

## Introduction to SCA Heraldry By Lord Beoan Freborn.

Heraldry, in period, was a method of identification that allowed the illiterate peasants that made up a large proportion of medieval armies to identify who they were fighting for. In the middle ages it developed into a structured art form with a series of rules or criteria that had to be adhered to.

To create an S.C.A. device is relatively easy once you understand the basic rules of period heraldry. The **device** (often mistakenly called a 'coat of arms') once submitted to Crux (a heraldic registry); can be placed on anything you own including feasting equipment, armour, heraldic garb as well as banners. This can add to the general "medievalness" of a feast or gathering. Each device is registered to one individual, group or household so no two are alike.

Consulting a herald is often the best (and quickest) way to find you a device as they have the resources to help. Also it is their job.

The descriptive language of heraldry is basically old French. In the S.C.A. it is referred to as **blazon**. Given a blazon, a herald should be able to recreate what a device looks like.

The rule of **top to bottom, left to right** applies to blazoning a device. The shield is broken up into 13 pieces. The main pieces are:

- Chief (top)
- Base (bottom)
- Dexter side (left)<sup>1</sup>
- Sinister side (right)<sup>2</sup>
- Honour point (upper centre)

### The rules

There are five **colours**:

- Red (Gules)
- Green (Vert)
- Blue (Azure)
- Purple (Purpure)
- Black (Sable)

There are also two **metals**:

- Gold /yellow (Or)
- Silver/white (Argent)

There are also several patterns of colours and metals called **furs**, and **treatments** but to keep it simple we won't be dealing with them today (unless you *really* want to know).

The most basic of heraldry rules, (called the **rule of tincture**) states that you may not place a colour on a colour or a metal on a metal. E.g. red (a colour) may be placed on white or yellow (both metals), but not on blue, green, purple, or black and vice versa. This was done to help devices to be identified over a long distance. Once this is understood, it makes designing a device much easier.

---

<sup>1</sup> as seen from the shield *wearers* side

<sup>2</sup> as seen from the shield *wearers* side

The background colour of your shield is called **the field** and that is a good place to start. It may be either a metal or a colour or fur.

The field can be broken up in several ways

- Per fess- horizontally across the middle
- Per pale- vertically down the centre
- Per bend- diagonally from left to right
- Per bend sinister- diagonally from right to left
- Per chevron- an inverted “V” coming from the base
- Per cross<sup>3</sup> or quarterly<sup>4</sup>- divided horizontally and vertically
- Per saltire- divided diagonally left and right And
- Gyronny- divided horizontally, vertically and diagonally left and right.

The lines used to make these shapes or **field divisions** may be straight or one of several types. These include

- Indented
- Embattled
- Dovetailed or
- Nebuly

There are also many others to choose from.

If you do not want a field division, you may choose to use one of the **honourable ordinaries or sub ordinaries**. These include

- Chief- a band across the top
- Fess- a band horizontally across the middle
- Pale – a band vertically from top to bottom
- Bend- a band diagonally left to right
- Chevron- an inverted “V” shaped band from the base.
- Saltire- a diagonal cross

There are more, but again I will keep it simple. The lines used to make these shapes may be straight or of one of the aforementioned types.

All that is left is to select a **charge** to place on your shield. A charge, quite simply is an object, animal or shape. Orientation of charges must also be taken into account. (Three swords in fess, palewise V’s three swords palewise in fess).

The uses of certain charges are restricted in the S.C.A. this may be because they are reserved for a particular rank, job or award or because they are deemed offensive. Other charges are so frequently used that there are just too many shields that look the same. These include

- Lions
- Roses
- Unicorns
- Swords and
- Dragons.

Please check with a herald before displaying any unregistered device.

---

<sup>3</sup> may be restricted

<sup>4</sup> may be restricted

Charges may be placed on a field, field division or ordinary. There may be one or multiples of any one charge. So as you can see, the variations are almost limitless but with a little practice, designing a device that is both pleasing to the eye and clearly identifiable will be a walk in the park.

Happy heralding.

**Tips for designing an SCA device.**

- Consult a herald (this is not a maybe!).
- Crayola “classic” textas are pretty close to heraldic colours.
- Select some colours you like (metals too).
- Think about- what charge(s) you might like
- Avoid ‘common’ charges
- Think about- how hard will it be to sew?
- Be flexible with your ideas
- Keep it simple.

**Drawing space**

