

CREATING A HERALDIC DEVICE

by Master Modar Neznanich, Volk Herald

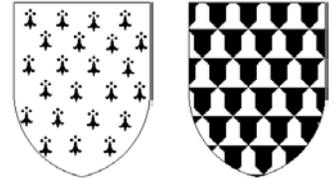
One of the great aspects of the SCA is pageantry. Each of us can participate in this area by creating a heraldic device for ourselves, then utilizing that device for heraldic display. Nothing is more inspiring than seeing dozens of banners, shields, surcoats, dresses, boxes, tablecloths, tents, archery equipment, etc. all decked out in heraldic splendour. It adds to the medieval ambiance of events and make us fit more into our personas. Following are general guidelines to use when developing a heraldic device.

Some General Terms

- Device - A heraldic design used to identify an individual.
- Coat-of-Arms - What a heraldic device is called once the owner receives an Award of Arms
- Badge - A heraldic design used to designate ownership.
- Armory - A general term encompassing all heraldic designs (devices, coats-of-arms and badges).

Basic Heraldry Information

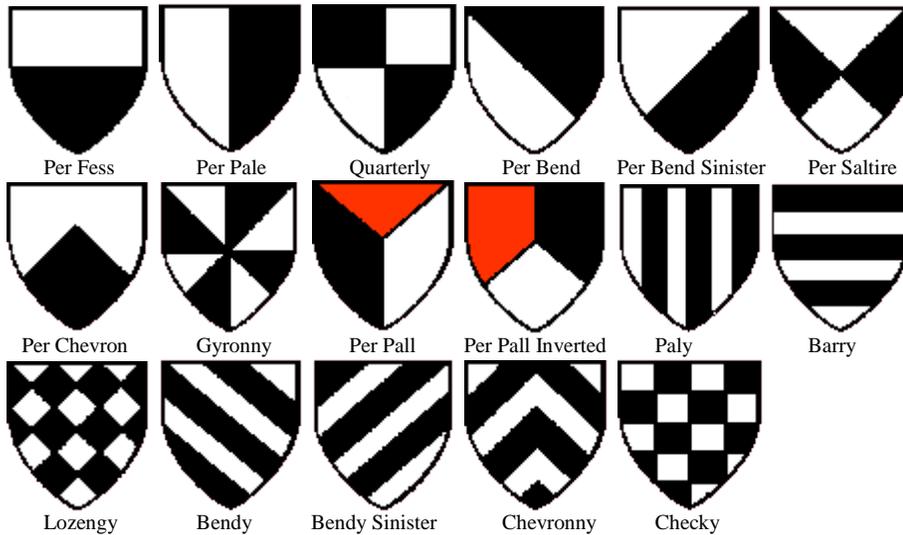
- There are three tincture classifications: 1) colors, 2) metals and 3) furs.
- There are five colors: Azure (blue), Gules (red), Purpure (purple), Sable (black) and Vert (green).
- There are two metals: Argent (silver or white) and Or (gold or yellow).
- There are two basic fur types, of which there are tincture variations:
 - Ermine fur (metals with color spots & colors with metal spots)
 - Vair fur (bell shaped quadrants composed of equal parts color and metal).



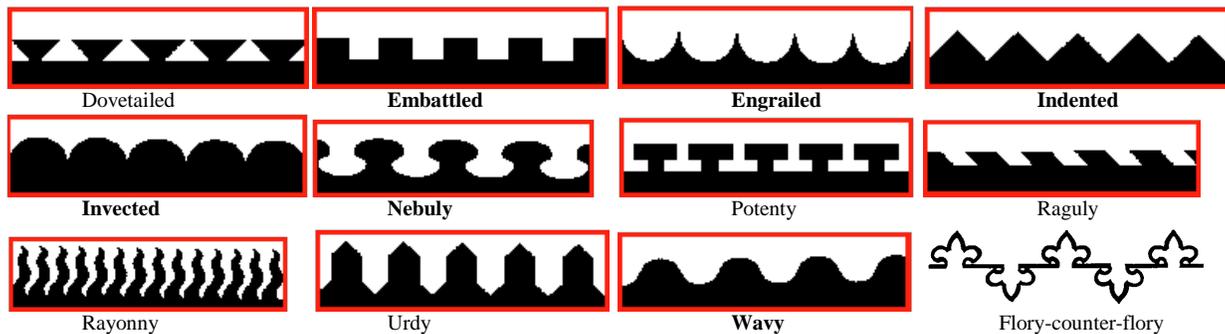
- The field is the background of the shield.
- A charge is an object placed on the field.

