

RESPECTING AND HONORING HERALDRY

Heraldry as we now know it is a development of the 12th Century. As the design of armor progressed, it became necessary to devise some method of identifying and recognizing warriors who were covered in metal from head to foot. Since just about every soldier at the time carried a shield, simple, easily recognized designs that could be painted onto a shield came to be used. In addition to designs on a shield, a lightweight cloth jacket that could be worn over armor, a literal "Coat" of Arms, called a "surcoat," was invented, and flags with the same designs as on the surcoat and shield also came to be used. A square or rectangular flag, with the same armorial designs as on the shield, is known as a "banner."

Besides its martial use, heraldry also at about the same time came to be used on seals for documents. At the time very few citizens could read, so a simple design, easily recognized and remembered, came to be attached to a document as a signature.

"Heralds" were originally the messengers for kings and great noblemen, and over time knowledge of the various armorial designs used by warriors became part of their duties, along with the recording and designing of Coats of Arms. Heraldry is both art and science, involving artistic design along with rules and methods.

It also very early on began to be fashionable to have an object attached to the top of the helmet. Purely decorative at first, and changed at will, over time such "crests" came to be assigned and recorded by the heralds. In a joust competitors met in mounted battle with a barrier between them, which tended to obscure the surcoat from the spectators on the other side of the barrier, so a distinctive crest design that functioned in a joust in much the same way as the design on a surcoat functioned in battle came to be employed by those who were involved in such tournaments.

The crest, therefore, is a component part of Armorial Bearings, the part that sits up on top of the helmet. The use of the crest alone as a mark of ownership or as a badge for followers to wear contributed to the misnomer of calling a complete set of Armorial Bearings a "crest." The familiar Scottish "crest badges," depicting the Chief's crest surrounded by a buckled belt, are an adaptation of the custom of supplying followers with a badge made up of part of the leader's Armorial Bearings.

Far from being an archaic survival, Scottish heraldry is very much alive today. The Scots have preserved their heraldry in a very healthy, robust form, and heraldry is in daily use in Scotland. Indeed, the 21st Century has seen a great revival in interest in heraldry, with large numbers of new Grants of Arms in Lyon Court.

The convention in Scotland is that Armorial Bearings or "Arms" belong to only one person at a time. Though Arms within a family will be similar, each "Armiger," that is, each person entitled to use Armorial Bearings, will have his or her Arms "differenced" in some unique way. The Armorial Bearings of the Chief form the basis for the design of Arms for each person bearing the same surname as the Chief. Indeed, the determination of who is to be the Chief within a family in Scotland, when in question, is made by deciding who is the legal heir of the Chiefly Arms. The Lord Lyon, who is appointed by the crown, and who must be a qualified attorney, since most of his duties are judicial in nature, is a judge of the laws of heraldry and related matters.

Here in the United States we have no authority like the Lyon Court in Scotland, but it is common courtesy to refrain from using the Arms of another. Armorial Bearings are a form of personal property used for identification, similar in some ways to the modern logo, and just as one should not wear a name badge that isn't theirs, or the badge of an organization to which one doesn't belong, no one should use Armorial Bearings that are not their own.

Bearing a shield painted with an armorial design, or flying a banner, indicates that the heraldry on them belongs to the person using them. In addition, flying a banner indicates the personal presence of the owner of the designs on it, so it makes no sense to fly one if the owner is not present. If you want to use heraldry in any way that indicates that you yourself are an Armiger, you must get Armorial Bearings of your own!

The Arms of Bruce of Annandale, illustrated in Figure 1, are the basis of the design assigned to any Bruce who becomes an Armiger.

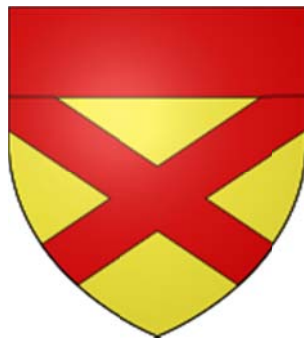


Figure 1. Arms of Bruce of Annandale

The undifferenced Arms of Bruce of Annandale, as illustrated, belong to our Chief, the Earl of Elgin, and are his alone to use on a shield or to fly in flag form. They should not be so used by anyone else.

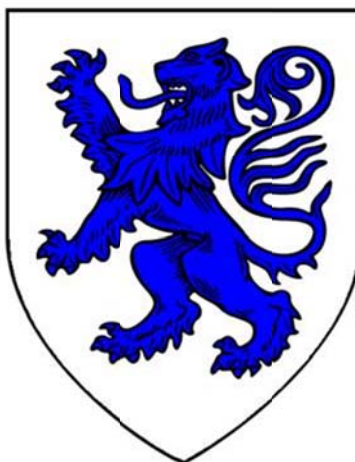


Figure 2. Arms of Bruce of Skelton

Another of the ancient Arms used within the Family are the Arms of Bruce of Skelton, illustrated in Figure 2. Today these Arms also belong to our Chief, and should not be used by anyone else.

The Chiefs of the Bruces have combined these two basic Armorial Bearings in several different ways over the centuries. The current Chief combines the basic design of Bruce of Annandale with Bruce of Skelton by bearing the blue rampant lion on a silver background in a "canton," as illustrated in Figure 3.

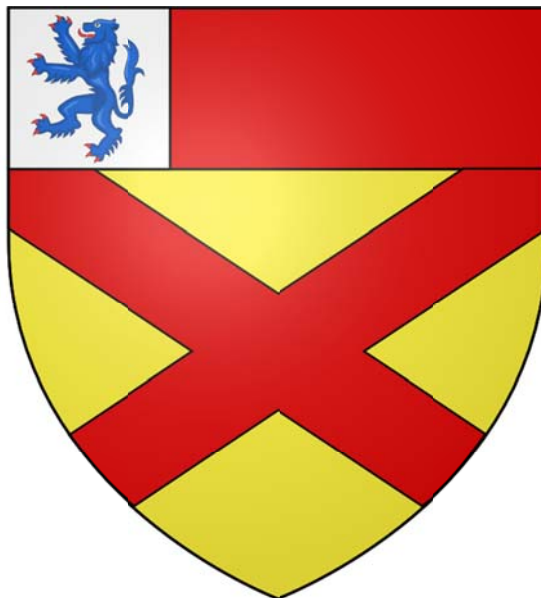


Figure 3. Arms of the Earl of Elgin

We in Family of Bruce International have a special duty to use heraldry properly, because three of today's most prominent heralds are members of the Bruce Family. Mrs. Elizabeth Bruce Roads is Lyon Clerk, and Snawdoun Herald of Arms; The Hon. Adam Bruce is Marchmont Herald of Arms; and Brigadier Alastair Bruce of Crionach is Fitzalan Herald at the College of Arms, London.

The author would enjoy hearing from anyone who has questions about heraldry, and especially anyone who would like to explore obtaining personal Armorial Bearings, at tabruce@windstream.net.