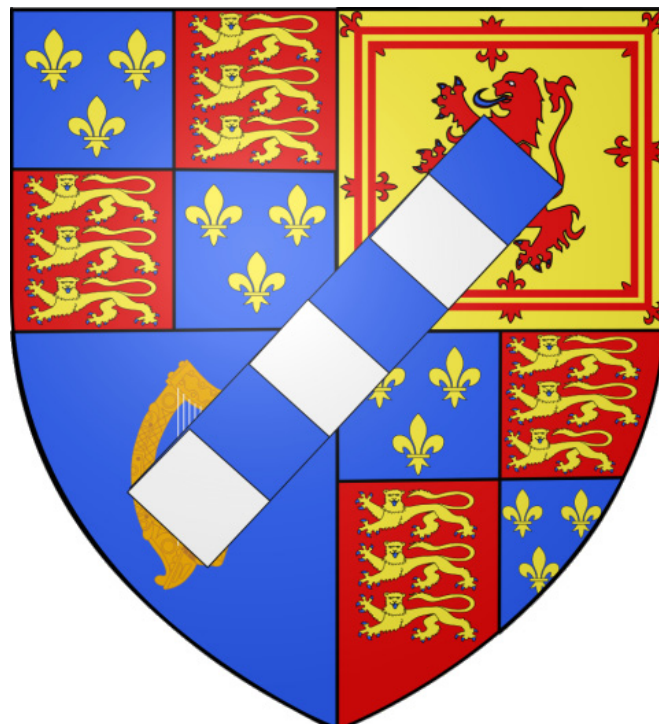
Bendlet Sinister

The bend sinister is often incorrectly referred to as the *bar sinister* (in French it is known as a *barre* but in English, as the *bar* is a horizontal band, a *bar sinister* would be indistinguishable from any other bar), so you will sometimes hear that term used to describe illegitimacy in heraldry.

It is important to note that none of these *charges* definitely indicates illegitimacy – a person may bear them for other reasons, although this is reasonably uncommon. And as the arms that include these *charges* may well be passed down to the legitimate successors of the person who originally held them, even if they do indicate illegitimacy, it may be in the past. The shields of two British Dukes will illustrate this:



Quarterly, first and fourth, Azure three fleurs de lys Or; Second and third, gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or, all within a bordure compony Argent and Azure.
Arms of the Dukes of Beaufort.



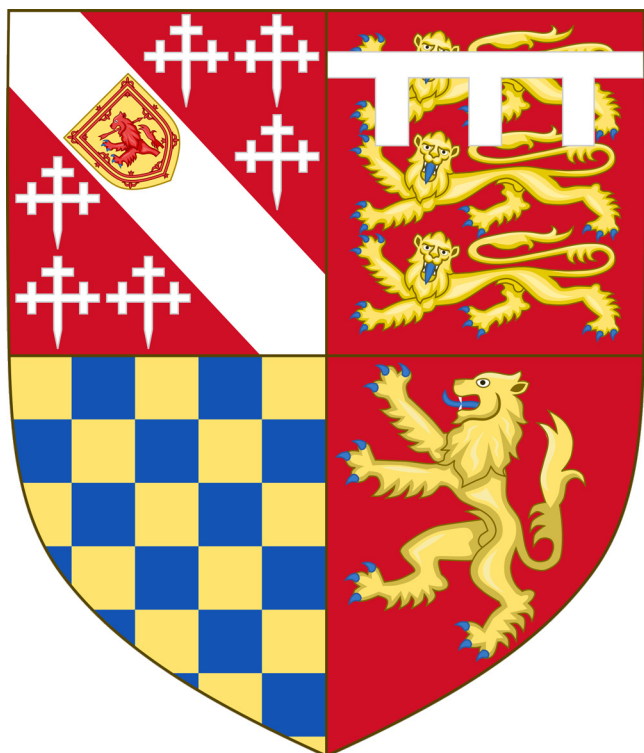
Quarterly, first and fourth, quarterly, first and fourth, Azure three fleurs de lys Or; Second and third, Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or, armed and langued Azure; Second, Or within a tressure flory-counter-flory a lion rampant Gules, armed and langued azure; Third, Azure a harp Or, stringed Argent; Overall a baton compony Azure and Argent.
Arms of the Dukes of Grafton.

Both of these shields bear versions of the Royal Arms of England, because the first to bear these arms were illegitimate descendants of English Kings (Edward III and Charles II, respectively). Even though centuries have passed, they still bear the *bordures* and *batons* that mark that historical illegitimacy.

In summary, while a full coat of arms will generally only be passed to a legitimate child of the bearer, if an illegitimate child is acknowledged, they may be permitted to bear the arms *differenced* with a mark of illegitimacy. In the case of extremely powerful people, such as King's and other powerful Lords, being the illegitimate but acknowledged child may still be a position of considerable influence and respect in the right circumstances and the arms a person bears can symbolise that.

Other Features

So far we have focused most of our attention on the shield that forms the core of any coat of arms. In some cases, especially historically, the shield may be the entire coat of arms, and even when a coat of arms is more complex, it might still be commonplace to only use the shield in certain circumstances. Consider this example:



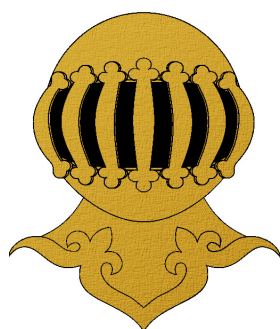
Quarterly first, Gules on a Bend between six Cross-crosslets fitchy Argent an Escutcheon Or charged with a Demi-lion rampant pierced through the mouth by an arrow within a Double Tressure flory-counter-flory of the first; Second Gules three Lions passant guardant in pale Or, Armed and Langued Azure, in chief a Label of three points Argent; Third Chequey Or and Azure; Fourth Gules a Lion rampant Or, Armed and Langued Azure. Arms of the Dukes of Norfolk, Earl Marshals of England.



