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A
GUIDE TO
BLAZONRY

Kevin Greaves

Illustrated by
Steve Cowan
and
Gordon Macpherson

The Royal Heraldry Society of Canada

A

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PREFACE

Blazon is the language of heraldry. Its intent is to provide a description in words of a coat of arms so that an experienced heraldic artist can produce an accurate picture of the arms. Although it may be archaic in form, it can describe an achievement much more precisely than can ordinary language. The objective of the heraldic blazon is to be clear and concise. While there may be more than one set of words available to create a proper blazon, an heraldic artist should be able to draw the achievement from the words of the blazon and the guidance of the artist should be the primary intent in all cases. While a concise, neatly worded blazon can be a source of satisfaction, clever wording should never replace clarity of meaning.

This handbook is intended to provide the heraldic enthusiast with a single correct way to blazon a given achievement, not two or three alternatives, no matter how correct. It is not intended as a guide to heraldic design. Also, it is assumed that the student has done the necessary homework on shields, ordinaries, charges, etc, and that what is required here is a guide to describing them in proper form and sequence.

Kevin Greaves
November, 2014

A GUIDE TO BLAZONRY

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CHAPTER 1

THE SHIELD

SEQUENCE OF BLAZONING

Since the shield is the most important and, in most cases, the most complex part of an achievement of arms, we will start off by describing the sequence in which its various components are normally described in a blazon.

1   The Field

The surface of the shield is called the **field** and its colour, metal, or fur is the principal tincture of the arms. In a blazon, the field is mentioned first.

> Colours and metals are customarily capitalized in blazon. The names of furs and the word "proper" are not capitalized.

a. **The Simple Field:**   We will start with a "simple" field – that is, where the background of the shield is of a single metal or colour. The blazon then starts with just the name of that tincture. In the case of Figure 1 this would be **Argent** ….; In Figure 2 – **Azure**…; and in Figure 3 – **Errmine.**
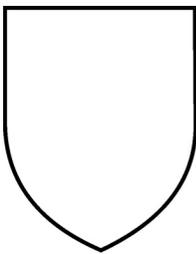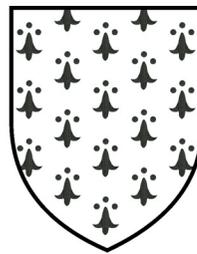
Figure 1   Figure 2   Figure 3

b. **The Complex Field:**   This is a term that may be used for a field that is other than simple, such as parted, banded, patterned or semy of small charges. Such a field is also named first, like a simple one. However, to avoid presenting the beginner with confusing detail before he has grasped the basic sequence of blazon, this subsection is placed in Chapter 2.

2   The Ordinary (Where there is one)

If there is an Ordinary on the field, it is considered the main charge and is mentioned directly after the field, with a couple of exceptions, the chief and the bordure (see below). For example, **Argent a bend Sable** (Figure 4), **Argent a fess Gules** (Figure 5) or **Vert a pale Or** (Figure 6).
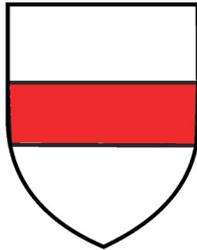
Figure 4   Figure 5   Figure 6

The exceptions to this rule about the blazoning of Ordinaries are the **Chief** and the **Bordure**, for which the rules of blazon are discussed in paragraphs 5 and 6, below.

3   Charges On The Main Field

a.   **Where there is no Ordinary**; Where there is no ordinary, the charge or charges on the field should be mentioned directly after the field itself. If there is a central or main charge, it comes first, followed by any others. If there are a number of roughly equal-sized charges, they are described in sequence from top down and from dexter to sinister, giving location and orientation where it is not obvious (note that top/down has precedence over dexter/sinister). Examples are (Figure 7) **Argent a mullet Sable between in chief three fleurs de lis Azure and in base a rose Gules;** (Figure 8) **Azure three fetterlocks in pale Or between two swords points upwards, Argent, hilted Or;** and (Figure 9) **Gules three swords, one fesswise point to dexter surmounted by the other two points upwards in saltire Or (Figure 4).**
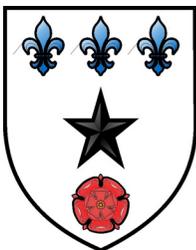
Figure 7   Figure 8   Figure 9

b. **Where there are charges on the main field and an uncharged Ordinary**: Where there is an uncharged ordinary, any charges on the main field are mentioned directly after the ordinary, giving their position and tincture, and usually with a term like "**between**" indicating their relationship to the ordinary. For example: **Argent a bend Gules between two crescents of the same** (figure 10), or **Argent a fess Sable between in chief two martlets Gules and in base a balance Azure** (Figure 11).

Figure 10   Figure 11

4. **Charges on the Ordinary**

a. **Where there are charges on the Ordinary but none on the main field:** Such charges are blazoned as **ON** the ordinary, to ensure that there is no confusion as to their secondary location. For example, **Argent ON a bend Sable three fleurs de lis Or** (figure 12); **Argent ON a fess Azure a stag trippant Or** (figure 13); or **Vert ON a pale Or a cross patriarchal Gules** (figure 14). The word "ON" seems pretty logical in this situation, but it is important to remember it for a shield where there are charges on both field and Ordinary.

Figure 12   Figure 13   Figure 14

b. **Charges on both the ordinary and the main field:**   This is a situation that often causes confusion, since the traditional sequence is to blazon the Ordinary before the charges on the field, and those before the charges on the Ordinary. How do we keep these things clearly separated and in their right places? This is where the word "**ON**" comes in handy. Let us take Figure 12, above, and place a crescent on each side. This would then give us Figure 15, below,

which would be blazoned: **Argent ON a bend Sable, BETWEEN two crescents Azure, three fleurs-de-lis Or.**