Field Divisions

The field can be one solid color or it may be divided into sections. These sections lay next to each other not upon one another.



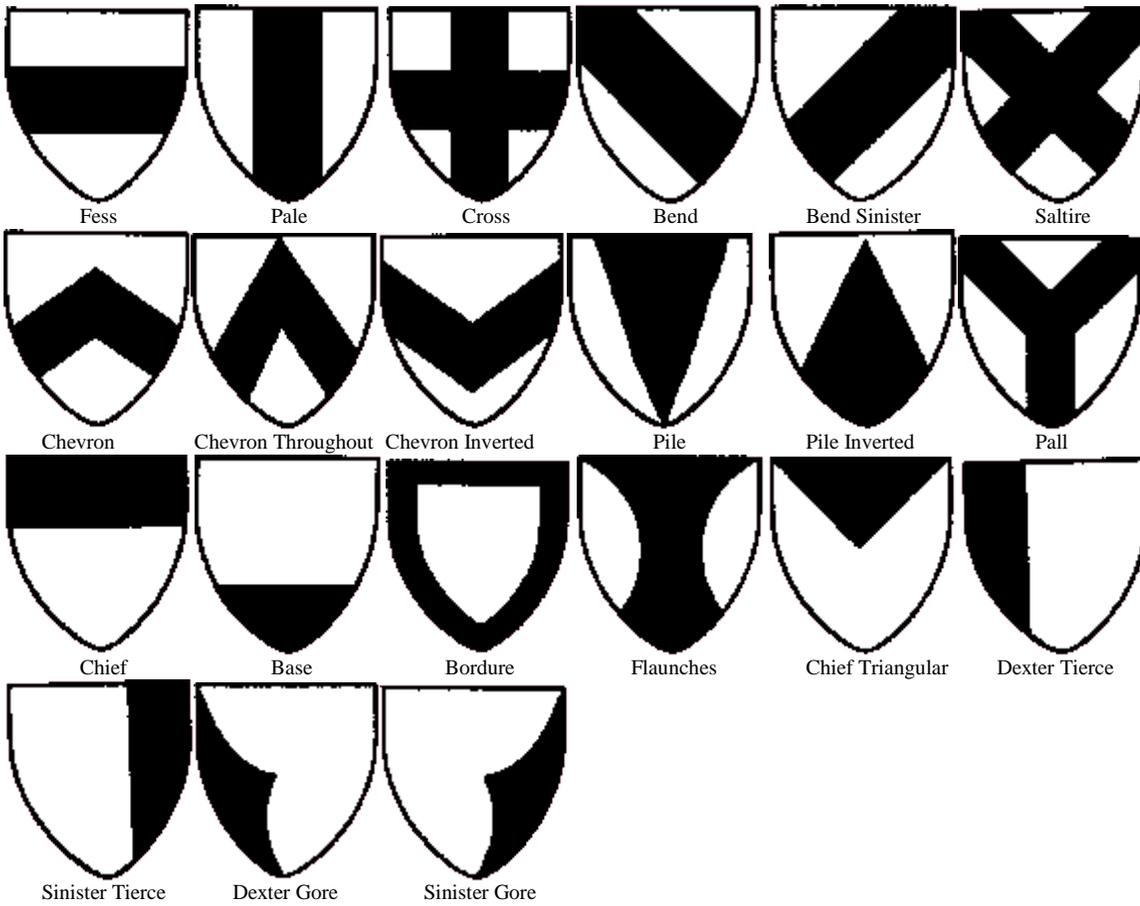
The lines used to create the field divisions can be plain (straight) or complex (follow a pattern). Some of the complex lines available for use are:



