

## Chapter 3: The shield and what goes on it

**H**eraldry started with designs painted on shields and the shield remains the main focus of the heraldic achievement. You can have a shield without a crest (or any of the other bits and pieces) but not the other way around. Therefore, we will start our heraldry lesson by talking about the shield.

### TYPES OF SHIELD

In the very early days of heraldry, the shield depicted in the heralds' illustrations was the type actually used in combat or tournament, a simple shape known as the "heater" shape from its resemblance to a pressing-iron. As heraldry became more of an art form, all sorts of odd shapes were devised, many of them having little in common with real shields. In recent times, thankfully, most of these have been abandoned and the simple shape is back in general use. The shape of the shield, however, is left strictly to the artist and has no symbolic or other significance.

*Shield shapes (after Fox-Davies)*



*"Heater" shield*



*XVth century shield*



*Renaissance shield*



*Lance-rest shield*

## TINCTURES—THE COLOURS OF HERALDRY

The early heraldic shield-makers had two main colour constraints: first, they had to use the paints that were available at the time, mostly simple, vivid colours; second, they needed to provide as much contrast as possible between the background of the shield and the devices painted on it. They came up with the following TINCTURES, each listed below with the Norman-French name associated with it:

*Five "Colours"*

Red	—	GULES
Blue	—	AZURE
Green	—	VERT (pronounced "Virt")
Black	—	SABLE
Purple	—	PURPURE

*Two "Metals"*

Silver	—	ARGENT <sup>1</sup>
Gold	—	OR

As time went on, a few other colours were added to the heraldic palette, but the ones listed above are still far and away the commonest. The most generally-observed rule of heraldry (based on the need for contrast) is that A COLOUR MUST GO ON A METAL AND A METAL ON A COLOUR, not metal-on-metal or colour-on-colour. An exception to the rule is permitted where a device is shown in its natural colours (PROPER), although common-sense would suggest not painting a "proper" white swan on a white field!

## THE FURS

The great popularity of heraldry required later heraldic designers to come up with the FURS as alternatives to the tinctures. There are two traditional ones: ERMINE, representing the white fur and black tails of the animal; and VAIR, representing squirrel-skins with back- and belly-furs placed alternately—normally shown as blue and white. Each of the furs has a number of colour variations, each with its own name, but the two originals are by far the commonest in use.

<sup>1</sup> Because at the time there was no satisfactory silver paint, ARGENT was (and generally still is) represented as white. The metal OR is usually shown as real gold-leaf or as yellow.