Note how, in this situation, the words **"on"** gives advance notice that there will be charges on the Ordinary, while **"between"** indicates the locations of those on the main field. A couple of other examples would be – fig 16: **Argent ON a fess Vert BETWEEN two escallops Azure a salmon naiant Or;** and fig 17: **Azure ON a chevron Or BETWEEN three mullets also Or a cog-wheel Sable.**
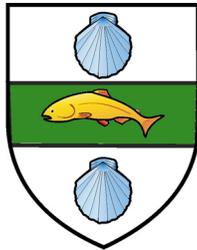
| Figure 15 | Figure 16 | Figure 17 |

c. **Exceptions to the "on/between" convention:** As in most things as ancient as heraldry, there are common-sense exceptions to the common rules. Such a situation occurs when we have a charged Ordinary, but only a single charge on the main field, denying us the use of "between". In this situation, we use the words **"charged with"** to indicate what is on the Ordinary, as in the following examples – Figure 18: **Or a chevron Azure, in base a lymphad Gules, the chevron charged with a cog-wheel Or** – Figure 19: **Gules a saltire Or, in chief a portcullis also Or, the saltire charged with a thistle proper.** Another exception occurs when the charges beside the Ordinary are of the same colour as the latter, as in Figure 20: In this case we would say: **Argent a chevron between three mullets Gules**.
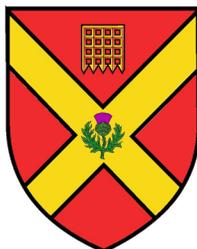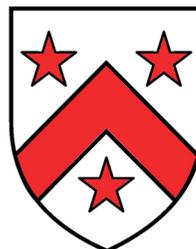
| Figure 18 | Figure 19 | Figure 20 |

5.   The Chief

As noted above, the chief and the bordure are exceptions to the rule about the primacy of an ordinary. This is because, in the past, chiefs and bordures were often used as differences, added to the original arms. Where there is a chief, it is blazoned after the features on the main field, followed by the charges upon it. As an example. Figure 21 (the author's arms) would be blazoned: **Or a fetterlock Azure on a chief wavy Azure three snowflakes argent**. The tincture of the chief usually follows the colour-on-metal rule as regards its relation with the tincture of the main field, but this is not a hard-and-fast rule.
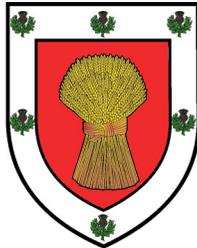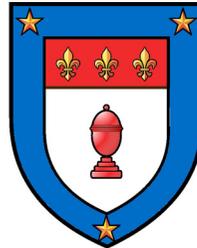
| Figure 21 | Figure 22 | Figure 23 |

6.   The Bordure

A bordure typically encloses all elements of the shield (including a chief, if present) and is normally mentioned last, followed by its charges. The positions of the latter should be described where they are not obvious. For example, Figure 22 above**: Gules a garb Or, *on* a bordure Argent six thistles Vert, three, two and one**. A further example, showing a charged bordure enclosing a charged chief is shown at Figure 23 above, which would be blazoned: **Argent a covered cup Gules, on a chief also Gules three fleurs-de-lis Or, all within a bordure Azure charged with three mullets Or**.

7. Cadency Marks (if any)

Since these are normally added as an amendment to the original design, they are mentioned at the end of the blazon, even after a bordure.

To recapitulate, the usual sequence of blazon is:

1	Field
2	Ordinary (if there is one)
3	Charges On the Field
4	Charges On the Ordinary
5	Chief and its Charges
6	Bordure and its Charges
7	Cadency Marks

In blazonry, some latitude is permitted in the above sequence, where to follow it to the letter would result in confusion or excess verbiage. As in all things, common sense and clarity should apply.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMPLEX FIELD

Before we go on to describe in detail the blazoning of charges on a shield, we will return briefly to the field itself, the first element to be described. So far, we have dealt only with the simple field of a single tincture or fur. However, the field itself may be somewhat more complicated. In this section, we will deal with the blazoning of these fields.

1   The Simple Parted Field

The Parted Field: If the field is parted, this is mentioned at the beginning, starting with the word "Per" followed by the name of the ordinary that goes the same way as the parting line, followed by the tinctures of the parts: So, a horizontal partition is called "per fess" (Figure 24) and a vertical one "per pale" (Figure 25) etc. Partition lines can follow the directions of the other ordinaries such as the bend, bend sinister, salltire or cross. Per cross is called "quarterly".

For examples. See Figures 24 to 26 below: **Per fess Argent and Azure; Per pale wavy Gules and Or**; and **Per Pall (or Pairle) Or, Gules and Azure**. The partition line will obviously divide two or more tinctures. Since neither of these is *on* the other, they do not have to obey the colour-on-metal rule and may be two colours or two metals. Occasionally, a field may be divided into three parts by lines paralleling an ordinary, although this is uncommon in British heraldry. An example is shown below. It is referred to as "tiercing" and the field is said to be tierced in pall (fig 26), in fess (like the Arms of Canada), in pale, etc.
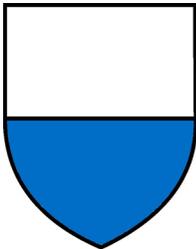

| Figure 24 | Figure 25 | Figure 26 |

(a) Plain Line – If the partition line is plain, its form is not mentioned (Figures 24 and 26).

(b) Formed Line – If the line is other than plain, its form is mentioned next. For example, **Per pale wavy** (Figure 25).

2   The multi-parted or "Banded" Field

The term "banded" is not an heraldic term, but it can serve to describe a form of division of the field that often causes confusion. This is the field that has a number of fairly equal-width stripes or bands of alternating tinctures upon it, such as those illustrated in Figures 27 to 29 below. The reason for the confusion is that this appearance can be produced by two entirely separate heraldic processes.