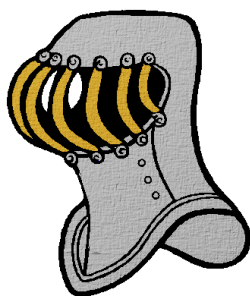
Quarterly first, Gules on a Bend between six Cross-crosslets fitchy Argent an Escutcheon Or charged with a Demi-lion rampant pierced through the mouth by an arrow within a Double Tressure flory-counter-flory of the first; Second Gules three Lions passant guardant in pale Or, Armed and Langued Azure, in chief a Label of three points Argent; Third Chequey Or and Azure; Fourth Gules a Lion rampant Or, Armed and Langued Azure. For crests, first, on a chapeau Gules turned up Ermine a Lion statant guardant with tail extended Or gorged with a Ducal Coronet Argent; Second issuant from a Ducal Coronet Or a pair of Wings Gules each charged with a Bend between six Cross-crosslets fitchy Argent; Third On a Mount Vert a Horse passant Argent holding in the mouth a Slip of Oak fructed proper. For supporters, dexter a lion Argent armed and langued Gules. Sinister - a horse Argent holding in his mouth a slip of oak Vert fructed proper. Motto 'Sola Virtus Invicta'. Behind, two Batons Or in Saltire enamelled at the end Sable. Full Armorial Achievement of the Dukes of Norfolk, Earl Marshals of England.

On the left we have the shield of the Dukes of Norfolk. On the right we have their much more complicated full armorial achievement. We will look at each section of such an achievement in turn, starting with the helm.

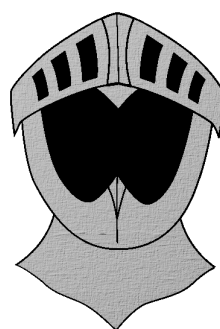
Coats of arms often include a helmet with a design atop it. In traditional heraldry, helmets were not normally used for those who were considered unlikely to be combatants – most notably women, and members of the clergy – but in a campaign world, it is perfectly possible that there is no reason for such restrictions. What is significant is that the helm is often used as an indication of rank. There are separate helms for royalty, for peers (nobleman), for knights, and for ordinary people. A full coat of arms can therefore help to identify a person's rank and position in society.



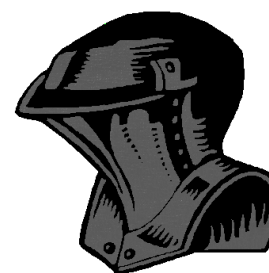
Royal Helm



Peer's Helm

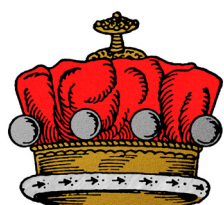


Knight's Helm

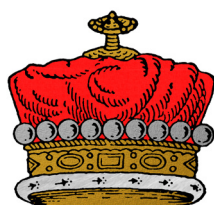


Gentleman's Helm

In a similar way, crowns and coronets are often used in heraldry to indicate ranks among the nobility with greater distinctions possible than with helmets alone. Royals will quite likely bear a particular image of their own crown on their coat of arms and these may be individual and unique but among the nobility, it is common for a set of coronets to exist that show precise rank. The following examples are drawn from British heraldry – with the lowest rank of nobility (Baron) seen on the left up to the highest rank (Duke) seen on the right – but similar systems exist in other heraldic traditions.



Baron



Viscount



Earl



Marquess



Duke

As can be seen in the Duke of Norfolk's full coat of arms earlier, sometimes both the coronet and the helm can be included where appropriate.



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In the absence of either helm or coronet, or above them when either or both is present, we can also have a crest. The crest probably has its origin in the tournaments of the Middle Ages – those competitions involving jousting and other acts of combat. Knights who were participating in such tournaments began to decorate their armour more and more over time, and in particular, used to add decorations to the top of their helmets.

These crests often, although not always, bore a similar design to part of Knight's shield design.

Crests came to be commonly included as part of a coat of arms. The design of crest can be almost anything imaginable – animals are commonplace, often rendered in a similar fashion to the charges on the shield, but there this one area where almost anything goes. The following selection illustrates this point:



Note that each crest rests on an image of a twisted roll of fabric. This is called the torse. It was originally part of the protective padding worn under a Knight's helmet, the parts that were visible were often dyed to match the colours of the arms.



Next we have the mantling. Historically this was an extension of the same fabric that made up the torse. In many ways, it is the least important part of a coat of arms, and is often omitted both visually and from the blazon. Where it is present, it is likely to be the same colours as the torse.



Finally, we come to the figures – generally animals or humans – seen on either side of a coat of arms. These are called the **supporters** and it is important to understand that in most forms of heraldry, not everybody is entitled to them. In the British model of heraldry that this guide is primarily based on, **supporters** are generally only available to royalty, to members of the nobility – those who hold hereditary titles, or to others of very special distinction – members of the greatest Orders of Knighthood. Common people and even most Knights are not generally entitled to them.

The Royal Arms of the United Kingdom have a lion and a unicorn as their **supporters**. Those of the Dukes of Norfolk are a lion and a horse. When heraldic beasts are used as **supporters**, they are most commonly seen in the rampant position, facing towards the shield. It is common for them to be presented in a more realistic, though still stylised manner, compared to the charges on the shield.

Finally we come to the **motto**, which generally appears on a scroll at the base of the shield. The motto can appear in any language, though in our world, it is most common for it to be in the language of the bearer, or in Latin. It may be an accepted and traditional phrase, or it may have more personal meaning. It is reasonably common for a motto to contain some subtle humour – two of my favourite examples are the motto of the famous British singer and comedian Sir Harry Secombe CBE who had the motto “Go On” at the base of his coat of arms – generally written to run together to say “GOON”, a tribute to his time as a stalwart of the BBC radio’s “Goon Show” of the 1950s, and the motto of the Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain & Ireland which is “Porro A Tergo” – translatable as “Advance from Behind!”

