Korsvag presents:

SCA Heraldry

For Beginners

A Primer
On Devices

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Meet the Author

Deykin ap Gwion is a mid-13th Century Welshman who makes his living wandering about Northern Europe, selling his ability to read, write and perform arithmetical functions as needed to fund his search for wine, women and song.

Along the way he has been a soldier, a farmer, a reeve, a carpenter, a con-man, a sailor, a scribe, a fisherman, a poacher, and a thief.

His hobbies include spending money on wine and women, gambling on contests of skill and chance, and traveling to find more money, wine, women or song.

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David Serhienko is a modern American, born and raised in the state of North Dakota, who makes his living creating or customizing software packages to better suit the needs to Fortune 1500 companies.

He became interested in the SCA in the l990s, and was immediately drawn to the puzzle solving aspects of book heraldry.

I will be covering the following topics for anyone interested in SCA Heraldry:

- Some Basics of Heraldry
- Basic Blazonry
- Arms Design
- The Name and Device Registration Process
- Ways to use your Device

Today's article will cover the Basics of Heraldry, as used in the SCA.

Please note that this article is not a completed work. The most recent change date is noted on the cover.

What is Heraldry?
Within the SCA, you will often hear people speak of two forms of heraldry: Field Heraldry and Book Heraldry. These forms of heraldry are distinguished primarily by the manner in which they are accomplished.

The field herald performs her duties in public, out loud, making use of a strong voice, a keen sense of drama and a vast patience for being the center of attention. These are the heralds one finds making announcements on the battlefield or during a royal court.

The book herald, by contrast, performs his duties anywhere he can find room to dig through his resource materials, making use of a strong need to argue, a keen sense of curiosity, and a vast patience for solving puzzles. These are the heralds one finds buried under a pile of paper, trying to find a way to make a submitted device or name clear for registration.

It is book heraldry that this document concerns itself. Specifically, it will be dealing with the devices with which SCA book heraldry concerns itself. Onomastics, or the study of names, is also a fascinating field, but it isn't the focus of this document.

Why Heraldry?
The long answer would require delving deeply into the history of Heraldry to a degree that this series of short articles isn't intended.

A somewhat shorter answer is as an identity token. The oft-repeated reason that Heraldry was invented in the first place was to allow easy identification of a man-at-arms at a distance. The chaos of battle would have made it quite

difficult to identify another. It is because of its battlefield utility that it became widespread, and that utility continues today, which is one of the reasons we still use it in the SCA.

The much simpler answer is that Heraldry can be fun. For those of an artistic temperament, heraldry offers a historically accurate arena in which to practice their craft. For the puzzle solvers, the challenge of properly emblazoning a Device such that it can be redrawn in the exact same way is very satisfying.

For both types of people, finding a design which is unique, clever, attractive and instantly identifiable is quite rewarding.

Finally, heraldry provides immersion and pageantry. The fluttering banners and bold devices on shields says to our modern minds that we have arrived in the Middle Ages in a way that little else could hope to achieve.

Some Definitions

Before delving into Heraldry more deeply, it is helpful to explain some terms that I will be using along the way. As in any specialized occupation, Heralds have developed their own terminology that is used as a short-hand.

SCA Heralds have a set of terms which are even more specialized in some cases than those of the professional mundane heraldry world. I will, of course, be focusing on SCA usages.

To ensure correctness, the definitions below have been selectively borrowed from the SCA College of Heralds webpage[1].

Arms – A label which can be applied to a device once that device's owner has received an Award of Arms. The difference between a Registered Device and Arms is not tracked by the CoA.

Blazon – a verbal or written description of a device. Contrast this with Emblazon.

Blazon-Fu – informal phrase often used by heralds during the process of tightening up a blazon in order to ensure that the blazon not only is unable to be interpreted in multiple ways, but also, often, to shorten the blazon by removing redundant or otherwise unnecessary words and phrases.

College of Arms - The Sovereign(s) of Arms, the warranted heralds on Laurel staff, the Principal Herald of each kingdom, and such other persons as Laurel may deem to be of assistance. The College of Arms is often referred to as simply 'Laurel', or 'CoA'.

College of Heralds - The Principal Herald of a kingdom, the warranted heralds and pursuivants of a kingdom, and such other persons as the Principal Herald may deem to be of assistance. Often referred to simply as the 'College' or 'CoH'.

In Northshield, this would be the Polaris Herald and the various Deputies such as the Aegis Herald and Keythong Herald. They are most often simply referred to as 'Polaris', 'Aegis', and 'Keythong', respectively.

Device – Any heraldic design which uniquely identifies its owner.