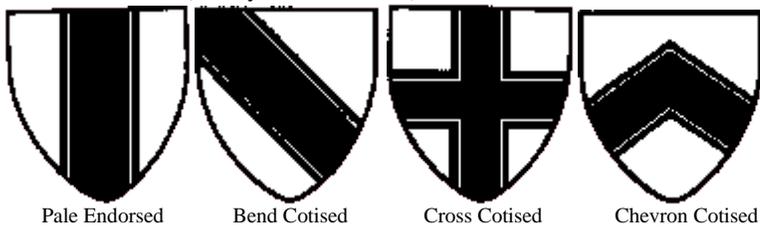
Charges

Charges are the objects that lay on top of the field (whether it is one area or divided into sections).

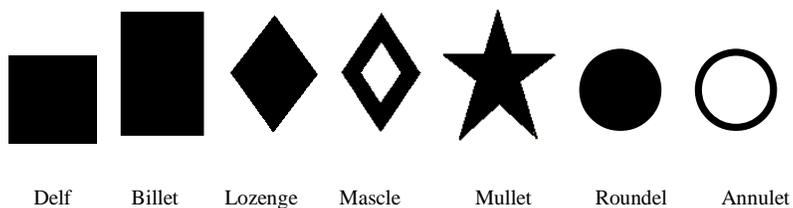
Ordinaries are one of the primary types of charges used in heraldry. These are wide bands or sections of tinctures. Most (but not all) of these can have other charges placed upon them.



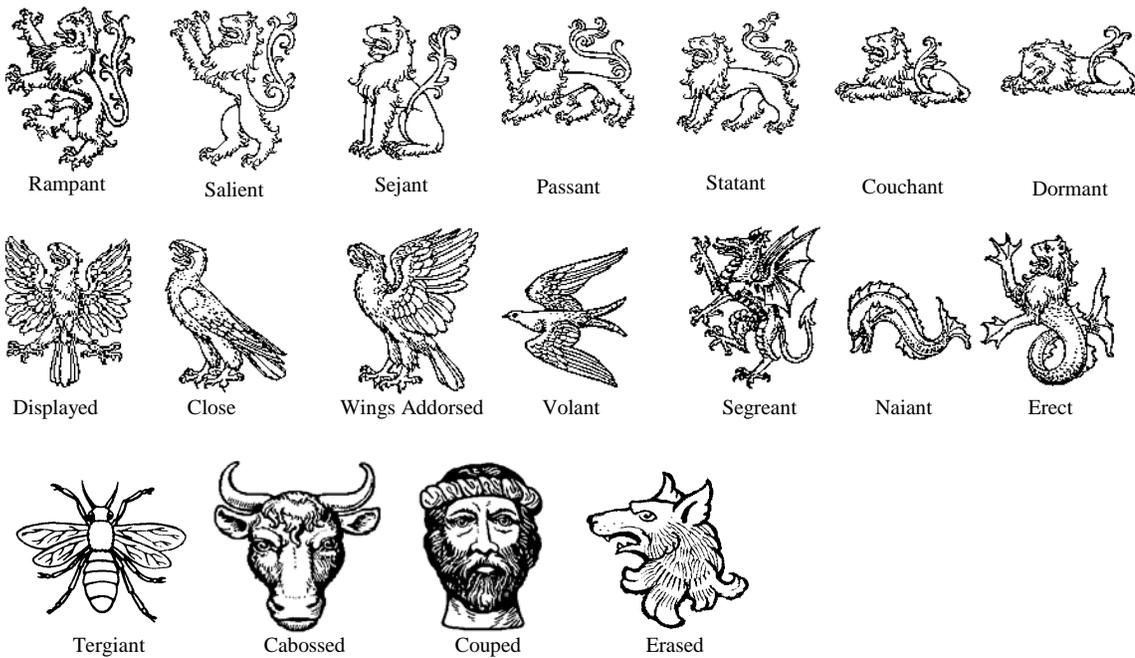
Some ordinaries (if they are two-sided) can have additional small bands flanking them.