The first is the one we are currently discussing – the division of the field by lines of partition into "bands" of differing tinctures, which by convention are equal in number – and therefore present an equal number of "bands". In these cases, the name of the partition-line is adapted to fit the direction and we use terms like "barry", "paly" and "bendy", always stating the number and the tinctures involved. Examples would be Figure 27: **Barry of six Argent and Sable**; Figure 28**: Paly of six, Or and Gules**. Note that if the partition-line is other that straight, this is included in the blazon of the line; e.g., Figure 29**: Paly-wavy of six Or and Azure**.
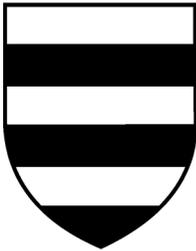
Figure 27   Figure 28   Figure 29

However, there is another means by which a very similar appearance can be obtained; and this is where the confusion arises. This is the situation where you start off with a plain shield of a single tincture and charge it with two or more of the larger band-like sub-ordinaries – things like bars, pallets and bendlets. This will produce shields that look like this (Page 8:

Figure 30: **Argent three bars Sable**

Figure 31: **Or three pallets Gules**

Figure 32: **Or two pallets wavy Azure**
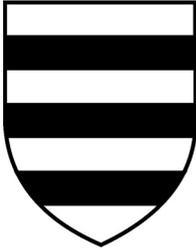
| Figure 30 | Figure 31 | Figure 32 |

Note that the appearances are quite similar, but that the heraldic means of getting there are very different. There is, however, an easy solution. In the case of the true parted field, the number of tinctures (and therefore "bands") must always be **even** while, where sub-ordinaries are charged on a plain field, that field must show on either side of the shield, resulting in what shows as an **odd** number of "bands". A look at the above Figures will demonstrate the point. Figure 30: **Argent three bars Sable** (7 "bands"); Figure 31: **Argent three pallets Gules** (7 "bands"). Note that the shape of the sub-ordinaries (wavy, indented, invected, etc.) must also be stated; see Figure 32: **Argent two pallets wavy Azure** (5 "bands"). The rule then, is: Even = parted field; Odd = sub-ordinaries.

3   The Patterned Field

If the field is patterned (e.g., "chequy" (or "checky"), "lozengy" or "fretty" etc.), start with the name of the pattern then give the tinctures, e.g**. Chequy Argent and Gules**" (Figure 33, next page).

> The first tincture of a chequy field is considered to start in the topmost dexter corner, so a red and white chequered field with the topmost dexter square being white is called **chequy Argent and Gules** (Figure 33, below). This applies to other patterned fields.

4   The Semy Field

A field is called "semy" if it is covered evenly with a number of small charges. It is said to be "semy *of"* such charges, and there are special names for particular examples. Often the sides or bottom of the shield will obscure portions of some of the charges.

> Special Names – e.g. Semy of fleurs de lis = **semy-de-lis**; semy of drops = **goutty**. The latter may be further distinguished by the colour of the drops: e.g. semy of azure drops is blazoned as **Goutty de larmes** (tears); of crosses crosslet as **crusilly**. When small charges are placed around the field as they would be in a bordure, they are said to be in **orle**.

5   The Gyronny Field

The gyronny field is normally divided quarterly, and then per saltire, making eight divisions. It may also be gyronny of six, ten or twelve, but this is unusual. A typical blazon would be: **"... Gyronny of eight, Or and Sable …"** (Figure 35). The first tincture mentioned is the one in the upper dexter.

Figure 33: **Checky Argent and Gules**;

Figure 34: **Or goutty de larmes;**

Figure 35: **Gyronny of eight, Or and Sable.**
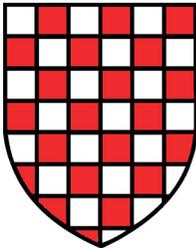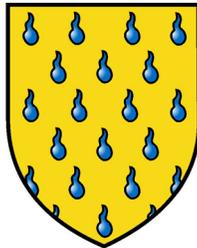
Figure 33   Figure 34   Figure 35

CHAPTER 3

BLAZONING CHARGES ON THE FIELD

Now we come to the most complex area of blazonry – the description of the charges on the field. This generally follows a conventional sequence although, as we shall see, it is not always a rigid one. The general sequence is as follows:

1 Location

We begin by stating the tincture and location of that part of the field on which the charge is placed. Things like: "**In base**" (Figure 36); **In dexter chief**; (Figure 37). Also stated should be the source of the charge, if it issues from part of the shield or an Ordinary; e.g. **Issuant from the sinister flank**, (Figure 38).
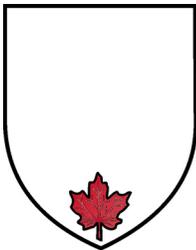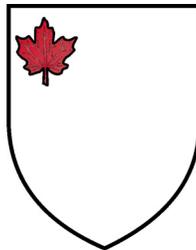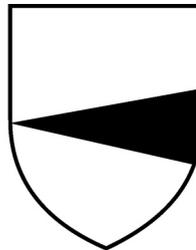
Figure 36   Figure 37   Figure 38

2 The Charge, its Primary Attitude and Tincture

A good example, applying to an animal, is shown at Figure 39 (page 11): **Argent a stag trippant Gules…**

Note that this first part of the description goes only so far as the attitude and main colour of the charge. Note that if the body of the charge is facing to the dexter – as in this case – its position is not stated. A useful list of attitudes can be found in Friar's *New Dictionary of Heraldry*, pages 31- 32.

## 3 Other Tinctures

Now we add those parts of the charge that have tinctures different from the main one – Figure 40: **"… attired Or …".**

4 Attributes

Finally, add the other attributes of the charge that have tinctures different from the main one. The term "attributes' refers to an enormous number

of variables, defined by Friar as "the properties and appendages associated with an armorial charge". These need to be learned from any good heraldic text (Friar, pages 34 – 36, provides a useful list). A few will be mentioned here to illustrate how they are used in blazon: "… **gorged with a wreath Vert**" (Figure 41, below) indicates the addition of a feature of a different tincture to the charge. **"A hand couped"** or **"a lion's head erased"** for human or animal parts, and **"a tree eradicated"** for trees, are used to indicate the means of severance of the charge from its body or origin. In animals, these terms usually come directly after the attitude and before other attributes. "Attributes" may also refer to parts of animals, etc, that are of a distinct tincture, as in **"beaked and membered"** for birds, **"armed and langued"** for lions; or to the parts of charges like swords; e.g. **"hilt and pommel Or"**.

| Figure 39 | Figure 40 | Figure 41 |

5   Orientation

The orientation of individual charges and of rows of similar charges may also have to be noted, especially for lengthy objects. For *individual* long charges like swords and spears, the suffix "-wise" is appended to the name of an ordinary to indicate the charge's orientation (e.g. **fesswise** = horizontal, **palewise** = vertical; **bendwise** or **bendwise sinister** = diagonal). For *rows* of charges, the word "in" is placed before the appropriate ordinary to show the orientation *of the entire row*.   So, "in fess" means in a horizontal row, "in pale" a vertical row, and so on. The "in" and "-wise" terms are frequently confused. Examples of orientation are shown below:

- **Three swords fesswise** (each sword horizontal**) in pale** (in a vertical row) **Sable** (Figure 42);

- **Three swords palewise** (each sword vertical) **in fess** (in a horizontal row) **Sable** (Figure 43);

- That useful word "in' may also be useful to indicate the orientation of charges not strictly in line, but following the shapes of other Ordinaries, such as **in saltire, in pall**, etc (Figure 44).