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[1] The home page for the SCA College of Arms is http://www.sca.org/heraldry

Emblazon – an artistic representation of a blazon e.g. a shield or banner with the device painted upon it. It is an interesting fact that the College of Arms does not register blazons, it registers emblazons.

Registered Device – Any device which is registered with the SCA College of Arms is a registered device.

RfS – common abbreviation of Rules for Submission[2], which are the College of Arms' official rules for SCA Heraldry.

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[2] The Rules for Submission can be found at
http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/rfs.html

Elements of a Device

The next thing to learn about is the basic parts of a device. Generally speaking, a device consists of a 'field', upon which are placed 'charges', all of which come in one or more 'tinctures'.

Now that you know that, we can all go home! Nope, actually, we need to look at them one at a time. First, we'll examine tinctures. We'll follow that with the field, and finish up by examining charges.

We have two goals by the end of all of this. First, we will be able to encode a device's emblazon as a blazon. That is to say that, given a device's image, or emblazon, we will be able to describe the colors and composition of that device, using unambiguous heraldic language, thus creating its blazon.

Secondly, we will be able to decode a blazon back into an emblazon as needed… the blazon, or description, will be so precise so as to allow another herald, who, having never seen an image of the device, will be able to draw or paint the device correctly, thus recreating the emblazon.

Tinctures

Tincture is nothing but a groovy word meaning, almost, color. Why almost? Because there are tinctures which are multi-colored, and which include shape, as well.

At its most basic, heraldry makes use of 7 tinctures, which are divided into two categories: colors and metals.

There are two metals, gold (yellow) and silver (white). Heraldry uses the terms 'or' and 'argent', instead.

There are also five basic colors used: red, blue, green, black and purple. The heraldic terms for them are 'gules', 'azure', 'vert', 'sable' and 'purpure'. The use of purple, incidentally, is wildly overused in the SCA, when compared to actual historic usage.

COLORS	METALS	COLORS	COLORS	COLORS	COLORS	METALS
PURPURE	OR	GULES	VERT	AZURE	SABLE	ARGENT

Several other tinture colors are found in historical heraldry, but they are not allowed for registry in an SCA context, so I'll leave that research as an exercise for the reader.

Mustela erminea
in summer.
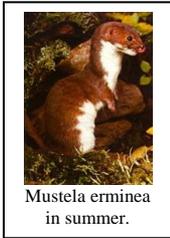
Next, there are the tinctures referred to as furs. These are multi-colored, and involve the use of very small charges. They are called furs because they represent the pelt of an animal, usually the ermine.

Mustela erminea
in winter.

The most common furs are 'ermine', 'ermines' (also known as 'counter-ermine'), 'erminois', and 'pean'. These are all a single color, with a bunch of little tails strewn across the base color.

ERMINE   **ERMINES**   **ERMINOIS**   **PEAN**

Other furs are possible, using the rule of tincture, of course. One could imagine a fur which was white with red spots on it, for instance. One would blazon that as 'argent ermined gules', and that would be a fine fur. For purposes of the Rule of Tincture, a metal based fur will count as a metal, and a color based fur will count as a color.

Lastly, in the discussion of tincture, one must know the term 'proper'. This indicates the use of the natural color of a particular object. However, it is important to keep in mind the heraldry usually has a standard color which is 'proper', and, which, many times, will not coincide with most people's assumption. One should always check the online Glossary of Terms[3] for these colors.

Hopefully, you've noticed that each fur above is either a color on a metal, or a metal on a color. This is the Rule of Tincture, sometimes called the Law of Tincture, and it will be a recurring theme, as well as a major consideration when designing a new device or badge.

Plainly stated, the Rule of Tincture is *"metal must never be placed upon metal, nor color upon color".* The reason for this is contrast. At a distance, in the confusion of battle, it is quite difficult to tell the difference between a red on black device and one which is purple on blue, for example.

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[3] http://www.sca.org/heraldry/coagloss.html

Does the Rule of Tincture really have any purpose? Take a look around you the next time you drive through your neighborhood. You'll begin to notice that the most effective signs on the various businesses obey the Rule of Tincture. The same can be said of road signs.

Where do furs fit into the Rule of Tincture? Well, that depends. Furs are predominantly a color with some metal spots on them, or, a metal with some colored spots on them. To maintain contrast with other elements in the device's design, furs are considered for the purposed of the Rule of Tincture to be the predominant tincture type involved.

 Thus, ermine, which is white with black tails, is considered white (or argent). White (argent) is a metal, so ermine is considered a metal for purposes of the rule of tincture.

Pean, in contrast, would be considered black (or sable), and since sable is a color, not a metal, pean is considered a color for purposes of the rule of tincture.

Now, earlier, I mentioned that there are tinctures which are multicolored. You've seen those in the furs. I also mentioned that there are tinctures that include shape. That isn't precisely true.   What there are, in the SCA, are field treatments.