In summary, once you have finished designing the shield, you may wish to continue with other features. These are strictly optional but may add to the design and to the effects you wish heraldry to have in your game.

An Issue of Gender

Medieval society – from which our ideas of heraldry are drawn – was a society in which it was considered normal for men and women to play different roles in life, and to be treated differently, and historically heraldry reflects this. In the heraldic tradition on which this guide is based, there are a few differences between the sexes that really need to be discussed and acknowledged, even if you decide to ignore them in your games – which, for the most part, I do in my own. Again, some roleplaying games and some campaign worlds do include these type of sex differences as a significant feature of the game, while others either treat them as relatively unimportant, or even irrelevant and non-existent. You, as players and GamesMasters, must decide what applies in your campaign. If there are differences, this chapter may be significant. If there are not, it may be ignored.

So what are the historical differences? One of these has already been mentioned in the section on cadency – historically symbols of cadency were far more likely to be used for men – the sons of a man who bore arms – than for his daughters. It is also generally true that while the eldest son would inherit his father's arms, the eldest daughter would only do so if she had no brothers. Again in a campaign world where sex differences are less important than they were in our own, both of these cases may not be true – and in Canada, which took control of its own heraldry fairly recently with the establishment of the Canadian Heraldic Authority (L'Autorité héraldique du Canada) this is the case – daughters can inherit arms in the same way as sons and there are cadency marks for females along with males.

The third and, perhaps most visible sign of the differences between the sexes in heraldry, though, is that historically, at least in the British tradition, women who have borne their coat of arms have not done so on a shield, but have instead done so on a lozenge - a rhombus or 'diamond' shape design.



Shield



Lozenge

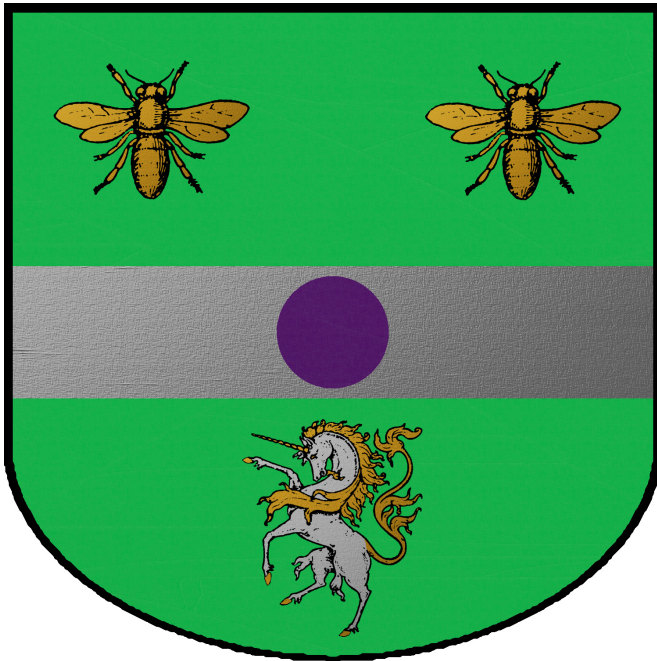
Or, A pelican in her piety proper

Again, in a world where the differences where the sexes are not considered as important, the idea of using a different shape for men and women may not apply – and Canadian heraldry has also made this change in our own real world. And even in cases where the difference did apply historically, Queens or other very senior women who ruled in their own right generally bore their arms on a shield, rather than a lozenge.

Combining Arms

While there are many shields where a single design covers the entire shield, there are many where more than one basic design can be seen on a single shield – where the shield has been divided in half, or into quarters, or even into much smaller divisions, each bearing their own, clearly independent designs. Where this is so, it is normally because two or more coats of arms have been combined into one. The most common reason for this to occur is when two people, who are both entitled to bear a coat of arms marry, and it is desired to combine their coat of arms together as a symbol of their union, or the uniting of their families.

Consider these two sets of arms, one of a man, one of a woman:



Vert, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or.



Or, A pelican in her piety proper

There are three ways these arms could be combined in standard heraldry to show a marriage between the two individuals.

First of all, we have impalement –where both shields are placed side by side on the same shield in their entirety. If necessary, elements can be shrunk in order to fit, although attempts will be made to this as little as possible. This is the most common way of combining two coats of arms.



Arms Impaled. Dexter, Vert, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or. Sinister, Or, A pelican in her piety proper.

By convention, the male arms are placed on the right (***dexter***) side of the shield, and the female arms on the left (***sinister***) side. Note, that to modern eyes, it will look like in the shield above, the male arms (the green background) are on the left while the female (the gold background) are on the right. This is because a convention in heraldry that arms are ***blazoned*** from the perspective

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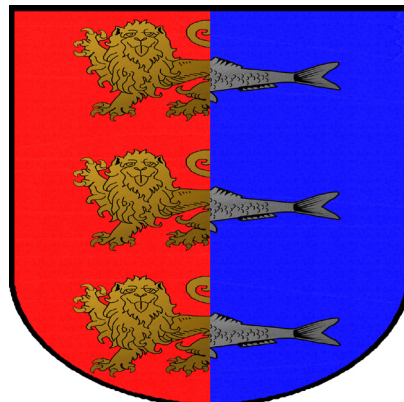
of the bearer – even though the bearer would normally be looking at the unadorned back of their shield. A minor point but one that can easily cause confusion.

The second way of combining two coats of arms is older and can often lead to difficulty in identifying what is on a coat of arms, but it does occur and so needs to be described. This is dimidiation and can most easily be thought of as “chopping the two coats of arms in half and sticking them together”:

Dimidiation can sometimes lead to odd results – such as these half-lion-half-fish creatures on the Coat of Arms of Great Yarmouth in England:



Per pale Vert and Or, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or dimidiated with a pelican in her piety proper.



