

Heraldry Simplified-Armorial

Or

What in the heck does that mean??

By

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WELCOME!!!

This class and handout has been created for those of you who have wondered what those funny shield-shaped things are, and why they're painted the way they are.

We will be talking about the art and science of HERALDRY – what it is, and how to create your own Device or Coat of Arms in the SCA.

Before we begin everyone STAND UP...NOW, REPEAT THESE PHRASES AFTER ME:

“HERALDRY IS *NOT* SCARY!!!”



“I CAN FIGURE THIS OUT – I’M AN ADULT!” (For those of you who aren’t adults

yet, you can say, **“I’M A BIG BOY/GIRL!”**)



AND, if that doesn’t work:

“I CAN ALWAYS ASK A HERALD FOR HELP!”



Now, feel better?



Off we go...

TERMINOLOGY:

As with anything, there are some terms that you have to learn. These are general terms – we’ll be getting into others later on.

HERALDRY: As defined in the Dictionary:

- a. The profession, study, or art of devising, granting, and blazoning arms, tracing genealogies, and determining and ruling on questions of rank or protocol, as exercised by an officer of arms.
 - b. A branch of knowledge dealing with the history and description in proper terms of armorial bearings and their accessories.
2. Armorial ensigns or similar insignia.
 3. Pomp and ceremony, especially attended with armorial trappings; pageantry.

Now, in the SCA, it’s a little different. Here is an excellent description, written by the office of the West Kingdom Herald:

“Many people think a herald is the guy who announces the arrival of important people to a Medieval Court. In the SCA it is a bit different. While many heralds use their voices to make announcements, there are also many different things that heralds do.

These activities include voice heraldry (using one’s voice to be heard), and research or “book” heraldry. Of course, it’s a little more complex than that.”ⁱ

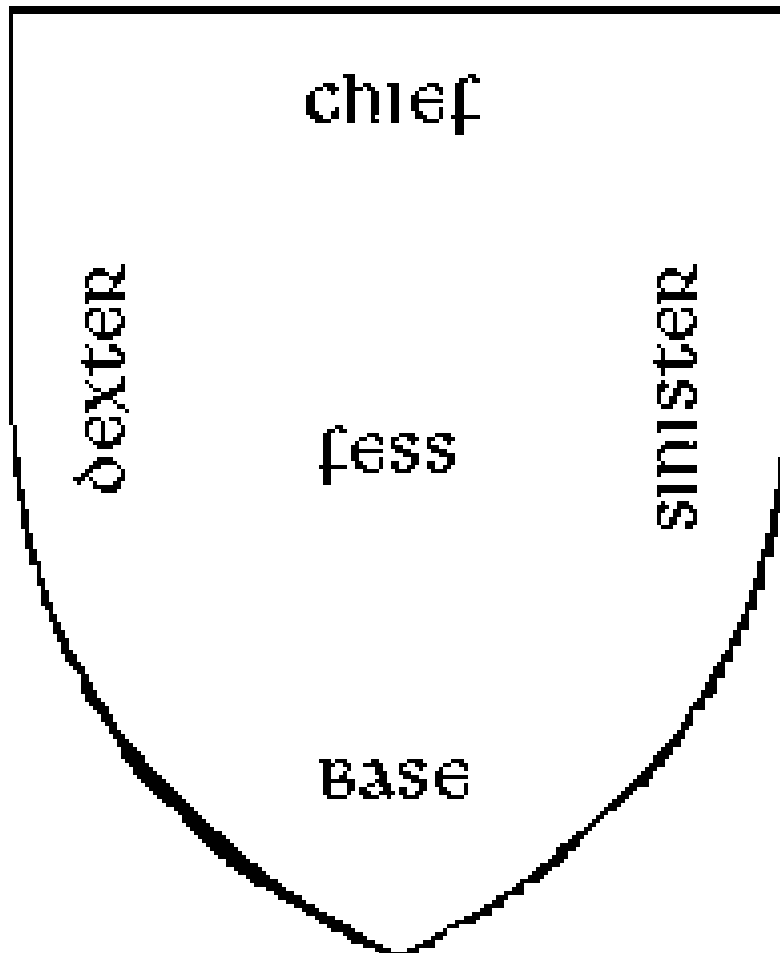
So, Heraldry in the SCA is the art and science of displaying, or BLAZONING, of Coats of Arms or Devices.

