

Introduction to English Heraldry

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THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH HERALDRY

The first documented royal coat of arms appears on the Great Seal of Richard I, using a shield containing one lion on the visible half.

Eventually Richard I's arms were three gold lions passant on red.

Knights' heraldry was worn on embroidered fabric covering their armor. Their family or house signs eventually became known as coats-of-arms.

Prior to the 16th century, there was no regulation on the use of arms in England.

The Heraldic Visitations of the various counties of England were begun in the 16th century and required each family which displayed a coat armor to report to the visiting heralds, who generally held court in the county seat during a certain period, to declare its pedigree, bringing evidence it came from ancient nobility or gentry. These visitations provide well recorded armorials of the ancient gentry families from each county.

THE MEANING OF HERALDIC TERMINOLOGY, COLORS & SYMBOLS

Terminology

Achievement, or Achievement of Arms - Any complete heraldic composition.

Armory - Heraldry. Also, a List of Names and Titles, with their respective Arms.

Banner - A flag, charged with the coat of arms of the owner, displayed over its entire surface.

Blazon - Heraldry: Armorial Compositions. "To blazon" is to describe or to represent any armorial Figure, Device, or Composition in an heraldic manner.

Blazoning—Describing in heraldic language: also, representing in an heraldic manner.

Blazonry—the representation of any heraldic Figure, Device, or Composition.

Crest - A figure or device originally worn upon a helm, and now generally represented above a Shield of arms. Crests at first were ensigns of high honour, and their use was restricted to a few persons of eminence: they were attached by a wreath, or torse, or by a coronet, to the helm or basinet; and sometimes a crest stood upon a cap of estate.

Helm, Helmet - Now placed as an accessory above a Shield of arms, and bearing its Crest after the fashion in which, in the Middle Ages, both Helm and Crest were actually worn in tournaments.

Herald - An officer of arms.

Livery Colours - In the Middle Ages, all great families had their own livery colours, which had no necessary relation to the tinctures of the shield.

Marshalling - The disposition of more than one distinct coat of arms upon a shield, so forming a single composition; or the aggroupment of two or more distinct shields, so as to form a single composition.

Motto - A word, or very short sentence, placed generally below a shield but sometimes above a crest, an idea perhaps derived from the “war-cries” of early times. A motto may be emblematical, or it may have some allusion to the person bearing it, or to his name and armorial insignia; or it may be the epigrammatic expression of some sentiment in special favour with the bearer of it.

Ordinary of arms - A list of armorial bearings, classified or arranged alphabetically, with the names of the bearers.

Quarter - The first (from the dexter chief – [which is on the left side when you are looking at the shield]) of the divisions of a shield that is parted per cross.

Quartering - Marshalling two or more coats of arms in the different quarters of the same shield.

Shield, or Escutcheon - The Shield of Heraldry.

Tinctures - The two metals and the five colours of Heraldry.

Colors

Or (Gold)	Generosity
Argent (Silver or white)	Sincerity, Peace
Purpur (Purple)	Justice, Sovereignty, Regal
Gules (Red)	Warrior, Martyr, Military, Strength
Azure (Blue)	Strength, Loyalty
Vert (Green)	Hope, Loyalty in Love
Sable (Black)	Constancy, Grief
Tern or Tawny (Orange)	Worthwhile, Ambition
Sanguine or Murray (Maroon)	Victorious, Patient in Battle

The Ordinares

These were the simple charges of early Heraldry, which always have been held in the highest esteem and which are most familiar, are:

The Chief	- bounded by horizontal line, of uppermost third
The Fesse	- crosses the center of a shield horizontally
The Bar	- placed horizontal except in Fesse or Chief of shield
The Pale	- it is vertical rather than horizontal
The Cross	- formed from a combination of a Fesse with a Pale
The Bend	- crosses diagonally from dexter chief to sinister base
The Saltire	- may also be regarded as a diagonal cross
The Chevron	- a V-shaped mark, often inverted
The Pile	- consists of a wedge emerging from the upper edge of the shield

The Charges

A charge is any emblem or device occupying the field of an escutcheon (shield).

Bear	Ferocity in the protection of kindred
Boar	Represents intrepidity
Castle	Given to one who held or captured a castle by force or stratagem
Falcon	Someone eager in the pursuit of an object much desired
Griffin	Composed of the most royal of the birds and beasts
Lion	An emblem of deathless courage and, hence, a valiant warrior
Phoenix	Represents immortality, rebirth, and renewal
Rose	A symbol of hope and joy. Red is the symbol of martyrdom. The white rose represents love, faith, and purity
Thistle	An emblem of pain and suffering
Unicorn	Represents virtue, courage, and strength

HERALDIC ACHIEVEMENTS

A heraldic achievement consists of a shield of arms the coat of arms, or simply coat, together with all its accompanying elements, such as a crest, supporters, and other heraldic embellishments.



A coat of arms is traditionally unique to an individual person, family, state, organization or corporation.

FINDING HERALDIC INFORMATION

FamilySearch Catalog

Place

- England – Heraldry
- England – Visitations
- County – Heraldry
- County – Visitations

Keyword

- Family Surname –
heraldry or coat
of arms