The CoA Glossary definition of a field treatment is "a repeating pattern drawn in a tincture with good contrast over the field or a charge. Field treatments leave more of the underlying tincture showing than they cover. They are considered a part of the field or charge tincture. The term field treatment is not a standard real-world heraldic description for a class of armorial designs, but is the SCA catch-all term for the few period heraldic designs meeting this description."

The reason we are considering field treatments as tinctures is that they are used in almost precisely the same way as any other tincture or fur. Anytime you see a tincture being used, you ought to be able to substitute a field treatment.

What are these famous field treatments? If one wanted to be argumentative, one could call each of the furs a field treatment, but let's not have that argument now…

Well, here are some of the more common field treatments. If you are interested, you can find a lot more where I got these[4].

[4] http://heralds.westkingdom.org/Templates/Fields/index.htm
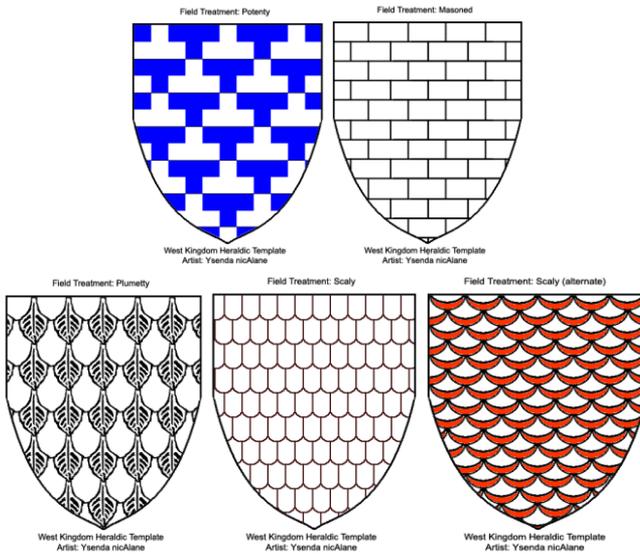
The Field

The field is the base of the device, and is usually represented by a shield. I will be using this convention throughout this article. There is no reason other than clarity, though, to do so.

In device heraldry, it is important to be able to not only accurately describe the colors of each 'thing' on the device, but we must be able to accurate describe the place of each thing as well.

Each region of the field has its own label, such as base and chief, sinister and dexter, meaning, essentially, top and bottom, left and right, respectively.

Important note: do not confuse the chief and base **regions** of a device with the **charges** called a chief and a base. Those charges are members of the charge family called 'ordinaries', and are not the same thing. I promise we will discuss this later.

Important note: When discussing a device, the dexter, meaning the right, region is on the left side and sinister, meaning left, is on the right. Confusing?

Not if you remember that the device is intended to be placed upon an armsman's shield, and, from the wielder's perspective, the dexter side *is* the arms bearer's right.

These region names can be combined, in a manner similar to cardinal directions, to achieve more specificity of location. Just as north and east yields northeast, dexter and chief yields dexter-chief. Note that Dexter and Sinister take precedence over Chief and Base here, just as North and South take precedence over East and West.
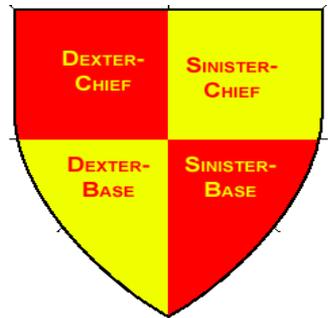
People generally don't say east-north or west-south anymore than Heralds will intentionally say Chief-Dexter or Base-Sinister.

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Why do we care what the regions are named? Why are they labeled at all?
Heraldry is not simply an art concerned with unique and attractive designs, but
also, first and foremost, with reproducibility.

By having very specific names for the location and orientation of each portion of
a device, any competent herald is able to reproduce a device solely from its
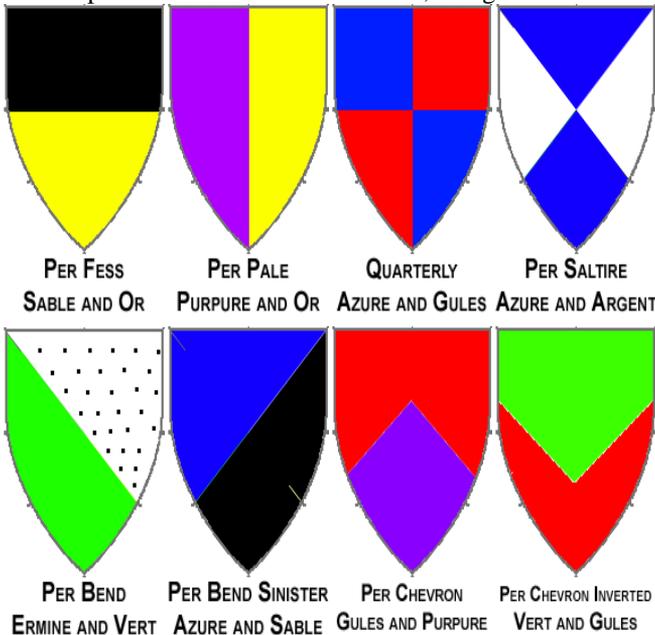blazon, in a form that is recognizable.