COAT OF ARMS: In the SCA, the term is given to one’s device when you earn an Award of Arms. Before that, it is termed a DEVICE.

A bit more information on the term “Herald” – for a local group, the Herald is usually called the PURSUIVANT. The actual term “Herald” is reserved for the members of the COLLEGE OF HERALDS, who are the authorities in the SCA who make sure that everyone’s Arms and Name are ok. Some groups will have other titles added to them, such as Pursuivant Extraordinaire, some won’t. It will depend on the Kingdom and their specific rules.

THE SHIELD ITSELF:

Now that we have some terms defined, we'll be talking about the actual designs of the shield itself, what goes on them, and how they go on the shield. The shield, or DEVICE, is divided up into sections. As you're wearing the shield, the sections are:



(As you can see from the shield, there are two terms, dexter and sinister, that you should be able to tell the meaning: DEXTER means Right, and SINISTER means Left. The terms for Heraldry all come from Norman French, but Sinister has always had a darker meaning. Why? Because the Medieval Church thought that anything that had to do with the left hand was evil, so we equate someone who's not actually nice as being "sinister".)

Tincture / Color.

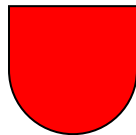
For all heraldic arms, the starting point is the color, or tincture, of the background (field). Because the intention in all heraldic arms is to produce the most visible and identifiable images possible, heraldic tinctures are divided into lighter toned metals and darker toned colors. Metals are represented by Argent (silver or white) and Or (gold or yellow) while colors are limited to Gules (red), Sable (black), Azure (blue), Vert (green), and Purpure (purple). (Figure 1)

Variations in shade are given No distinction so

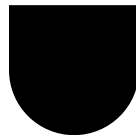
Pink = Red and sky blue = navy blue = blue.

Figure 1: Tinctures

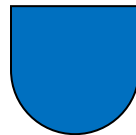
Heraldic Colors:



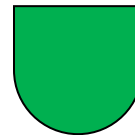
Gules



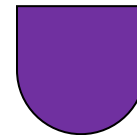
Sable



Azure

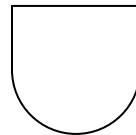


Vert

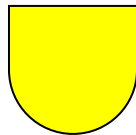


Purpure

Heraldic Metals:



Argent



Or

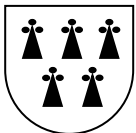
The rules for color application are absolute in (SCA) heraldry:

No Color on Color

No Metal on Metal

To achieve a clear contrast in the arms colors are clearly visible on metals and metals on colors. In some instances hybrid fields, representing Furs, (Figure 2) can also be used. For contrast purposes, Furs are usually considered the color of the background, except for Vair, which is considered neutral.

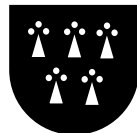
Figure 2: Heraldic Furs



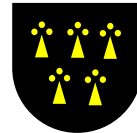
Ermine
(white with
black spots)



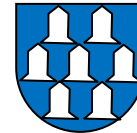
Erminois
(yellow with
black spots)



Counter Ermine
(black with
white spots)



Pean
(Black with
yellow spots)

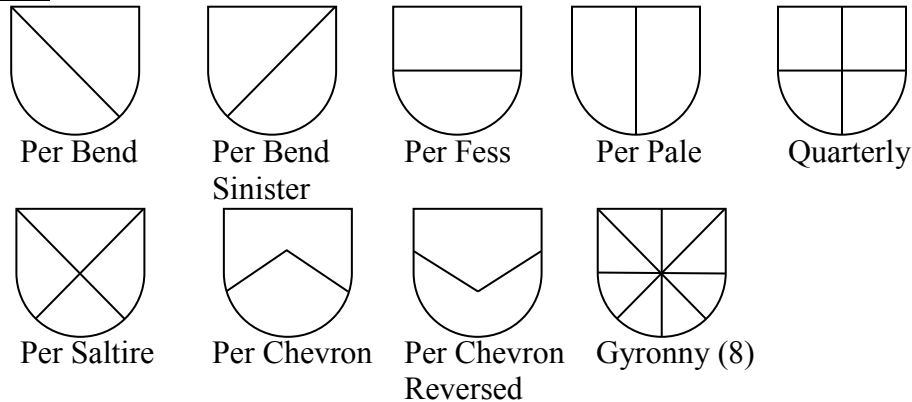


Vair
(Blue and
White)

Fields.