Figure 42: **Three swords fesswise in pale;**

Figure 43: **Three swords palewise in fess;**

Figure 44: **Four daggers in saltire points inwards.**

| Figure 42 | Figure 43 | Figure 44 |

6   Number

To avoid unnecessary repetition of a number, the words "as many" may be used when the same number is required on a second occasion. (e.g. **"… between three crescents in chief and as many mullets in base")**

7   Rows

When several similar objects are arranged in rows, the number in each row is stated (e.g. **"six crosses crosslet, 3, 2 and 1"**, to indicate three in the top row, two in the second and one in the third).

8   Tertiary Charges

Minor charges located upon larger ones are usually indicated with the words "charged with" following the larger object and preceding the minor one (e.g. **"a lion passant Or charged on the shoulder with a maple leaf Gules".**

9   Overlying Objects

Charges overlying others frequently present a challenge in blazonry. The following is an attempt to provide the beginner with the correct terms for specific depictions, intelligible to both blazoner and artist.

a. Charged with - When a smaller object is depicted upon and within the outline of a larger one, say that the larger is "charged with" the smaller; e.g. **"a maple leaf charged with a sword"** (Figure 45);

b. Surmounted - A charge partly covered or overlaid by another (which usually overlaps its borders to some degree) is said to be

"surmounted" by it; e.g. **a maple leaf surmounted by a sword** (Figure 46). This does <u>not</u> mean "above" or "over" in the vertical plane, for which it is sometimes confused. To blazon the latter situation, say **ensigned with** (see paragraph e, below);

c. <u>Over All</u> - Where a charge overlies a number of others or a major part of the field, use the expression "over all", the term being used before the charge; e.g. **Argent three maple leaves in pale Gules, and over all a sword bendwise point upwards Or** (Figure 47).

d. <u>Debruised</u> - When a charge is overlaid by an ordinary or diminutive, say that it is "debruised" by it rather than surmounted; e.g. "…a **maple leaf Gules debruised by a bendlet Or** (Figure 48).

e. <u>Ensigned</u> - A charge with an object placed immediately above it (in the vertical sense) is said to be ensigned with it: e.g. **a maple leaf ensigned with a naval crown** (Figure 49).

| Figure 45 | Figure 46 | Figure 47 |

10   Issuant

When an animal or other charge is represented as rising up from an ordinary, part of the shield or another charge, it is said to be "issuant" from it: e.g – "**Argent a fess Gules issuant therefrom a demi-lion of the same"** (Figure 50).
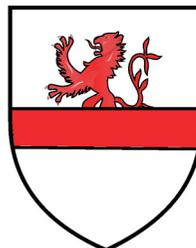
| Figure 48 | Figure 49 | Figure 50 |

11   Tincture

The tincture is generally named after the last charge to which it refers and refers back to all charges mentioned since the preceding tincture. For example: **Gules a bend between in chief a rose and in base a crescent Or.** In this case, you would be indicating that the bend, rose and crescent are all Or, since they are mentioned after the preceding tincture, Gules. Bear in mind, however, that this economy of language should be avoided if the result is to cause confusion.

12   Entire

A charge that normally occupies part of a field is said to be **entire** when it extends to the edges of the field (applies mostly to certain crosses).

13   The Canton

Since the canton is theoretically supposed to be a later addition to the shield, it is always superimposed over every other charge or ordinary, with the exception of a bordure denoting cadency. It is therefore blazoned after every such charge, except for the aforementioned bordure. A canton in the sinister chief is called a "sinister canton".

CHAPTER 4

COUNTERCHANGING

COUNTERCHANGING is one of the most popular techniques in heraldry. It is defined by Friar as a system "whereby a shield may be divided by any of the lines of partition, and the metals and colours, both of the field and of any charges placed thereon, reversed on either side of the line."

This may be done in a number of ways, such as: an ordinary laid upon a partitioned field (Figure 51): **Gyronny Sable and Argent an annulet counterchanged**; by a charge similarly placed (Figure 52): **Per fess Argent and Sable a lion rampant counterchanged**: or any combination of the above (Figure. 53): **Per pale Or and Vert, a chevron between three towers all counterchanged.**

Figure 51: **Gyronny Sable and Argent an annulet counterchanged**;

Figure 52: **Per fess Argent and Sable a lion rampant counterchanged;**

Figure 53: **Per pale Or and Vert a chevron between three towers all counterchanged.**
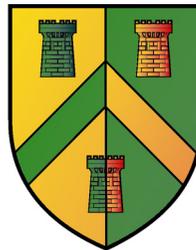
| Figure 51 | Figure 52 | Figure 53 |

These techniques, in general, do not pose a major challenge to the blazoner. However, difficulties may arise where counterchanging adds to the confusion that sometimes tends to occur when an Ordinary is placed directly over its "own" partition-line – the one whose lines parallel that Ordinary. Let us take for example a field party per saltire. (Figure 54, next page): **Per saltire Gules and Or**. We then charge the field with an actual saltire (Figure 55): **Per saltire Gules and Or a saltire …**

Figure 54: **Per saltire Gules and Or;**

Figure 55: **Per saltire Gules and Or a saltire** (tincture unspecified);

Figure 56: **Per saltire Gules and Or a saltire counterchanged.**

Figure 54   Figure 55   Figure 56

Note that in Figure 55 our saltire has no colour and possesses a most unheraldic dotted line down its middle, indicating where the original partition-line originally lay – and which it now conceals. Now we counterchange the saltire, resulting in the final result of Figure 56, in which the lines of counterchange follow the original lines of partition. How then, do we blazon this seemingly complicated process? This is a case where simplicity trumps complexity and we can simply say: **Per saltire Gules and Or a saltire counterchanged.**   The trick here, in blazoning the final product, is to recognize behind the saltire the original line of partition. This permits a basically simple blazon for what might have been a more complex one.