The ability to refer to different portions of the field when creating the blazon for
a device is indispensable.

Field Divisions
There are several standard field divisions used in heraldry, broken into two
basic sets: the simple divisions and the complex divisions.

The simple divisions are those that do not require the designer to be concerned
with the rule of tincture while choosing the field.   These simple divisions are
those that fit the CoA's Rules for Submission (RfS) section VIII.2.b.iii, which
says "evenly divided into two parts, per saltire, or quarterly".

 Here are some depictions of these field divisions, along with the blazon of each:

PER FESS	PER PALE	QUARTERLY	PER SALTIRE
SABLE AND OR	PURPURE AND OR	AZURE AND GULES	AZURE AND ARGENT

| PER BEND	PER BEND SINISTER	PER CHEVRON	PER CHEVRON INVERTED
ERMINE AND VERT	AZURE AND SABLE	GULES AND PURPURE	VERT AND GULES

Note here how in each of these simple field divisions we have mixed colors, metals and furs together with no regard for contrast. This is because, with the very limited number of divisions into which we've divided the field, these will remain identifiable from a great distance, even with two metals or two colors on them.

The Rule of Tincture will, of course, still apply to the contrast between the field and any charges placed upon it. So, for example, any of the simple field divisions could be chosen as two metals, two colors, or a metal and color.

Once the field tinctures are chosen, the charge tinctures must be chosen in such a way as to obey the rule of tincture. So, if the simple field division is 'quarterly azure and gules', we have all color, so any charges we place upon that field must be metal.

The complex divisions are those that require sufficient contrast between the parts of the field. Thus, you must use a metal and a color together, with furs counting as a metal or color as described above. These divide the field into more than four parts.

PALY
OR AND GULES

BARRY
OR AND GULES

BENDY
OR AND GULES

BENDY SINISTER
OR AND GULES
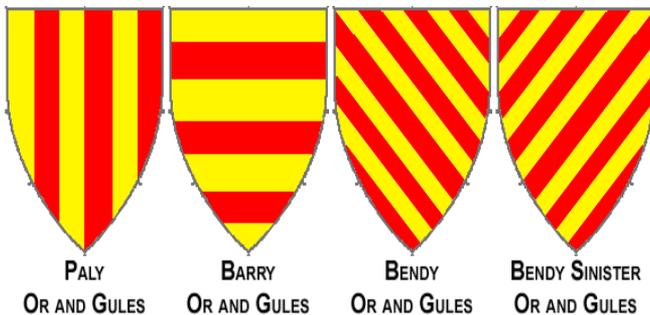
These do not exhaust all possible field divisions, but they do demonstrate the most commonly used in SCA heraldry. For those interested in some much less common divisions, check out the West Kingdom Herald's page[5] which has several others illustrated.

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[5] http://heralds.westkingdom.org/Templates/Fields/index.htm

Field Blazoning

In the SCA, we always blazon the field portion of a device first, and then describe the positions and tinctures of any charges on the device. In order to blazon the field, you need to decide which tincture to blazon first.

Examine the chief portion of the field. If there is a tincture which completely covers that portion, then you are probably safe to place that tincture first. Per Saltire, Barry and Per Fess are good examples of this.

If there is a tincture which completely covers the dexter portion of the field, then blazon that tincture first. Per Pale and Paly are good examples of this.

If neither of these two are the case, such as in a bendy field, then look to the dexter chief and sinister chief corners. Whichever corner is completely covered is the tincture one blazons first. Examples of this are Per Bendy, Per Bend Sinister, Bendy and Bendy Sinister.

If both corners are complete, then use dexter chief's tincture. Take a look at the field division Quarterly to see this in action.