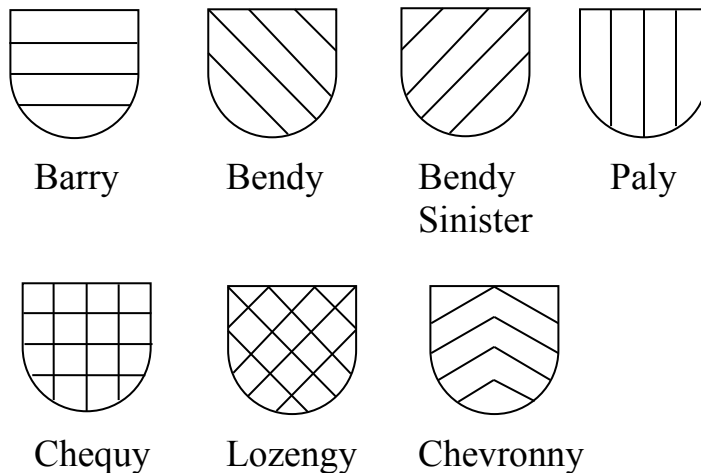
The field is the background that goes directly onto the shield. Since it is the first part applied to the shield, it is the first part described in the blazon. The field can be any tincture mentioned so the simplest fields consist of a single metal or color. Furs can also be applied to the field and are blazoned appropriately. The field can be divided into 2 or more regions using formal field divisions called “Parted Fields.”(Figure 3)

Figure 3: Parted Fields



The field can also be divided into stripes horizontally, vertically or diagonally or drawn with a checked or diamond pattern to give a Varied Field. (Figure 4) Parted or Varied Fields can be any Tincture, color or metal, and the rules of contrast **Do Not** Apply, as the field regions are considered to be next to, not on, each other.