Per pale Gules and Azure three Lions passant guardant in pale Or dimidiated with as many Herrings naiant in pale Argent.
The Arms of Great Yarmouth.

The third way in which a coat of arms can be combined on marriage is only of relevance in a society where men and women are treated differently because it involves the situation where male-preference primogeniture applies – that is, where sons always take precedence over daughters in terms of inheritance, where a sister is behind any younger brothers in terms of inheritance rights and so she only inherits her father's arms if she has no brothers at all. In such a case she is referred to as a heraldic heiress. In such a case, on marriage, her arms are placed within her husband's arms on an inescutcheon – a shield within a shield – as so:



Per pale Vert and Or, a fess Argent a between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or and on an inescutcheon, Or, a pelican in her piety proper.

Marriages are not the only reason why arms may be combined in this way – if two nations merge their arms might be combined in a similar fashion.

Besides these situations in which two coats of arms are merged together as two halves of a shield, **quartering** is also common. This generally arises when arms of a married couple are inherited by their own heir.

So when the eldest son (or daughter in places and situations where she is the heir) of the couple we have been discussing in this chapter inherits their own arms, while they will bear the same devices as their parents arms, they will bear them in a different way:



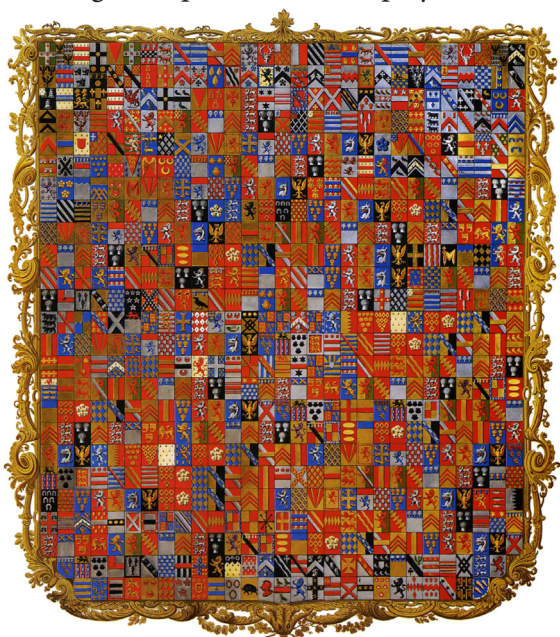
Per pale Vert and Or, a fess Argent a between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or and on an inescutcheon, Or, a pelican in her piety proper.



Quarterly, first and fourth, Vert, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or; Second and third, Or, a pelican in her piety proper.

So, **quarters** result when the child of a couple begin to bear their own arms derived from their parents.

This term is used in heraldry even when there are more than four divisions but once you start getting below quarters and quarters of quarters, you can start to work against the idea that a coat of arms should be identifiable from a distance. Still, when we talk about **quartering** we are including such arms as the following example (which, I hope you will forgive, will not be blazoned here):



Left: Arms of the 1st Marquess of Buckingham (as seen in the Stowe Armorial)

In summary, coats of arms can be more complex than a single design on a single field. New coats of arms can be created by combining existing ones so a new shield is made up of halves, quarters or further division each showing a particular individual coat of arms. This most commonly occurs as a result of marriage.

For a larger version of this picture, see page 31

Canting and Punning

While many people take heraldry very seriously, there is a considerable tradition within heraldry of making use of humour of various sorts in designing a coat of arms. This has already been touched on when we discussed mottoes earlier, but another example is in the use of images that evoke names or ideas relating to the person the arms are being created for. Often this relies on using symbols that have similar names to an element of the person's name – one of the most famous examples being the arms granted to the father of William Shakespeare (which were inherited by William as his eldest son):

Or, on a bend Sable a spear of the first steeled Argent. Arms of John Shakespeare of Stratford-Upon-Avon and his heirs.

Here the **canting** (the heraldic term for symbols on a coat of arms alluding to the name of the bearer) is simple and obvious – a spear for Shakespeare.

A more modern example, of particular interest to many roleplayers are the arms granted to English author, the late Sir Terry Pratchett:

Sable an ankh between four Roundels in saltire each issuing Argent. For a crest, upon a Helm with a Wreath Argent and Sable On Water Barry wavy Sable Argent and Sable an Owl affronty wings displayed and inverted Or supporting thereby two closed Books erect Gules. Motto 'Noli Timere Messorum'. Arms of Sir Terrence Pratchett OBE.

The most famous world that Sir Terry created for his books was the Discworld, and its greatest city, where many of the books were set was



Ankh-Morpork. The name of this city gives us the two main devices seen on his arms – the silver ankh in the centre of his shield is very obvious. Less obvious is that the owl depicted in the **crest** is specifically a **Morepork** found in Tasmania and New Zealand.

A couple of other features of Sir Terry's arms are worth pointing out. Note that the **helm** that forms part of the **crest** is specifically that of the Knight that he became in 2009. And note the motto 'Noli Timere Messorum'. This is a Latin rendition of the phrase 'Don't Fear The Reaper', reflecting both to the anthropomorphic character of Death in the Discworld, who is presented as a highly sympathetic and caring character, and to Sir Terry's own philosophy in the face of the illness that he faced towards the ends of his life.

Note, as well, the absence of **supporters**. As Sir Terry was neither a peer nor a member of the few orders of Knighthood in the British tradition that entitle a person to **supporters** on their coat of arms, such were not granted – to his disappointment. He would have liked a couple of hippos and that would certainly have been appropriate.

In summary, when designing a coat of arms in your games, do not be afraid to make use of puns and other forms of humour. Though heraldry is a serious business, this is traditional, and is something you should feel free to have some fun with.



A Case Study

I am going to take you through the process of how the coat of arms of a player character in one of my own games developed over the course of a campaign. This campaign is set in a world that is quite similar to our own, and in a country that is quite similar to medieval England, and which has a similar heraldic tradition for that campaign.