PALY
OR AND GULES

PER SALTIRE
AZURE AND ARGENT

BENDY
OR AND GULES

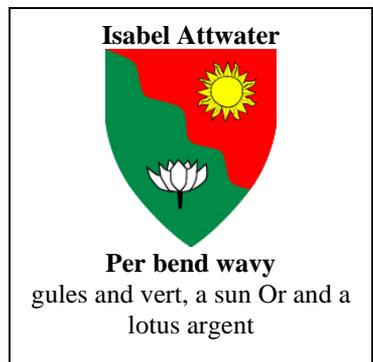QUARTERLY
AZURE AND GULES
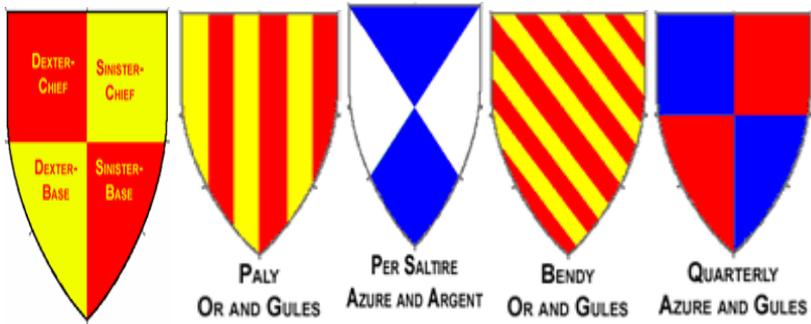
Lines of Division

In all of the field divisions shown in the previous section, I used a plain line to separate one portion of the field from another. This is unnecessary; it may also be undesirable from both a conflict and a design standpoint.

There are several lines of division common in the SCA, and many others are allowable for registration. I have borrowed, with gracious permission, these images from Baron Modar Neznanich's website[6].

Dovetailed	Embattled	Engrailed
Indented	Invected	Nebuly
Potenty	Urdy	Wavy

The West Kingdom Herald's web page[7] also does good job of showing many of the more common lines of division mixed with the more common field partitions.

By way of example, here are a couple of examples, drawn directly from the Northshield Armorial.

The Shire of Darkstone

Per fess indented
gules and sable, in pale a
bezant and a laurel wreath Or

Isabel Attwater

Per bend wavy
gules and vert, a sun Or and a
lotus argent

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[6] http://www2.kumc.edu/itc/staff/rknight/Lines.htm
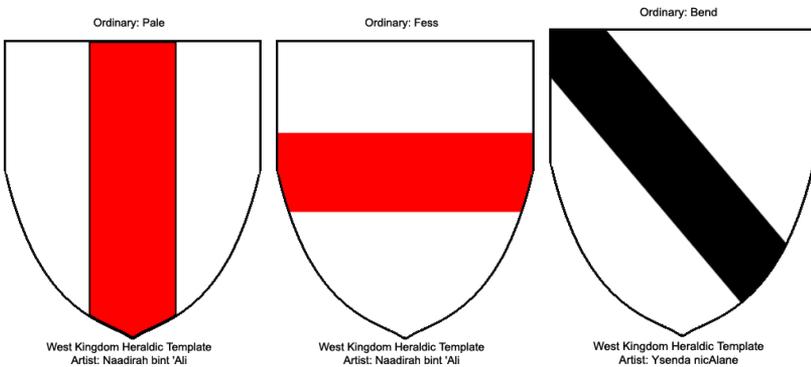[7] http://heralds.westkingdom.org/Templates/Fields/LinesOfPartition.htm

Charges

At long last, we come to the part of the device everyone is interested in… charges. A charge may be a simple geometric figure, such as a circle or a square, or a representation of an inanimate or animate item.

Those charges which consist simply of geometric shapes have a special name… They are referred to as the ordinaries, and we will discuss them first. We will then continue on to discuss charges which represent items.