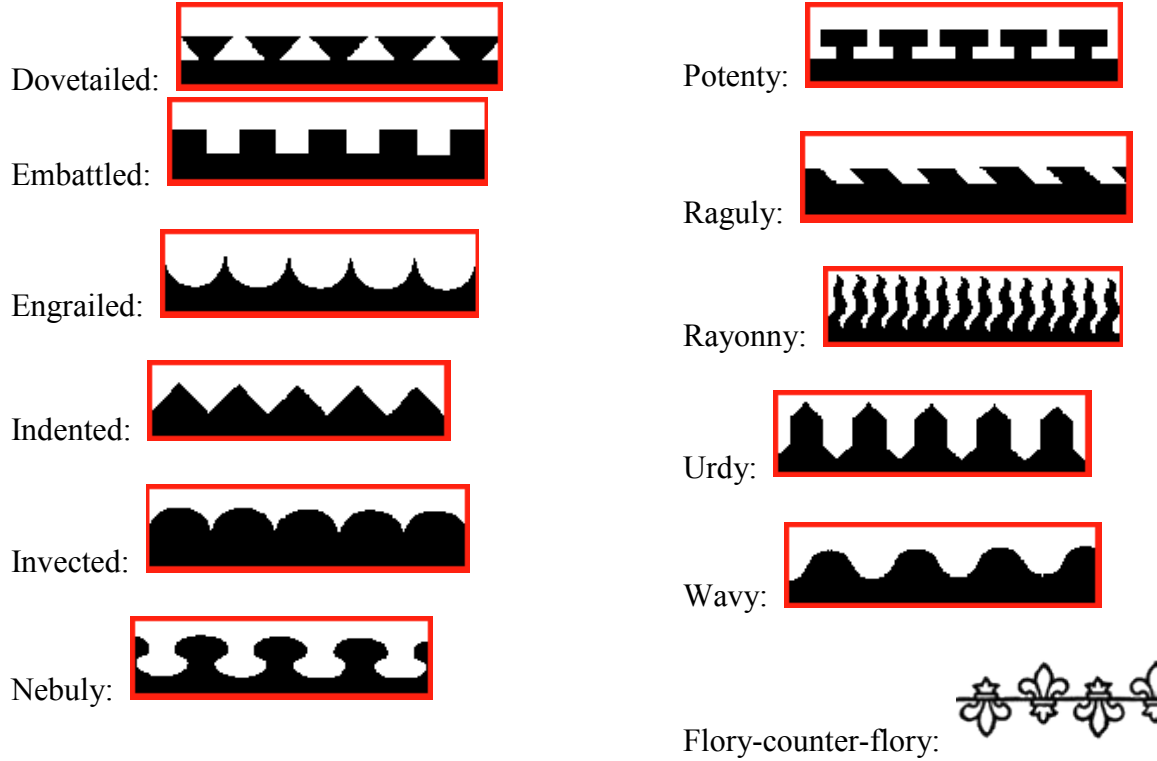
Figure 4: Varied Fields



The field regions in both Parted and Varied Fields can be divided by simple straight lines or by using a Complex Partition line (Figure 5). Complex Partition lines must be clearly and boldly drawn so they are visible on the shield and not confused with each other or a straight line.

When blazoning a parted or varied field with a complex line, the line is stated immediately after the partition type; i.e. Per Pale wavy gules and vert. When placing designs or images onto the field, the contrast between the images and all parts of the field must be taken into account so the overall design is clearly visible

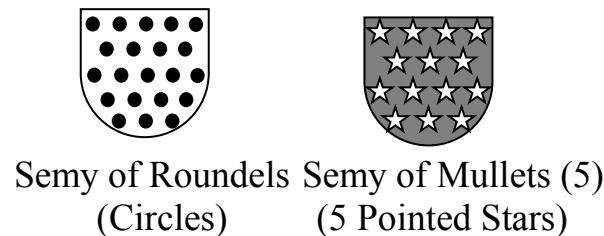
Figure 5: Complex Partition Lines



Charges.

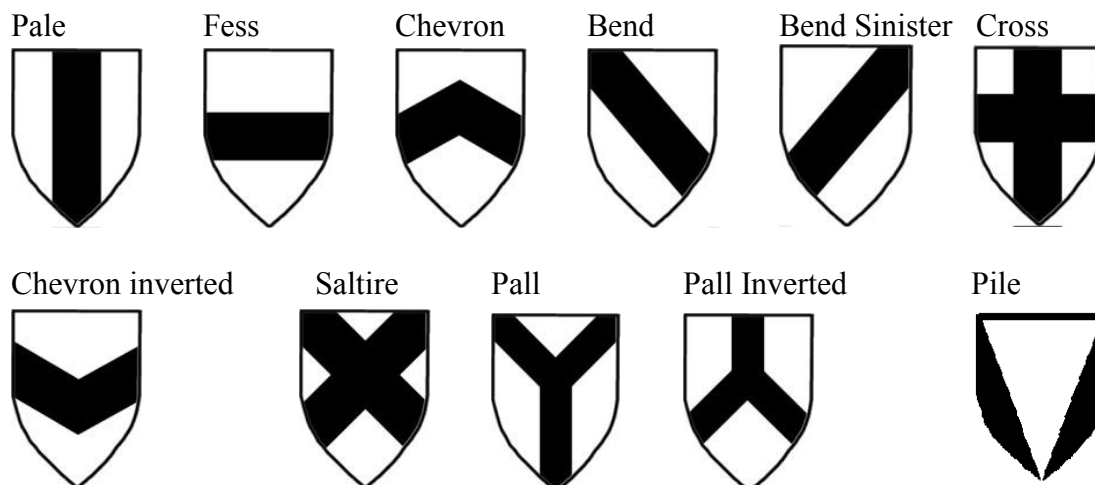
Charges are images or geometric designs that are placed onto the field of a device or badge. In a badge the charges can be the only element (fieldless) but on a device the charge is always on the field. As a consequence of this the rules of contrast **always** apply to charges on a field. Charge can appear singly or as a related group called a charge group. Small charges, such as circles, stars, crosses, or even Fleur-de-lis can be applied as a field treatment covering the entire field known as a Semy. (Figure 6) Indeed, Furs can also be seen as a field with a semy of ermine spots.