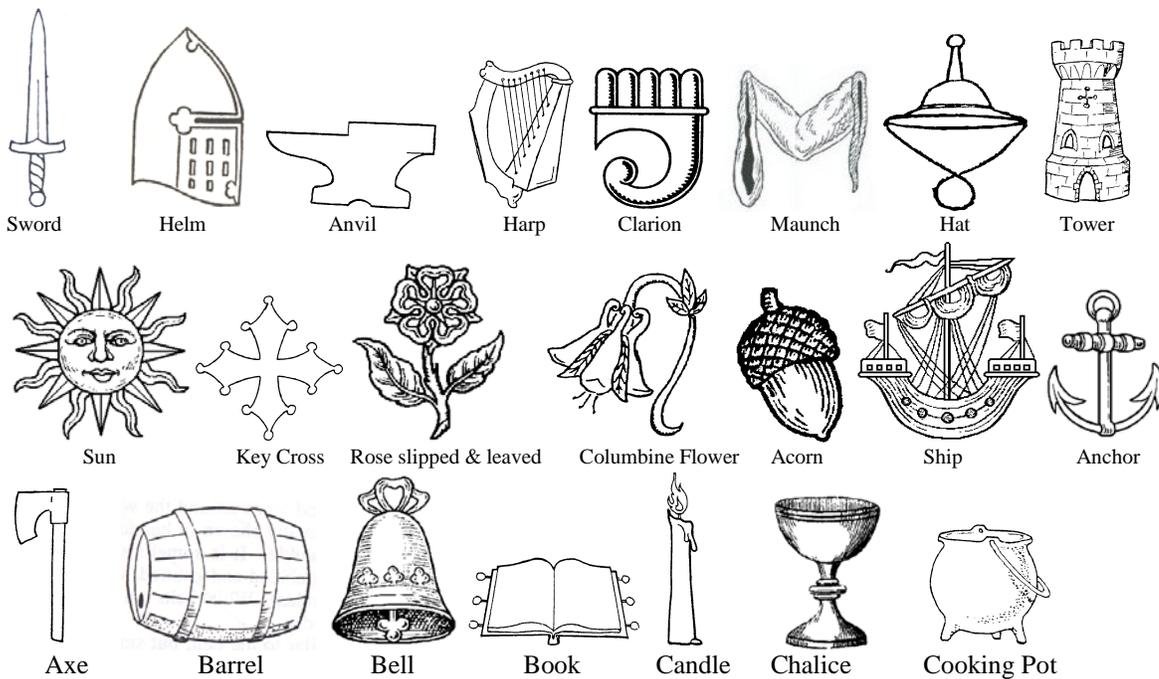
Geometric shapes are a second key type of charges used in heraldry. Examples of these are:



Creatures are a third central type of charges utilized in heraldry. There are three categories of creatures: beasts (actual animals such as boars, bears, bulls, birds, wolves, coney, deer, fish, etc), monsters (mythological critters such as unicorns, dragons, wyverns, griffins, sea-beasts, etc) and humanoids (people, sea-folk, angels, etc). These creatures are placed on the shield in specific, stylized positions.



Items and artifacts are the fourth main type of charges utilized in heraldry. This category includes, but is not limited to, objects such as weapons, armour, tools, musical instruments, clothing, towers, suns, crosses, flowers, ships, etc.



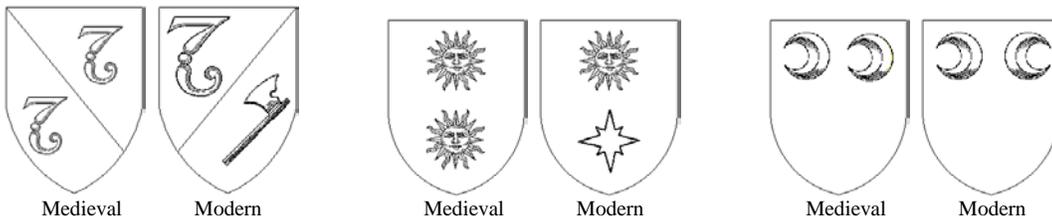
NOTE: A lot of modern heraldry books and websites try to associate meanings with colors or objects in heraldry. For the most part this did not occur in period but was created during the revival of the chivalric age during the Victorian Era. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance the tinctures and charges selected were done so for significance to the bearer, not because a particular element had a particular meaning. Each person gave their own meaning to the elements they used.