Ordinaries

The SCA defines ordinaries as "those simple geometric figures that pass through the center of the field and terminate at the edge of the field (the pale, fess, bend, bend sinister, chevron, cross, saltire, pall, and pile), their diminutives, and the simple geometric additions to the edges of the field (such as the chief and bordure).[8]"
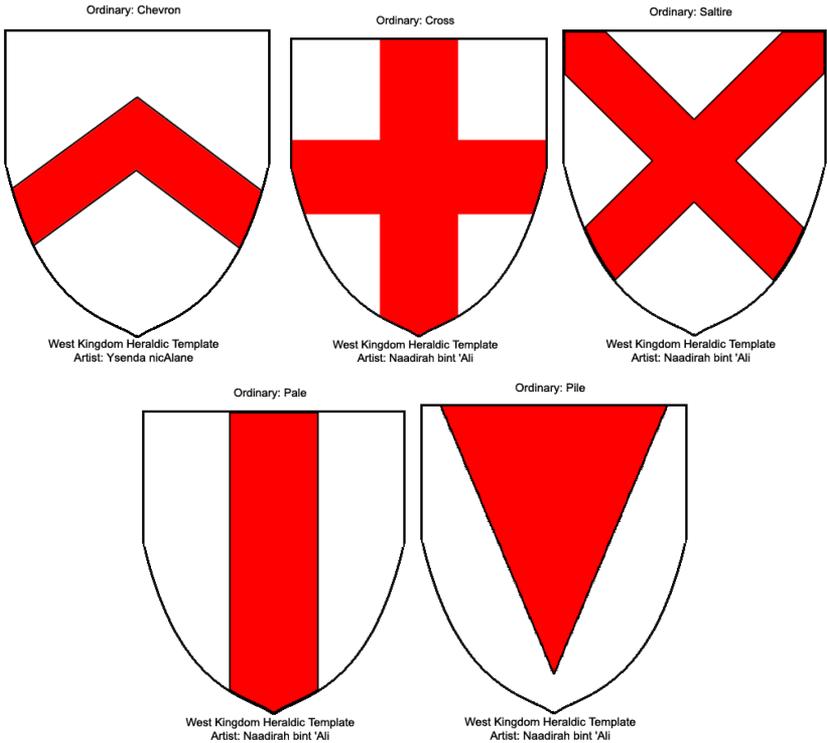
Here are the ordinaries which 'pass through the center of the field and terminate at the edge of the field'[9]… specifically the Pale, the Fess and the Bend:

Ordinary: Pale
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Naadirah bint 'Ali

Ordinary: Fess
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Naadirah bint 'Ali

Ordinary: Bend
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Ysenda nicAlane

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[8] http://www.sca.org/heraldry/coagloss.html

[9] All directly from http://heralds.westkingdom.org/Templates/Ordinaries/index.htm

Here are the rest of ordinaries which 'pass through the center of the field and terminate at the edge of the field'[10]… the Chevron, the Cross, the Saltire, the Pale, and the Pile:

Ordinary: Chevron
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Ysenda nicAlane

Ordinary: Cross
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Naadirah bint 'Ali

Ordinary: Saltire
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Naadirah bint 'Ali

Ordinary: Pale
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Naadirah bint 'Ali

Ordinary: Pile
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Naadirah bint 'Ali

Each ordinary has diminutives, that is to say, thinner, smaller versions of the ordinaries. Diminutives are not registered in SCA heraldry[11], so, I will leave further investigation of the diminutives as an exercise for the reader.

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[10] All directly from http://heralds.westkingdom.org/Templates/Ordinaries/index.htm
[11] http://www.sca.org/heraldry/primer/variants.html

The Peripherals

Peripherals are a subclass of ordinaries. Included in the definition of ordinaries was the phrase "and the simple geometric additions to the edges of the field (such as the chief and bordure).[12]" Since they don't technically pass through the center of the field, as required by the first part of the definition of ordinary, they get their own name, and that name is Peripherals.
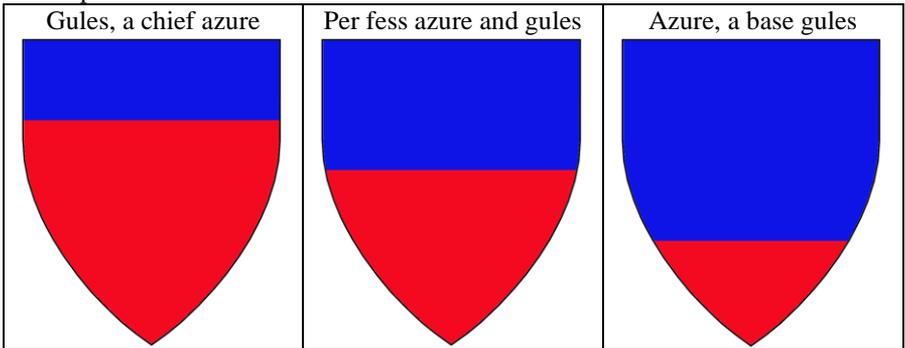
When discussing the field regions of a device, I promised to discuss the chief as a charge when I discussed it as a label for a region. Now is the time.

Chief and base are, as you already know, labels that can be applied to the field's top and bottom regions, respectively. They are also the names of two Peripherals charges which mostly fill up those regions.

That is to say, there is a peripheral charge, called a chief, which fills up (mostly) the region of the field referred to as chief. Likewise, there is a peripheral charge termed a base, which is placed on, and fills up (mostly), the region of the field referred to as base.

How much is mostly? Enough so it is clearly filling up most of the area, but NOT enough to allow someone to confuse a Base or a Chief with a field division of Per Fess.