CHAPTER 5

MULTI-FAMILY SHIELDS

1   Dimidiation

By the late thirteenth century, as more and more families acquired arms, it often occurred that a man from an armigerous family would marry a woman from a similar family, creating a need, in the wife's case at least, to display both sets of arms on a single shield. The original method of doing this was known as "dimidiation", where the shields of husband and wife were each cut vertically in half, the dexter half of the husband's arms were joined to the sinister half of the wife's. The method produced some pretty weird results, such as in Figure 57: where the lions appear to have acquired fishes' tails! However, real confusion occurs in the case of Figure 58, where in the sinister half of the shield the **two barbels haurient addorsed Or** are reduced to a single fish. In this case, dimidiation has in fact changed the blazon of the arms

Figure 57: **Gules three lions passant guardant in pale Or dimidiated with Azure three herrings naiant in pale proper**;

Figure 58: **Barry of ten Argent and Azure an orle of martlets Gules dimidiated with Gules semy of trefoils, two barbels haurient addorsed Or.**
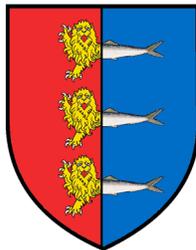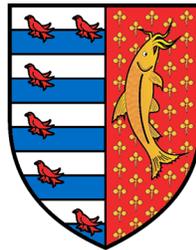
Figure 57   Figure 58

2   Impalement

This method of displaying two sets of arms on a single shield largely replaced dimidiation in the 14th century. It consists simply of the side-by-side placement of two **whole** coats on one shield. From the artist's point of view, it may present problems of distortion caused by squeezing charges into a narrow space, but there are no real blazonry challenges.

It is necessary always to mention the dexter shield first and to say "impaled with …". It also helps to remember that a couple of hold-overs from the days of dimidiation still exist for Ordinaries like the bordure, orle and tressure, which do not surround the shield but end at the line of partition. In Canada, since women have been granted their own arms, the need for impaled shields in the matrimonial sense has virtually disappeared. It has been largely replaced by the use of impalement to indicate the relationship between an individual and an institution of which he/she is the head – such as a business, association, parish or guild. In such a case, the arms of the institution are shown on the dexter side, those of the individual on the sinister. See examples below.

Figure 59: **Canadian Heraldic Authority impaled with Robert Watt as Chief Herald.**

Figure 60: **Royal Heraldry Society of Canada impaled with Kevin Greaves as President.**

Figure 61: **Church of Saint John, Cambridge, impaled with the Rev. Canon David Bowyer as Rector.**
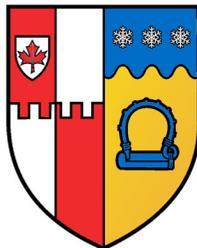
| Figure 59 | Figure 60 | Figure 61 |

3 Quartered Shields

The quartering of shields was a technique that developed at about the same time as impalement, where there was a need to record the subsequent descendants of the impaled unions. As its name implies, it consisted initially of parting the field per cross (i.e. into quarters) and then placing full achievements onto each quarter – where, incidentally, they fit much better than into the half-shields of the impalement. The most important coat is always displayed in the first quarter (the dexter chief) and, if there is an uneven number of arms, in the last quarter (the sinister base).

If the term quarterly, unqualified, is used, it may be assumed that the shield is of four quarters only. However, it is possible for a coat of arms to be "quarterly" of a great many arms, although the shield is always

divided into equal sections, any "extra" spaces being filled with repeats of the more important quarterings. A quartering itself may be quartered to show two or more coats, in which case it is called a grand-quarter (Friar). This is more frequently used in Scottish arms.
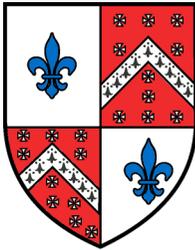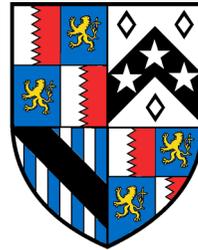

| Figure 62 | Figure 63 | Figure 64 |

Fig. 62: Quarterly, 1 and 4, Argent a fleur-de-lis Azure: 2 and 3, Gules a chevron ermine between ten crosses patée Argent. This is just a straightforward quarterly shield, with no blazonry problems.

Fig. 63: Quarterly, 1 and 4, Gyronny Or and Sable: 2 and 3, Argent a lymphad sails furled, oars in action Sable, pennant and flags flying Gules. This is again a straightforward quartering, but it also illustrates the way in which a lymphad is blazoned.

Fig. 64: Quarterly per grand quarters; I and IV, quarterly: 1 and 4, per pale indented Argent and Gules: 2 and 3 Azure a lion rampant Or: II, Argent on a chevron Sable between three mascles Sable voided Argent, as many mullets also Argent. III, Paly of eight Argent and Azure, a bend Sable. This gives an idea of the more complex blazon of a "grand quarters" shield. It is useful to use Roman numerals for the numbering of the grand quarters and regular numbers to the quarters themselves. The diagrams below (from Brooke-Little) show the sequence in which quarterings should be blazoned.

Quarterly shield
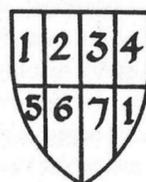
Method of arranging seven quarterings

Since Canada has neither peers, knights, nor "great families" to connect, these methods of shield division are rarely seen in this country. They remain prevalent in British arms and in those families to whom the arms have descended.

CHAPTER 6

THE CREST AND ITS ASSOCIATED FEATURES

1   Helmet

In Canadian blazonry, mention of the helmet is typically omitted, since its style and historical period are left to the artist. There is a convention, however, that the direction of the helmet (i.e. whether it faces to dexter or to the front) is designed to agree with the corresponding orientation of the crest. In the occasional situation where the crest is affrontée, the helmet is also depicted in that position.