Figure 6: Semy



The simplest charges are geometric designs derived from the Field Divisions called Ordinaries. (Figure 8) Ordinaries can be drawn with either straight or complex lines. They can be uncharged or charged, applied alone or in groups. When charged, the contrast rules apply to the charge relative to the ordinary. Ordinaries are considered the Primary Charge of the device and are blazoned after the Field.

Figure 8: Ordinaries



Pile Inverted



Chief



Base



Flaunches



Bordure



Chief Triangular



Dexter Tierce



Sinister Tierce



Dexter Gore



Sinister Gore





Other charges:

Many other things can be Charges!!!
Geometric shapes:


Delf - 


Billet - *m*

Lozenge - 

Masle - 

Mullet - 

Roundel - 

Annulet - 

Heraldic charges also include veritable zoo of creatures, both real and imaginary, including (but not limited to) lions, dragons, eagles, gryphons, hedgehogs, doves, wolves, bats, lobsters, bees, dolphins, bulls, and even humanoid monsters, such as Medusa, satyrs, angels and devils.

Not only humans, but parts of humans, from head to feet, are sometimes used as well.

Each creature charge will have a variety of poses it can be displayed in – most four-legged beasts, such as lions, for example, may be shown as **rampant**, (with one leg on the ground and three outstretched, as if fighting); **salient**, (with both hind legs on the ground), **sejant** (seated), **passant** (walking with one arm raised), **statant** (standing still), **couchant** (lying down), or **dormant** (asleep). Birds, such as eagles can be **displayed** (both wings out), **close** (walking), **volant** (flying), or **addorsed**, with both wings out and ready to take off. Dolphins are usually shown as **naiant**, or swimming, or **bowed**.

When parts of a creature, such as a head, arm or hand are used, the bottom line of the charge may be **cabossed** (shown frontwards), **couped** (with a straight line at the neck), or **erased** (with a jagged line at the neck).

Items and artifacts from all walks of life are also part of various coats of arms. Some people often make visual puns, called CANTING THEIR ARMS – a man whose name is Archer, for instance, might have bows and arrows on his shield.

EMBLAZONING YOUR DEVICE:

So, now that you've seen what Heraldry is, and the stuff you can put on a shield, how do you describe it? Heraldry has special lingo, (based on old Norman French), to describe the field, the charges, and how they're layered.

In designing a device, the idea is to cover as much of the field as necessary with the **Primary Charge**, or the one that sticks out the most:



This is a good example:

Here, the 3 roundels fill up a good part of the shield.

Also, charges should be symmetrically placed. Modern-day definitions of symmetry are a little different than what was done in the Middle Ages. For one thing, most charges were all the same type and size, and usually they all faced in the same direction:



as opposed to



There are a number of charges allowed, but there are some that are not allowed or are restricted to a certain group. Those not allowed are ones that are obscene or vulgar, offensive religious/political symbols, and stereotypical symbolism.

There are also some restricted charges, used in the SCA:

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Reserved for</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Baldric, White | Masters of Arms |
| Belt, White | Knights |
| Chapeau | Order of the Pelican |
| Chaplet of roses | Princesses |
| Charged canton | Augmentation |
| Multiply charged single inescutcheon | Augmentation or arms of pretense |
| Two straight trumpets in saltire | Heraldic offices |
| Crown/Coronet | Kingdom/Principality armory; Personal armory of Society Royal Peers and Court Barons/Baronesses |
| Laurel wreath | Society branch arms |
| Orle or annulet of chain | Knights |
| Pelican in its piety | Order of the Pelican |
| Pelican vulning itself | Order of the Pelican |
| Wreaths of roses | Queens; Members of the Order of the Rose |