When I first created this character he was 17 years old and had only just recently ‘gained his spurs’ as a Knight. He had no great achievements of his own so any coat of arms he would be bearing to begin with would not be his own – but derived from those of his father.

The character’s name was Sir Brandon of Meadwell, and he was the third son of Sir Hufbert and Lady Samand of Meadwell. Sir Hufbert was a former soldier of common birth who had been Knighted on the battlefield after being wounded saving the son of the Baron of Forme and who had been granted the village of Meadwell as a reward. These were all details I had worked out in creating my characters history.

So my first task was to design a coat of arms for Sir Hufbert and I decided to make use of these facts in designing that coat of arms.

First of all, I decided that Sir Hufbert’s coat of arms would consist of nothing but his shield – as he was of common birth and had never participated in tournaments or anything of that nature, he had not been overly concerned with obtaining anything too impressive. He had a coat of arms because he was told he was required to have one by the Lord who knighted him, and so he consulted the Heralds. The Heralds decided his coat of arms should have the following features.

First of all, it should reflect the fact that he gained his Knighthood by being wounded on the battlefield. They decided that the shield should have a green field (*Vert*) to reflect the large meadow in which the battle had been fought, and that it should bear a *golpe* – a purple circle (a *roundel Purpure*) that is traditionally used to indicate a wound in heraldry. As he was being rewarded for saving the life of the son of the Baron



of Forme, and the Baron of Forme’s arms bore a golden and silver unicorn as its main device, it was decided to include that on Sir Hufbert’s shield. Finally, the village of Meadwell, which he had been given dominion over is famous of its honey and its mead, so two bees would be added to the shield. Based on these considerations, they designed a shield that we have seen in this guide before:

Vert, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or.

The silver band (*fess Argent*) was added simply in order to ensure the purple circle did not rest on the green field, violating the *colour* on *colour* rule.

So these are Sir Hufbert’s arms – and as Sir Brandon has no particular achievements of his home, he decided to embark on his own adventuring career bearing his father’s arms differenced by the mark of *cadency* traditionally used for a fourth son – the *martlet* (a small bird). Unfortunately being the fourth son of a Knight of relatively limited means, Sir Hufbert’s was not able to pay an artist to render his coat of arms – and so he began his career bearing a coat of arms he had painted himself and a surcoat sewn and embroidered for him by his younger sister.



Vert, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a unicorn rampant Argent, horned, armed, maned, tailed, and unguled Or, difference by a martlet Argent in chief.

Sir Brandon bore these arms for some years until he was part of a group of adventurers who found themselves involved in thwarting a plot to kill a Bishop who acted as an adviser to the King. In recognition, the King instructed the Heralds to add an **augmentation** to Sir Brandon's arms in recognition of this achievement. As this **augmentation** would make his arms distinct from those of his father and brother's it was no longer necessary to include a mark of **cadency**. Sir Brandon himself has no great link to his father's act of bravery in saving the son of the Baron of Forme, but he maintains his link to his own family, so it is decided to replace the unicorn of Forme with a bishop's crozier on a field of royal purple.



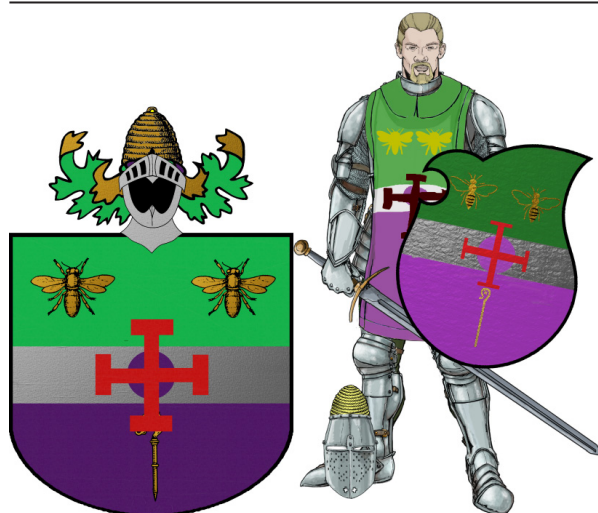
Per fess Vert and Purpure, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a Bishop's crozier Or.

At this point, Sir Brandon felt inspired to go on Crusade. During his time in the Holy Land, he became part of an Order of Crusading Knights which entitled him to place the blood red cross of their Order on his arms. When he returned home he was bearing the following arms.



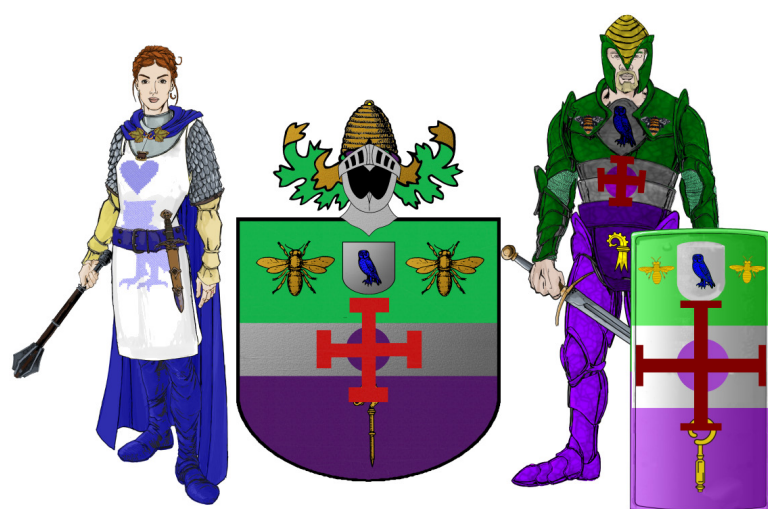
Per fess Vert and Purpure, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a Bishop's crozier Or, overall a cross potent Sanguine.