2   Mantling

The style of this is left very much to the individual artist, and it is not usually included in the blazon. It is traditionally of the principal colour and metal (or fur) of the main arms), with the outer side being of the colour, the inner lining of the metal or fur. If it is required to blazon the mantling, the sequence goes, for example: **… Mantled Gules, doubled Or.**

3   Wreath

The wreath or torse is also often omitted from the blazon, since, like the helmet and mantling, it is subject to convention. It typically consists of six folds of alternating tincture, these being the principal tinctures of the shield, with the metal (or fur) always preceding the colour. If it is required to blazon the wreath, the sequence is normally something like**: … within (or upon) a wreath Or and Gules, this crest …**

4   Crest-Coronet

Where a crest-coronet is part of a crest, it is mentioned as the first part of the crest, in the form: "… Issuant from a Loyalist Military coronet…" (Figure 65); or **"… a coronet its rim set with three maple leaves Or alternating with two roses Argent …"** (Figure 66) followed by the remainder of the crest. In the place of the crest-coronet, there are a number of similar items from which a crest may issue, with names like **"… a circlet Or, its rim set with flowers** (Figure 67). Many municipal arms use the **mural crown** as their crest-coronet and the crest may in fact be issuant from (or standing on, if appropriate) a rock, a grassy mound, or any suitable perch! But remember, the majority of crests do not have a coronet or its equivalent and stand on (or issue directly from) the wreath.

Figure 65: **A Loyalist military coronet;**

Figure 66: **A coronet its rim set with three maple leaves Or alternating with roses Argent;**

Figure 67: **A circlet Or its rim set with flowers proper.**

Figure 65   Figure 66   Figure 67

5   The Crest

The best way to discuss crest blazons is to consider typical crest subjects.

   a. **Animals and Demi-animals**   These are by far the most common subjects for the crest. The attitude and head position are noted as for the shield. Rampant is, so to speak, the "default" attitude and will be assumed if no other is mentioned. In the demi-animal, the line of severance is normally concealed within the wreath or coronet, so it is not necessary to say "couped". If the creature is *erased* from his lower body, it will be obvious and should be so stated.

In many cases, an animal will have something on its head, around his neck (*gorged*), be charged with something on shoulder, body or flank, and/or be holding, grasping or supporting other objects with his paw or paws. The sequence of blazon is head, neck, body, dexter paw, sinister paw, in that order. An object held in a paw should have its attitude noted if it is not obvious. The entire blazon of a rather over-elaborate animal crest might then read as described in the blazon for Figure 68 (next page).

   b. **Birds and Demi-birds** Birds are also commonly used as crests. Again, the attitude of the wings (e.g. "displayed, "close", "inverted", etc) is first noted, followed by objects on the head, charged on the body or wings, or held in a claw, in that order.

   c. **Arms, Forearms and Hands.** These are frequently employed as crests, usually holding some object. They should normally be identified as dexter or sinister – although assumed to be dexter unless otherwise stated.

(i)   **Arm:** The entire arm is typically shown (and blazoned) as "**embowed**". The attitude is usually assumed to be upper arm issuant from the wreath, elbow to the dexter, unless otherwise mentioned. Other positions should be specified. If "**in armour**," this should be stated as such (although the less accurate "vambraced" is sometimes used – strictly, the vambrace protected only the forearm). E.g. "**A dexter arm in armour embowed Sable holding a baton Or**" (fig. 70, below). An arm wearing a sleeve is said to be "**habited**" of a certain tincture. The arm is assumed to include the hand, so it is not necessary to say "the hand holding …" an object;

(ii)   **Forearm** This is typically shown in the vertical, palewise position, often rather shorter than full-length, and referred to as a "**cubit arm**". It is occasionally difficult to distinguish a rather short cubit arm from a hand, which it sometimes resembles. Again, one should note dexter or sinister (as shown by the location of the thumb). If in armour, it is said to be "**vambraced**". Otherwise, blazoning is as for the arm, the hand being included as understood; e.g. "**A sinister cubit arm habited Gules holding a closed book proper**" (fig. 71, below)..

(iii)   **Hand:** Again, state dexter or sinister. It is usually shown bare, but may be "**gauntleted**".

Figure 68: **Issuant from a coronet its rim set with three maple leaves Or and two roses Argent a demi-lion Gules gorged with a collar and charged on the shoulder with a maple leaf both Or, holding in his dexter paw a spear point downwards Argent, his sinister paw resting upon a castle Argent masoned Sable;**

Figure 69: A**n eagle rising, wings elevated and addorsed Azure;**

Figure 70: **Arising from a grassy mount, a dexter arm in armour embowed proper holding a baton Or.**

| Figure 68 | Figure 69 | Figure 70 |

(iv)　**Objects Held**: An objects held by a hand or the claw of an animal or bird must have its position and other features indicated (in the case of Figure 71,: **"… binding to dexter…"**), and It must be stated whether the points of weapons, etc., are upwards or downwards. Remember, an artist cannot read minds, and the blazon is the only thing he has to go on.

Figure 71: **A sinister cubit arm proper habited Gules holding a closed book also proper, binding to dexter**.

Figure 72: A**n oak tree eradicated, fructed Or.**

Figure 73: **A Castle proper** *(showing two towers with a wall between)*
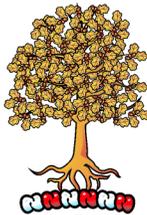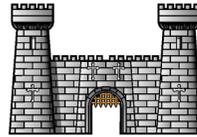
| Figure 71 | Figure 72 | Figure 73 |

d.　**Trees**　A tree may be just a generic tree, but more commonly is identified by shape (pines, firs) or leaves (oaks). A tree may bear recognizable fruit, such as apples or acorns, and is then said to be **fructed**. If the roots are illustrated, it is said to be **eradicated** (Figure 72).

e.　**Towers and Castles**　These are sometimes used in crests and it is important to distinguish between them – the castle being distinguished by having two towers with a wall between (Figure 73). When either castle or tower is surmounted by what we would refer to as turrets, it is said to be "towered".　Remember that, while a castle may be just "proper", it may also have coloured walls and be **masoned** of a different colour.

f.　**Other Objects**　A great many objects may also be employed as crests, of which the following is but a sampling: **human figures or heads**; **animals' heads**; **wings**; **ships**; and occupational symbols, such as **lamps of learning**, **scales of justice**, **garbs** and so forth. In general, these are blazoned exactly as they would be in the shield and present no special features in the crest.