Style and Symmetry

The style of drawing for period heraldry was static and two-dimensional. Charges were drawn to fill as much space as possible



In period the viewpoint of symmetry differs from the modern perspective. Charges most commonly were all the same type and size and usually they all faced in the same direction.



Many times a central charge was surrounded by smaller, secondary charges. Additionally ordinaries were often charged and/or surrounded by other charges.



Another feature noted in period was the use of strewn charges (semy).



Restrictions.

So that everyone may have a heraldic design unique to themselves, devices cannot be too similar to one another. Therefore, if your heraldic design is too like a design already registered you'll need to make alterations to the design.

Additionally, certain charges are reserved, restricted or forbidden from use.

Amongst the items that are forbidden are: swastika & fylfot <Nazi Party>, flaming cross (cross of fire or cross on a flame) <KKK>.

Amongst the objects restricted from general use are: a cross couped gules on argent <Red Cross Symbol>, Papal Cross <Pope> and the Hand of Glory (hand on a flame or a hand producing flames).

Amongst the things that are reserved for special use are: crowns, coronets, charged escutcheons, charged cantons, laurel wreaths, white belts & baldrics, pelican in its piety, chapeau, chaplet of roses, two straight trumpets in saltire, orle/annulet of chain, wreath of roses. Note: While chaplets and wreaths of roses are restricted, the use of single roses or multiple roses not clustered together is fine.

General Armory Guidelines

The basic rule of heraldic design is: When designing a device you may not place a color on a color or a metal on a metal.

The "no color on color, no metal on metal" rule may be disregarded if a charge lays equally over two tinctures (one being a color and the other a metal) **AND** there is good contrast between all of the tinctures.

When using a fur, there must be good contrast between all components. The basic rule is: Do not put a fur whose major background tincture is a metal (such as ermine and erminois) on a metal and do not put a fur whose major background tincture is a color (such as counter-ermine and pean) on a color. If a fur is equally divided of a color and a metal (such as blue and white vair) make sure there is good visible difference with anything it lays on or lays upon it.

Devices are **more likely to pass** if they have a charge that is used less frequently. Some of the charges that statistically have been used less often in SCA registrations include: Abacus, Alembic, Alphyn, Anchor, Angel, Angles (fastener), Antelope (heraldic), Ape, Apothecary Jar, Arachnid (spider), Arch, Astrolabe, Bagpipes, Balance, Barnacles (horse clamp), Barrel, Basket, Bat, Battering Ram, Beehive, Bellows, Billet (solid rectangle), Bones, Book (usually open), Bottle, Brooch, Broom, Brush, Bucket, Bull, Caliper, Card Pique, Cartouche, Catapult, Cauldron (kettle), Centaur, Chair, Clarion, Clouds, Cock (rooster), Coffin, Collar (horse-collar), Comb, Comet, Cornucopia, Crampon (wolf hook), Crutch, Cushion (pillow), Delf (solid square), Dice, Door, Drinking Horn, Drum, Elephant, Enfield, Equatorium, Escarbuncle, Estoile, Ewer, Fan, Fasces, Fer-a-Loup (wolftrap), Fetterlock, Fireplace, Fish, Fleece, Fork, Fruit, Fungus (mushroom), Furison, Garb (wheat stack), Gore, Grenade, Grozing Iron, Gurgles, Hautbois, Hedgehog, Hide, Horseshoe, Hourglass, Ink Bottle, Inkhorn, Insect, Key, Keystone, Knot, Krummhorn, Ladder, Lamp, Lantern, Level (plumb line), Lock, Lozenge, Lute, Manacle, Mascle, Maunch, Mill, Millrind, Mirror, Mortar & Pestle, Mouse, Needle, Nesselblatt, Net, Oar, Pavilion, Peacock, Pen, Pen Box, Pick, Pipe, Pitcher, Pitchfork, Printer's Ball, Psaltery, Quadrant, Quill of Yarn, Quiver, Retort, Rustre, Saddle, Satyr, Saw, Scissors, Screw Press, Scroll, Scythe, Seebblatt, Shave (currier's knife), Shovel, Shuttle, Sickle, Slea (weaver's tool), Snaffle-bit, Spindle, Spoon, Staple, Sunburst, Table, Trident, Triquetra, Trivet, Turtle, Tyger (heraldic), Wagon, Water Bouget, Windmill, Yak, Yale and Zephyr.