At this stage, Sir Brandon decides to begin participating in tournaments. Initially, he tries to have a crest made for his helmet resembling a bee, but this proves unsuccessful and so he settles on a beehive. He surprises himself by winning a major tourney, and applies to the heralds to have his crest added to his coat of arms as a result. This request is granted.



Per fess Vert and Purpure, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a Bishop's crozier Or, overall a cross potent Sanguine, for a Crest, on a Knight's helmet, a Beehive Or.

Sir Brandon's newfound celebrity leads to his mixing with the high and mighty. He meets and falls in love with Lady Hannabel Wisden, the only child of the Earl of Wisden. After negotiation, their parents approve the match (the formalities must be observed) and they marry. At this point, Sir Brandon's arms are combined with the arms of his new father-in-law by the latter arms being placed on the former.



Per fess Vert and Purpure, on a fess Argent a golpe, between two bees volant Or and a Bishop's crozier Or, in chief, on an inescutcheon Argent, an Owl Azure; overall a cross potent Sanguine, for a Crest, on a Knight's helmet, a Beehive Or.

Finally, Sir Brandon, returns to the Crusades as an officer in his father-in-law's command. During an attack on the Holy City, when all the senior officers fall, Sir Brandon takes command and successfully holds the city against great odds. He is granted the Earldom of Wisden as his father-in-law's heir and is granted the coat of arms he will bear for the rest of his life and pass onto his children. Supporters - the Owls of Wisden are added and his knight's helm is replaced by that of a nobleman. He also asks to add a motto - 'I Know Not How To Yield', or, in the ancient tongue 'Cedere Nescio'. Finally the head of his Order, bestows on him their greatest honour - the Cross In Gold to replace the blood red cross on his arms.



crozier Or, in chief, on an inescutcheon Argent, an Owl Azure; overall a cross potent Or, for a Crest, on a Peer's helmet, a Beehive Or; for Supporters, two Owls Proper Crowned With Earl's coronets Proper. Motto 'Cedere Nescio'.

In summary, when designing a coat of arms consider its history - or more properly the history of the person who will bear it. Use symbolism to decide what devices you place upon the shield, but do not be afraid to do something just because it looks good to you - and remember it is possible to get too complicated very easily.

The Right to Bear Arms in a Roleplaying Context

In most societies where heraldry is a feature, not everybody has the right to bear a coat of arms. It is a right that is reserved to those who have a certain amount of power and influence. In a Kingdom, it is likely that the King himself reserves the right to decide who may bear arms, although he may well delegate this authority to his Heralds. And the right may be considered automatic – or nearly so – for certain people. In my own campaigns, typically the right to bear arms is bestowed when a person is knighted – and it carries with it a literal right to bear weapons as well. It may also be granted to others who perform acts of distinction or to cities and towns or to powerful organisations and guilds.

If a person gains this right, they should approach a Herald to help them design their arms. These individuals are experts in the laws of heraldry. But they are more than just that. The heralds probably began their existence as messengers for Kings and nobles – moving from place to place announcing official proclamations and delivering communications. They came to be considered trustworthy arbitrators and negotiators, and it is in this type of role that they probably originally began to settle disputes concerning coats of arms – when two men had adopted similar arms, there could be confusion, especially if they found themselves involved in the same military campaigns.

A herald typically wore the arms of his master on a tabard as seen in this image of the heralds of King Henry VIII of England.



They often found themselves serving in a diplomatic role – and they were granted a medieval equivalent of what we now know as diplomatic immunity – travelling from nation to nation negotiating the exchange of prisoners and especially the ransom of knights. They were even reasonably safe on battlefields during battles in many cases, although accidents could happen.

This diplomatic role could be one fulfilled by a player character in a roleplaying game – a number of my PCs over the years have been heralds on missions for their Kings. A herald is likely to have language and diplomatic skills, as well as some ability with regards to art. Because it was also the herald's role to design a coat of arms when requested and issue the Grant of Arms that officially bestowed it, in the name of the King.



Artistic talent is not essential – the heralds could have employed artists and scribes to handle these specific tasks as well as the production of *rolls of arms*. Official lists of the coats of arms in a particular situation – whether on the scale of a role for an entire Kingdom, or for one specific tournament.



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Part of a 13th century roll of arms (the Segar Roll) showing the arms of various rulers – note the arms of Jerusalem (the gold crosses on a silver field), of France (the golden fleurs de lys on blue) and of England (the golden lions on red) that we have seen previously in this guide.

So – how can you use heraldry in your games? A coat of arms can add background to a character, particularly a knight or somebody of noble birth – in much the same way as a physical description might. It can also be used as a way of providing information to characters:

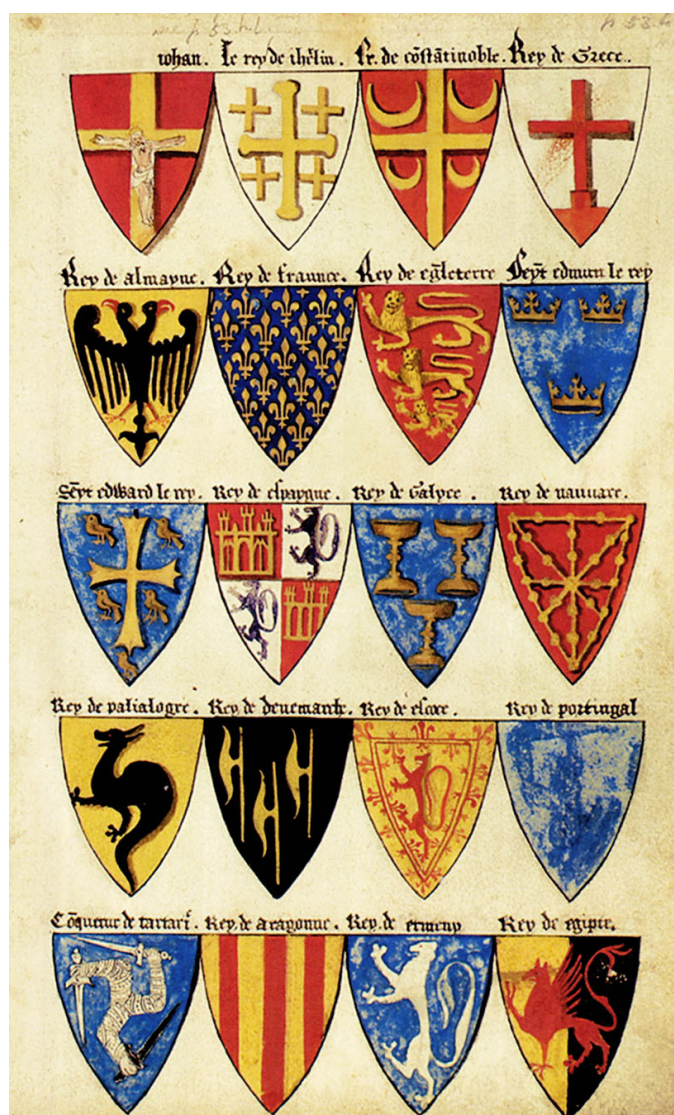
“The armoured man who stands in front of you is unknown to you. He is dressed in plate armour, and on his coat, and shield, you can see a green star on a golden field quartered with a golden dragon on a blue background.”

“The golden dragon is the King’s symbol, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is.”

“This person is obviously connected to the King in some way – we’d better be polite.”

In my own experience as a GM, many players can really get into designing a shield or full coat of arms for their character as part of developing and enhancing their characters background. And I have run a campaign once where a similar device on their shields showing common ancestry was the motivation for an entire party forming to adventure together.



Glossary

Armed: refers to the weapons of a human or the claws, teeth, beak or similar in an animal when describing a coat of arms.

Abatement: an heraldic mark of dishonour. Historically suspect.

Affronté: facing the viewer

Annulet: a charge resembling a ring

Argent: silver, one of the standard, common, metallic colours in heraldry. Often rendered as white.

Attitude: the posture of a human or animal charge.

Augmentation: an heraldic mark of honour.

Azure: blue, one of the standard colours in heraldry.

Bar: a charge in the shape of a horizontal bar across a field.

Baron: A rank of nobility. In England and the United Kingdom, the fifth and lowest rank of nobility.

Barry: a repeating pattern of bars across a field.

Baton: a charge in the shape of a diagonal band that does not extend to either end of a field. A **baton sinister** (one that slopes from the top right to bottom left of a shield from the perspective of a modern viewer) often indicates an illegitimate birth.

Beast: an animal in heraldry.

Bend: a charge in the shape of a diagonal band that extends to both edges of the field. A **bend sinister** (one that slopes from the top right to bottom left of a shield from the perspective of a modern viewer) often indicates an illegitimate birth.

Bendlet: a thin bend (half the thickness of a normal bend). A **bendlet sinister** (one that slopes from the top right to bottom left of a shield from the perspective of a modern viewer) often indicates an illegitimate birth.

Bendy: a repeating pattern of bends across a field.

Bezant: a golden charge shaped like a circle – variant of the roundel.

Billett: a rectangular charge, oriented vertically and horizontally, the vertical sides being longer than the horizontal

Blazon: the written description of a coat of arms. As a verb, the act of writing such a description.

Bleu celeste: sky blue, a rare colour in heraldry.

Bordure: A charge that consists of a border around a shield. It often indicates an illegitimate birth.

Caboshed: indicates that only the head of an animal is shown, with no neck.

Cadency: a system of small symbols used to indicate order of birth when children bear a parent's coat of arms.

Canting: alludes to coats of arms that contain symbols alluding to the name of the bearer, or some other important feature of the bearer.

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Canton: a small square (less than a quarter in size) in the top corner of a field.

Carnation: 'flesh colour', a rare colour in heraldry. For historical reasons, this refers to the colour of Caucasian skin.

Cendrée: ash-grey, a rare colour in heraldry

Charge: A symbol placed on a coat of arms. They can resemble real world objects, both animate and inanimate, or be simple geometric shapes.

Chequey: a repeating pattern of small squares across a field.

Chevron: an inverted V-shape charge on a field.

Chevronny: a repeating pattern of chevrons across a field

Chief: the top third of a field (or the entire shield)

Clarichord: a charge resembling a medieval musical instrument. Used as a mark of cadency in Canadian heraldry.

Colours: In heraldry, the term colour is used specifically to refer to non metallic colours.

Copper: copper colour, a rarely used metallic colour in heraldry.

Coronet: similar to a crown, but in heraldry crowns are reserved for royalty, while nobles can have coronets on their coats of arms.

Couard: A posture that shows the tail of an animal between its legs. Can represent cowardice.

Couchant: a posture showing an animal lying down, but awake.

Couped: Cut off cleanly.

Crest: The part of a coat of arms above the shield.

Cross: A cross shape aligned horizontally and vertically.

Dancetty: a zigzagging line

Delf: a square shaped charge.

Dexter: right (in terms of direction or orientation)

Diffamée: lacking a tail

Difference: specific marks used to vary a coat of arms from another. Such a coat of arms is said to be differenced.

Dimidiation: describes two coats of arms being combined by 'chopping' them down the middle and placing them together as one coat.

Displayed: a posture used for birds that has them facing the viewer with the underside of their wings visible.

Dormant: lying down and sleeping.

Dovetailed: a line resembling a carpentry joint.

Duke: A rank of nobility. In England and the United Kingdom, the first and highest rank of nobility.

Earl: A rank of nobility. In England and the United Kingdom, the third and middle rank of nobility.

Embattled: A line resembling the battlements of a wall.