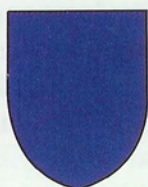


A CANADIAN HERALDIC PRIMER

THE COLOURS



*Gules*



*Azure*



*Vert*



*Sable*



*Purpure*

THE METALS

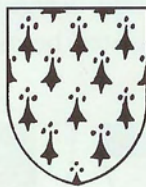


*Argent*

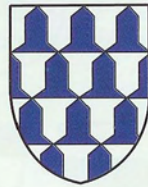


*Or*

THE FURS



*Ermine*



*Vair*

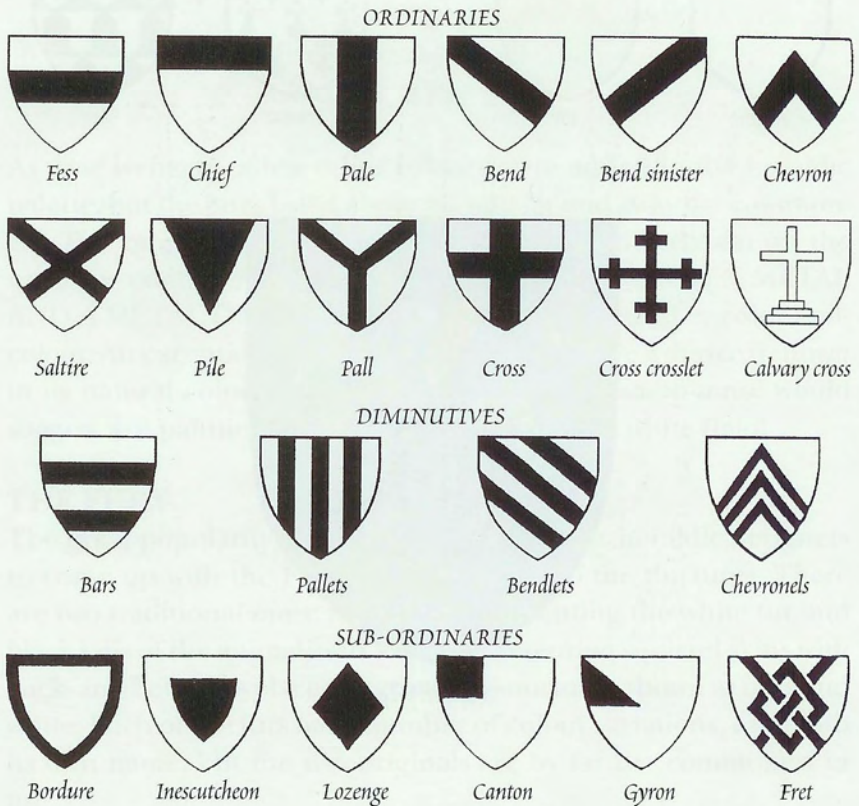


*A damsel proper*

## GEOMETRICAL DESIGNS—THE ORDINARIES

Early heraldry developed a number of simple geometric designs which came to be known as the ORDINARIES. The main ones are as follows: the FESS, the CHIEF, the PALE, the BEND, the BEND SINISTER<sup>2</sup>, the CHEVRON, the SALTIRE, the PILE, the PALL and the CROSS.

Most of the Ordinaries have narrow versions or DIMINUTIVES such as the BAR, the PALLET, the BENDLET, and the CHEVRONEL, while the Cross (the symbol of the crusades) has at least a hundred varieties, such as the CROSS CROSSLET and the CALVARYCROSS. In addition to the Ordinaries, there are a number of other geometrical designs known as SUB-ORDINARIES, some of which are illustrated below.

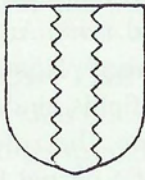


<sup>2</sup> So-called because the upper part originates in the SINISTER (left) side of the shield. In describing arms, left (SINISTER) and right (DEXTER) are considered from the point of view of the bearer of the shield, not that of the observer.

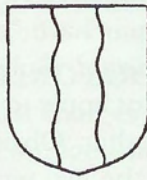


**LINES OF PARTITION**

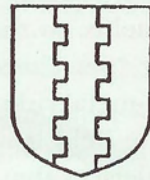
As it became necessary to distinguish similar designs within a single family, artists developed what are called **LINES OF PARTITION** to replace the simple outlines of the various geometrical devices. A number of these are illustrated below, using the pale as an example. Such lines could be used to distinguish the arms of various branches of a family without altering the basic design of the shield.



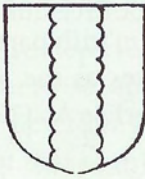
*Indented*



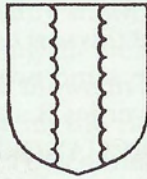
*Wavy*



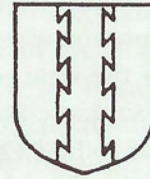
*Embattled*



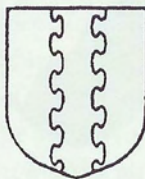
*Invected*



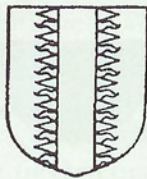
*Engrailed*



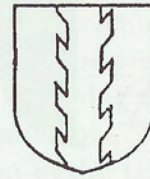
*Dovetailed*



*Nebuly*



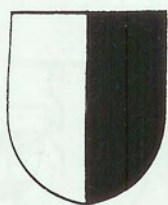
*Rayonné*



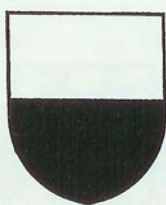
*Raguly*

## PARTED SHIELDS

Sometimes a shield will be shown as divided into roughly equal parts, each of a different tincture. Such a shield is known as **PARTED** or **PARTY**. If the line separating the two sections goes the same way as a Pale, the **FIELD** or background is said to be **PARTY PER PALE** (often shortened to **PER PALE**) of such and such colours and the same applies to lines following the general shapes of the other Ordinaries. (The only exception is that a field parted per cross is known as **QUARTERLY**). The lines of partition may also apply to parted shields, so that we may have “per bend *wavy*, Argent and Sable”, or “per chevron *indented*, Gules and Vert”. Note that the colour-on-metal rule does not apply to parted fields, since neither part of the field is *on* the other. Obviously, too, the rule cannot apply to devices that *overlie* the two sections of a parted field, but here again, common sense should rule; one would avoid placing a white bull overlying a black and white parted field, since one half of your bull would virtually disappear against the white part of the field. A common way to avoid this sort of problem with parted fields is to have the charge in the same two tinctures as the field, but reversed, so that colour A overlies B and B overlies A. The charge here is said to be **COUNTERCHANGED**.



*Per pale*



*Per fess*



*Per bend wavy*



*Per chevron indented*



*Unhappy monochrome bull*



*Happy counter-changed bull*