Devices that are **more difficult to pass** are ones that utilize a heraldic charge that is used frequently.

Some of these are: Bear, Bird-Eagle, Bird-Falcon, Bird-Hawk, Bird-Raven, Crescent, Dagger, Deer, Dragon, Escallop, Griffin, Hammer, Heart, Lion, Merfolk, Mullet (star), Rose, Ship, Sword, Tree (especially Proper), Unicorn and Wolf.

This is NOT to say that frequently used charges can't be used. Merely that, you may have to "be adaptable" and be willing to work with the heraldic design to get to use the charge you want. Many simple designs with the frequently used charges have already been registered.

HELPFUL HINTS

1. Remember that the style of heraldry striven for is bold, bright and distinctive as to be clearly identifiable. (i.e. red lions, purple unicorns, green swords, etc). **NEVER USE PALE, PASTEL, OR NEON COLORS.**
2. Try to use only 2 or 3 tinctures at most.
3. Try to use only 2 different types of charges/objects if possible.
4. Draw complex lines of division big and bold
5. Try to give a balance to the design.
6. Don't try to make a scene/pretty picture or tell your persona story on your device. This is not the style of medieval heraldry.
7. Try not to place tinctures that blend together right next to each other (i.e. blue by black, green by blue, gold by white).
8. Try not to use Proper as a tincture, where Proper means coloring a charge in its natural color (i.e. a tree Proper has green leaves and a brown trunk). The tincture brown was rarely used in period heraldry.
9. Concerning tinctures, know that purple and vert were rare in period. Roughly 2% of arms had vert as their main colour, and less than 1% had purple. Examples of both in the same device in period are unknown. Also note that colors such as bleu-celeste (sky-blue), brunatre (brown), cendree (cinder-grey), murrey (mulberry/purplish red), rose (pink), sanguine (dark blood-red), and tenné (tawny orange) are post-period additions (after 1600).
10. Note that many folks want to show they are part of a couple with their heraldry and thus try to use identical colors and/or charges in their heraldry. Actually, in period practice, the use of identical colors and/or charges by a man and a woman identified them as brother and sister, not husband and wife. What was done in period to denote a couple was married was for them to display their heraldry together, side by side (with each having their own distinct design).

Historical Aspects of Armory

The origins of heraldic arms began in the late 12th century. Although the use of heraldry spread quickly, especially through Western Europe, there were many places where arms were not used at all. Therefore, while the use of heraldry grew, historically speaking, heraldic design grew in fits and starts. In areas where arms were inherited from one generation to the next, only a small number of new devices were designed in each generation. And new armigers wanted to associate themselves with the older noble families, to legitimize their claims to nobility, so they copied the same (old) design styles into their own devices. This restricted the growth of new designs during most of the Middle Ages. There were a few cases of rapid change in armorial style. Perhaps the most classic example of this was in England after the War of the Roses. The Tudor kings adopted arms which were distinctly different from those used by their predecessors, so everyone would know that a new dynasty had taken charge. But these cases of sudden growth were few.

Is Heraldry for Everyone?

In the SCA, everyone is allowed to register a heraldic device for themselves. However, if a person has a persona from a time period before the late 12th century, or from a place that didn't use heraldry, then they have a decision to make. They can be faithful to their persona and not use arms, or they can follow Society custom and use arms (even though historically they wouldn't have them). Only they can make the choice; there is no right or wrong choice.

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