CHAPTER 7

SUPPORTERS, COMPARTMENT AND MOTTO

1   Supporters

Supporters in Britain are granted to peers of the realm, to knights of certain knightly orders, and to county, city, district and town councils, and certain corporations (Boutel). In Canada, personal (non-hereditary) supporters may be granted to certain high officials, such as Governors General, Lieutenant Governors of Provinces, Companions of the Order of Canada, Chief Justices and the like. However, *all* institutional arms have the right to supporters, from metropolis to village, from university to school, so we are likely to run into them frequently in our own heraldic backyard. They may be animals (real or mythical), birds, or human beings, but by far the most common are animals.

> **a.   Animals** These form the majority of supporters and in general do not pose any particular blazonry problems – save, perhaps, in what may be omitted. The default position is rampant or its equivalent, facing towards the shield. This means, of course, that the dexter supporter will typically face to sinister, but that is assumed and the creature should be blazoned as if it were facing dexter in the usual way. Any variations from these positions should, of course, be noted. The primary and secondary tinctures (claws, tongue, etc.) should be mentioned next, as on a shield, followed by any special adornments (collars, etc.) and finally anything the animal is holding or supporting.

Figure 74 (Page 25): *Supporters*: **Dexter a bear Or gorged with a collar of maple leaves Vert; sinister a stag Or attired and unguled Azure, gorged with a collar of dogwood flowers Argent, leaved and seeded Vert, both standing on a rock set with salal leaves and sword-ferns proper**.

Figure 75 (Page 25): *Supporters*: **Upon an escarpment of earth grassed and planted with perennials in flower proper, two boars sejant guardant Or, each gorged with a ribbon Bleu-Celeste.**

It will be noticed that while the animals in Figure 74 follow the general pattern of being rampant and facing the shield, those in Figure 75 do not do so. This is relatively uncommon, but must be watched for. Also note that, in Figure 74, the blazon of the compartment follows that of the supporters, while in Figure 75, the opposite is the case. We shall return to that below, under **Compartment.**

Figure 74
(Village of Belcarra)

Figure 75
(Butchart Gardens)

b. Birds (See Figure 76, below). Birds, particularly long-legged ones, are fairly common as supporters. As a rule, they stand facing the shield, with the inner leg bent and supporting it – although shorter-legged birds, such as eagles, may sometimes stand with both legs on the ground. As for animals, their individual features, such as legs and beaks, should be blazoned.

Figure 76: *Supporters:* **Dexter a bald eagle proper, sinister a great blue heron Argent crested Sable, both beaked and membered Gules and gorged with a collar of maple leaves Gules and dogwood flowers Argent, both standing upon a grassy mount Vert above barry wavy Argent and Azure.**

Figure 77: *Supporters:* **Upon a grassy mound, dexter a fisherman holding a codfish by its head with his dexter hand, sinister a naval rating both habited circa 1860, all proper.**

Figure 76
(Brentwood College)

Figure 77
(City of Halifax)

c. Human Beings (See Figure 77, above). Humans as supporters are fairly common in Canadian heraldry, although they tend to be discouraged by the Canadian Heraldic Authority. The reason is probably that, whereas the general appearance of an animal or bird is fairly easily accessible, that of a naval rating, circa 1860, is likely to be less so to the majority of heraldic artists. Human figures tend to face frontwards or partly inwards towards the shield and most grasp the shield with the inward hand, although objects held in that hand may prevent this. In general, it not necessary to blazon *exact* positions of human supporters, leaving the details to the artist.

2 Compartments

There seems to be no set rule as to whether the compartment is blazoned before or after the supporters than stand upon it, so one can make one's own choice. Most are simple, showing a grassy mount, perhaps decorated with flowers or other significant objects. A few show barry-wavy below the grassy mounts (suggesting a river, lake or the sea), accommodated by merely inserting the word "above" between "mount" and the remainder. A few compartments are extremely complex, and you just have to do the best you can with them.

3 Mottoes

All that needs to be said after quoting a motto is whether it is placed above the crest or below the shield.

CHAPTER 8

BADGES AND FLAGS

1   The Badge

Badges and flags, while frequently granted and approved by heraldic authorities, do not form part of the heraldic achievement. Since they tend as well to be variable in overall design, they may best be referred to as para-heraldic items. Their external design is not, in general, governed by as strict conventions as those that apply to the achievement. However, within the outer form, there are features that lend themselves to traditional blazonry.

Badges go back a long way in the heraldic world, being used originally to identify the dress and uniforms of the retainers of the great lords who bore the arms. Frequently, the main charge of the shield, the crest, or a personal badge might be so employed. In modern times, they are used by individuals for the marking of objects such as clothing, jewellery, letterhead and other items too small for the full arms. They are also used by corporate bodies for identification, where the location or use seems not to justify the dignity and complexity of a full heraldic achievement. For those involved in designing arms for a municipality, it is a good idea to include a badge, which fills perfectly the role of the popular (and much more expensive) municipal logo.

Below. on Page 28, are represented a number of badges followed by their blazons. This will provide an idea of the many differences in badge design, along with a familiarity with the form of blazon employed.

Figure 78. *Badge*: **On a plate within a belt Azure edged, buckled and inscribed with the motto in letters Argent, an eagle's head erased Azure, beaked Gules.**

Figure 79**.** *Badge*: **A garb Or enfiling a Loyalist civil coronet Gules.**

Figure 80. *Badge*: **Between a pair of dragon's wings conjoined and expanded Or, a sword erect the blade enflamed proper, pommel and hilt Or.**

Figure 81. *Badge*: **Two curtana swords (swords of mercy) in saltire Or, surmounted by a torteau charged with a horse's head Or.**

Figure 82. *Badge:* **On a hurt a polar bear passant Argent holding in the dexter paw a key, within an orle embattled Or.**

Figure 78	Figure 79	Figure 80	Figure 81	Figure 82
(David Cvet)	(Kenneth Calder)	(David Birtwistle)	(Sylvain Bissonnette)	(John Mah)

This display demonstrates the great variability of the badge as to its general shape and outline, but shows that the individual components are eminently blazonable.