Examples:

Gules, a chief azure	Per fess azure and gules	Azure, a base gules

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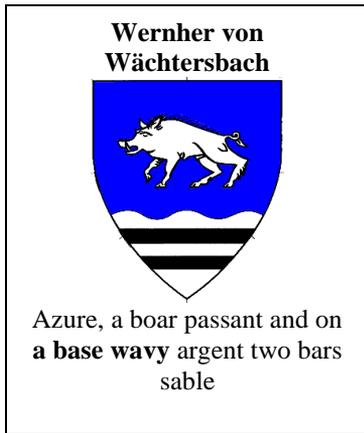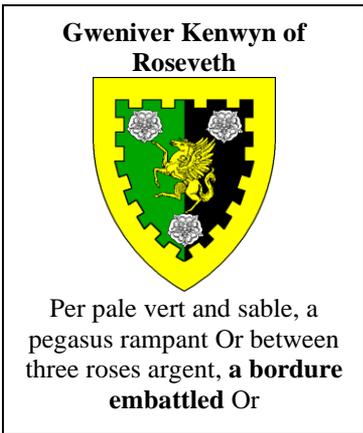[12] http://www.sca.org/heraldry/coagloss.html

Some of the other peripheral ordinaries which you will see a lot of include the bordure, the orle and the canton. A very good place to see these ordinaries is the SCA's Heraldic Primer[13].

Or, a bordure gules	Gules, an orle or	Vert, a canton or
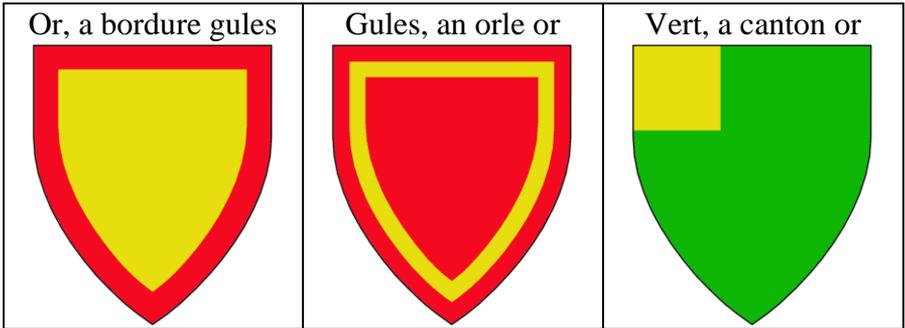
A word of caution: the canton cannot be used casually. It is, generally speaking, a mark of distinction, and thus has a special set of rules governing its use.

Ordinaries and Lines of Division

Ordinaries can be varied by applying any of the legal lines of division to the edges of the ordinary, creating, essentially, a new charge. Again, some examples drawn from the Northshield Armorial:

Gweniver Kenwyn of Roseveth

Per pale vert and sable, a pegasus rampant Or between three roses argent, **a bordure embattled** Or

Wernher von Wächtersbach

Azure, a boar passant and on **a base wavy** argent two bars sable

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[13] http://www.sca.org/heraldry/primer/ordinaries.html

Inanimate and animate Charges

The non-ordinary charges include everything else, from the simple diamond shaped lozenge, to the mighty Griffin, most beloved of Northshield. The most important factors to pay attention to when using standard, non-ordinary charges are:

- Orientation or Posture
- Arrangement

Orientation tells us how to align the axes of the charge. Posture is similar, but applies only to animate charges such as dragons and fish. Finally, arrangement tells us how to layout a group of charges in relation to each other.

We will discuss the orientation of inanimate charges first.

Many inanimate charges have default orientations.
When you look at an animate charge, whether it is a mug, a sword, or a pile, you will immediately notice that the object has both a vertical and a horizontal axis.

You can change the appearance of a charge by flipping it on one, or both axes. In some cases, flipping something on its horizontal axis does nothing. The same can be said for the vertical.

By way of example, take a look at four charges… the 'cross bottony', the pile, the heart and the harp.

The pile, for example, by default has its widest portion in chief, and its point aimed to base. Flipping it around its vertical axis does nothing, but flipping it on its horizontal yields something new… an inverted pile.

Purpure, a pile or

Purpure, a pile inverted or
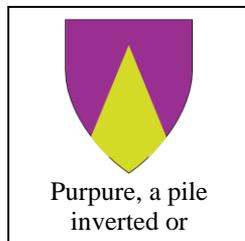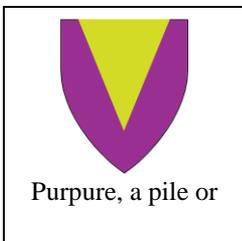
Flipping the cross bottony around its vertical axis does nothing, and flipping it on its horizontal yields nothing new, either.

But, imagine rotating a harp around either, or both axes… You end up 'inverting' when you flip on the horizontal and you 'reverse' when you flip on the vertical.

