

The Use of Heraldry in French Genealogical Research

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Heraldry Terminology

Armiger: A person who bears arms.

Armorial: A collection of blazons for arms and/or drawings of arms usually arranged by surname and limited to a nation, region, or event.

Blazon: The technical description of arms.

Canting Arms: A pictorial jest on the surname of the armiger.

Charges: An object borne on a shield or on another charge. Includes ordinaries, sub-ordinaires, and a wide variety of objects, like beasts, flowers, monsters, humans, tools, etc. Ordinaries are basic geometrical charges (Fess, Pale, Bend, Chevron, Cross, Saltire, etc.) and sub-ordinaires are diminutives of ordinaries (Inescutcheon, Orle, Tressure, Bordure, etc.)

Crest: A three-dimensional object mounted on a helmet and often shown in arms with a wreath and mantling. Like mottoes, crests can be changed at will. Crests fell out of favor in France by the seventeenth century.

Differencing Arms: A change to arms to indicate the arms of younger sons are different from the arms of the eldest son and heir. In French this is called *brisure*, literally, breaking. The French do not have a well-developed system of cadency as in England to show the birth order of sons.

Escutcheon: A small shield used as a charge. Often used to show the arms of a heraldic heiress displayed in the center of her husband's arms (escutcheon of pretense). Also, used to indicate a claimed relationship between families.

Heraldic Heiress: The daughter of an armiger with no brother. Her children are intitled to quarter her father's arms with her husband's arms.

Illegitimacy: In French heraldry, a bastard's arms were often shown using a bend (barre) sinister or baton sinister place over the father's arms.

Impaling Arms: The division of a shield side-by-side (per pale) to display two different arms, usually the husband and the wife's arms. In French heraldry, the arms of spouses are often displayed side-by-side, *accollée*.

Marshalling Arms: The ordering of several arms on a shield to indicate marriage, inheritance, office, or claimed connections. It usually involves quartering of arms.

Ordinary of Arms: Special tool that lets you look up the owner of an arm based on the blazon. Difficult to use without a thorough understanding of how to blazon correctly.

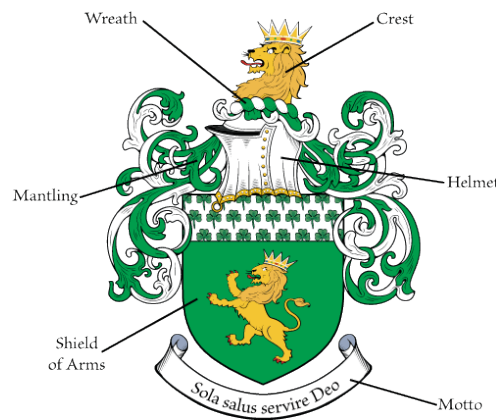
Proofs of Noble Status: In France, evidence submitted to the Judge of Arms or the Genealogist of the King's Orders to prove noble status and/or to enter one of the orders of knighthood or another cherished institution. Arms are often recorded in these documents.

Quartering Arms: The practice of dividing a shield to display more than one coat of arms a person is intitled to own (can be more than just four arms shown).

Roll of Arms: Medieval heralds compiled lists of arms, usually drawings, based on an event or region.

Sigillography: This is the study of seals. Publications dealing with seals often provide the name of the owner, the type of document the seal was attached to, the date, and a description of the seal including any text. However, they usually lack information on tinctures.

Tincture: Colors, metals, and furs used in heraldry. The colors are Gules (red), Azure (blue) Sable (black), Vert (green), etc. The metals are Or (gold or yellow) and Argent (silver or white). The furs are stylized patters representing Ermine (white with black tails), Vair (white with blue pelts), etc. The general rule is that metals appear on colors, not colors on colors or metals on metals. When the French violate the tincture rule this is called *cousu* (stiching), the color is sewn on the color or the metal on a metal.



Parts of a Full Achievement of Arms

Note: In French heraldry helmets were only supposed to be used by nobles, but even commoners tended to use the helmet assigned to knights or squires. Crowns, which were supposed to be reserved for titled nobles, were also often used by others. The French often had not only a motto placed below the shield, but also a war-cry (*cri d'arme*) above the shield. Crest became unpopular by the seventeenth century in France and arms were often displayed only surmounted by a crown. Lastly, it is rare to find the crest or motto recorded for French arms.

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