Engrailed: a line consisting of repeated curves with points facing outwards. Opposite of indented.

Erased: torn off raggedly.

Ermine: a fur pattern used in heraldry, based on the winter coat of a stoat. Mostly white with black markings.

Escallop: a charge resembling a sea shell. Used as a mark of cadency in Canadian heraldry.

Fess: the horizontal middle of a shield

Field: the background colour or pattern of a shield or part of a shield.

Flaunch: A curved shape on the side of a shield.

Fleur de lys: a stylised lily shaped charge.

Flory-counter-flory: a line endorsed with flowers, facing in alternate directions.

Fret: a charge consisting of interlaced diagonal lines

Furs: particular patterns used as colours in heraldry, based on the furs of animals – the most common being ermine and vair.

Gore: part of a shield consisting of a curving line ending in a point.

Grant of arms: A document describing a new coat of arms and who is allowed to bear it.

Guardant: a posture that involves standing side on and facing the viewer.

Gules: red, one of the standard colours in heraldry.

Gusset: a side portion of a shield cut off at the top and bottom by diagonal lines.

Gyron: a wedge shaped charge.

Hauriant: a posture for a fish which is erect with its head pointing upwards.

Helm: an heraldic device patterned after a medieval helmet.

Heraldic heiress: a female who is entitled to inherit her father's arms in traditions which normally do not allow this, generally because she has no brothers.

Impalement: describes two coats of arms being combined by placing them side by side on a new shield in their entirety.

Indented: a saw shaped line

Inescutcheon: a small image of a shield that appears on a larger shield.

Invected: a line consisting of repeated curves with points facing inwards. Opposite of engrailed.

Label: a charge that is placed across the top of a shield. It most commonly resembles a capital E placed on its side with its three points facing downwards. Used as the most common mark of cadency, that of an eldest son or other heir.

Langued: describes the tongue of an animal.

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Lozenge: a rhombus, 'diamond' shaped charge with sides of equal length and right angles. In some heraldic traditions, the coat of arms of a female are traditionally shown on a lozenge rather than a shield.

Mantling: material protecting the back and sides of a helmet and the neck of the wearer. Often included on a coat of arms.

Marquess: A rank of nobility. In England and the United Kingdom, the second highest rank of nobility.

Martlet: A small bird. Used as a mark of cadency.

Mascle: A hollow lozenge.

Morné: teeth and claws removed.

Motto: A short phrase with special meaning, often included on a scroll at the base of a coat of arms.

Mullet: a star shaped charge, normally shown with five points unless otherwise specified. Used as a mark of cadency.

Murrey: purple-red, a rare colour in heraldry.

Nainat: a posture showing swimming.

Nebuly: a line shaped like the edge of a cloud.

Or: gold, one of the standard, common, metallic colours in heraldry. Often rendered as yellow.

Ordinary: a charge shaped like a basic geometric shape.

Orle: a narrow band that follows the edge of a shield, but without touching that edge.

Overt: a posture for a bird – standing.

Pale: a vertical band down the centre of a shield.

Pall: a Y-shaped band on a shield.

Paly: a way of dividing a shield into three parts with one part above the two. The division between the parts resembles a capital 'Y'.

Passant: a posture, walking.

Pile: A triangular shaped charge.

Point: The base of a shield.

Potenté: A line with alternating T-shapes in opposite directions.

Proper: Coloured in its actual 'real world' colours.

Purple: purple, one of the standard colours in heraldry.

Quarter: One quarter of a shield.

Quartering: The practice of dividing a shield into quarters, or even smaller sections.

Raguly: A line resembling the battlements of a wall but set on an angle.

Rampant: A posture – standing to fight.

Rayonné: A line resembling the rays of the sun or flames.

Reguardant: a posture that involves standing side on and facing backwards.

Rising: a posture for birds showing them about to take flight.

Roll of arms: A list of particular coats of arms, showing or describing them.

Rose: pink, a rare colour in heraldry.

Roundel: A circular charge. Roundels of different colours have specific names.

Sable: black, one of the standard colours in heraldry.

Salient: a posture, leaping.

Saltire: a cross aligned diagonally, resembling a capital 'X'

Sanguine: blood red, a rare colour in heraldry.

Sejant: a posture, sitting.

Sinister: left (in terms of direction or orientation).

Statant: a posture, standing.

Subordinary: a smaller, less frequently used geometric charge. Often included in the ordinaries.

Supporter: An animal or human figure standing on either side of a shield in a coat of arms.

Tabard: an actual coat that can be worn bearing a coat of arms. Worn by knights over their armour, worn by heralds as a uniform.

Tenné: orange brown, a rare colour in heraldry.

Tinctures: A collective term for all heraldic colours – including colours, metals, and furs.

Torse: A twisted piece of fabric worn around the top of a helmet. Often appears in a coat of arms between the helm and the crest.

Undifferenced: A coat of arms that has not been changed.

Urinant: a posture for a fish which is erect with its head pointing downwards.

Vair: One of the furs, a pattern in blue and white. A representation of squirrel skins sewn together.

Vert: green, one of the standard colours in heraldry.

Viscount: A rank of nobility. In England and the United Kingdom, the fourth and second lowest rank of nobility.

Volant: A posture – flying.

Wavy: a line resembling a curving wave.

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Acknowledgements

I am certainly not a great artists and although I have painted a number of the coats of arms that appear in this guide – the stylised nature of heraldic painting means that some people will find they can produce art of this type even if their skills with other forms of art are more limited – the task of assembling this guide would have been much more difficult if not for many people who have generously made their art available for use in various ways normally under Creative Commons licences. I have also made use of art that has entered the public domain through the passage of time and clip art collections where licencing allows me to use particular pieces. But I would like to acknowledge here, the following for their permission granted through licencing to make use of their art. The nature of the internet means that in some cases, I have only been able to acknowledge them under their internet nicknames. In most cases, I have adapted this art, rather than using it unaltered.

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