2   The Flag

Heraldic flags are divided into two main categories, the banner and the standard. Note that for all flags, the term "hoist" is used for that part of the flag nearest the staff or halyard, the term "fly" for the rest of the flag.

a.   **The Banner:**   The banner is what most people would term a flag. It is square or rectangular, made usually of light, durable material like silk or nylon and has fittings enabling it to be flown from a pole or staff. It was originally the principal personal flag of the nobility and carried only in the presence of the owner. In Canada, banners may be granted to anyone granted a coat of arms. In this context, is is generally referred to as "a banner of the arms", and these are fairly frequently granted.

Figure 83: *Blair Churchill* – **A banner of the arms**

Figure 84: *Sylvain Bissonnette* – **A banner of the arms**

Figure 85: *John Richards* – **A banner of the arms**

Figure 86: *Edward McNabb* – **A banner Or charged with a griffin passant holding in his dexter claw a maple leaf Gules.**

Figure 83	Figure 84	Figure 85	Figure 86

Although technically square, those banners meant to be flown outdoors ("fair-weather banners") are often longer than they are wide, as one can see from two of the examples. The blazons are shown above.

 (Note how very simple it is to blazon a banner of the arms – if, in fact, that is what it is. The last example is blazoned in full because the charge on the flag is NOT the arms, but a slightly variant version of the crest).

> b. **The Standard:** The standard is a long tapering flag, originally swallow-tailed but now more usually rounded at the end**.** Unlike the badge, the standard does have what might be called a "standard" design. This has changed a little from time to time and probably varied as much in the Middle Ages as it does today, but our examples below provide an idea of typical standards and their blazons for the student to follow in this area.

Figure 87: **A Standard, the arms in hoist, the fly tierced in bend Or, Gules and Or charged with the crest between two representations of the badge all separated by two bends Argent charged with the motto in letters Sable.**

Figure 88: **A Standard, the arms in the hoist the fly Gules charged to the dexter with the crest and to the sinister with two representations of the badge all separated by two bends Argent inscribed with the motto in letters Sable and fringed Or.**

Figure 87	Figure 88
(Ross Ransome)	(Kenneth Calder)

Readers will notice certain minor variations in these two "typical" standards. In that for Ransome, the crest is placed in the more traditional location between two versions of the badge (sometimes there are two different badges), while for Calder it is next to the hoist.

Note also that the "official" blazon for Calder makes note of the fringe in the blazon, while that for Ransome does not. It is suggested that this feature be mentioned in the blazon, since it is a traditional one and affects the appearance of the Standard.

c. **The Guidon:** The Guidon is, in a sense, a shorter, stouter version of the standard – one that has perhaps not followed its doctor's advice on diet. It is a flag traditionally used by cavalry and, more recently, by armoured units, and is the flag used by the British Columbia Regiment, A Guidon is sometimes also granted to ex-servicemen who have served with an armoured regiment, as shown in Figure 90, below.

Figure 89: **A Guidon Gules, the regimental badge in the fly, with the battle honours and prior regimental badges displayed on either side thereof, fringed Or.**

Figure 90: **A Guidon, the arms in the hoist, the fly Argent charged with the badge, fringed Or and Gules.**

The Guidon looks like this:

Figure 89

(The British Columbia Regiment)

Figure 90

(Allan Bird)

PRACTISING YOUR BLAZONRY

Those readers who have learned a bit about blazonry in this small booklet may wish to practise their skills. The best way to accomplish this, in the author's experience, is by going on-line to the Public Register of Arms, Flags and Badges of Canada. Here you may select any of a myriad of heraldic achievements. Click on any one to see the illustration. Practise your blazonry on it, then scroll down to see the official version -- and see how close you came! It's the best way to hone your skills.

ADDENDUM

Spelling

It will be noted that in the words of blazon used above, a number of descriptive terms ending in the letter -y have been used in place of the corresponding spellings with endings in -é or -ée (e.g. semy, goutty, etc). These spellings are the ones, in general, preferred by Friar. This has been done:

a. for consistency with terms like fleuretty, gyronny, bendy and dancetty, for which the original French endings have largely disappeared; and

b. because it avoids the rather silly choice between the masculine -é and the feminine –ée endings, which are meaningless in an English text;

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THE ROYAL HERALDRY SOCIETY OF CANADA

(Founded 1966)

The Royal Heraldry Society of Canada is an organization one of whose purposes is "to promote a greater interest in heraldry among Canadians." The Society puts out three publications*, Gonfanon* (a newsletter), *Heraldry in Canada* (a journal) and *Alta Studia Heraldica (*a scholarly review), which provide a wealth of heraldic information and discussion. Its meetings and social gatherings also provide a great opportunity for people interested in the subject to get together. If heraldry interests you, you might consider membership in the Society and in one of its local branches. To find out more about it, and especially about the reduced student rates, contact:

> The Royal Heraldry Society of Canada
> P.O. Box 8128, Terminal T
> Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H9

> Or visit the Society's website at: **www.heraldry.ca**

A Guide to Blazonry

Many folk who have become fascinated with the mediaeval magic of heraldry – with decorated shields, crests, supporters, badges and flags – still have trouble learning its archaic language of blazonry – the language used to describe a coat of arms so that an heraldic artist can render it correctly. The language is a curious mixture of mediaeval Norman, mediaeval English – and just plain, ordinary English. It can do the job of describing heraldic objects more accurately and economically than regular English, but it is more than that: it is a fascinating and highly specialized jargon that separates that strange creature – the heraldry enthusiast – from the rest of the world, and worth learning for itself alone.

The Author and Illustrators

Dr. Kevin Greaves, a retired physician living in Hamilton, Ontario, became involved in heraldry as a boy and, as author of *A Canadian Heraldic Primer* and of many articles, is well known in the Canadian heraldic community.

LCdr. Steve Cowan, who did most of the illustrations, lives in Comox, BC. Besides doing vector drawings of arms he has been doing military and naval unit badges as well as the artwork of the ship badges of the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps. His work can be seen at **www.stevecowan.ca**.

Gordon Macpherson, the artist who painted the cover, is Canada's best known and most respected heraldic artist. He bears the title of Niagara Herald Extraordinary and is a Member of the Order of Canada.

The Royal Heraldry Society of Canada

www.heraldry.ca