Cross Bottony
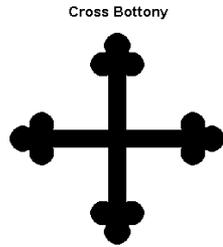
West Kingdom Heraldic Template
Artist: Vigdís Vestfirzka

A harp

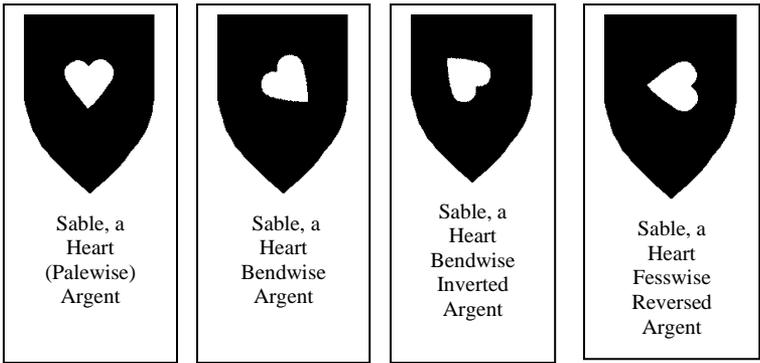A Harp reversed

A harp inverted

A Harp inverted reversed
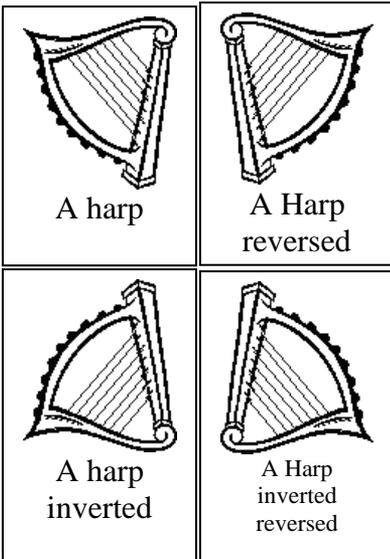
Unfortunately, it is far outside the scope of this introduction to detail the default positions that charges begin in. A good reference to these can be found on the West Kingdom Herald's site.

Finally, we come to the last aspect of orientation of a charge… specifically aligning the vertical axis into a particular direction.

As mentioned earlier, each charge will have a default orientation, and when you look, you should have no trouble finding its vertical axis. You can change that, if you like, to palewise, bendwise, bendwise sinister and fesswise.

Recall how the field divisions and ordinaries had analogous structures? Well, here they are again. You can divide a field Per Pale, you can place a Pale on the device, and now, you can orient a charge Palewise. Likewise for the other three.

We will use the heart for our example. One thing I would like to point out is that, since a heart is, by default oriented palewise, we do ordinarily not mention it. I include the palewise here only for instructional purposes.

| Sable, a Heart (Palewise) Argent | Sable, a Heart Bendwise Argent | Sable, a Heart Bendwise Inverted Argent | Sable, a Heart Fesswise Reversed Argent |

Beast Orientation
Beast, or animate charge, orientation is different from that of inanimate charges. Primarily, it concerns the posture of the beast, as well as describing the positioning of the head, the wings, the claws or talons, etc.

Some details to note along the way, though: generally speaking, the position of a beast's head, and the tincture of its claws, tongue eyes and other minor details do not count for difference when comparing two devices.

For far more information on this topic than I can hope to provide in an introduction, please visit the Laurel Heraldic Primer[14].

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[14] http://www.sca.org/heraldry/primer/

Designing your Device

Big, Bold and Butch
When designing your device, remember the purpose of armorial devices. They exist to make you recognizable. Thus, whenever possible, avoid anything which will make it difficult to recognize a device from a distance. Avoid using fiddly little details which will fade into a blur from a distance.

Make sure to render each charge in your device as large as possible without obscuring the other charges present, if any and use strongly contrasting colors whenever possible.

Your goal is for each charge to fill the space available to it as completely as possible while still maintaining identifiably for each individual charge item.

The Rule of Eight

As a rule of thumb, keep a count of the number of charge types you are using and the number of different tinctures you are using. If the total of those two values exceeds eight, you should make changes, because your device is too complicated to remain period in style and recognizable from a distance.

Resumes and Slot Machines

Your device is your graphical name, but it need not be your life story. Due to changes over time and heraldic inheritance, very few devices in period could tell you anything about the bearer beyond their identity, and, perhaps, to whom they were related.

If you have read this far, you will no doubt realize that this introduction is not yet complete in all of its topics. Topics which have not yet been covered at all, but which you should feel free to ask about include, but are not limited to:

- Charge groups and their arrangement
- Fimbriation
- Cadency
- Conflict Checking
- Simple Armory
- The Registration Process