

Guidelines for Heraldry 1

Coats of arms and other heraldic devices may occur in any section a Church Record, carved in stone or wood, engraved on silver, printed on bookplates or covers, adorning textiles, pictures, tiles or windows. **Most Recorders will need expert help in order to blazon (ie to describe in proper terms) the arms correctly.**

Aim to record coats of arms accurately. Do what you can to identify the arms, making it quite clear whether the identification is correct or whether it is questionable and whether the bearer was indeed entitled to the arms displayed.

Recording

When recording armorial bearings always enlist the help of someone with knowledge of heraldry. **Do not** use heraldic terms or attempt blazoning until you have consulted a local expert (see list held by your Group Leader). Ask them to blazon the heraldry, sending a clear colour photograph of the arms (with SAE) or a digital image via email if they cannot visit the church. Acknowledge the expert's assistance in the Record.

You may have a shield or a crest only, a shield with crest, or a whole **achievement**, which has a helmet and draperies (**mantling**) between shield and crest, and perhaps **supporters** at the sides, a **motto** beneath, occasionally the insignia of an order. See illustration in *Inside Churches*, Heraldry section.

Often a shield will show the arms of two families side by side, those on the **dexter** (left hand for the viewer) being the husband's arms **impaling** the arms of his wife on the **sinister** (right hand for the viewer). Less frequently, but still quite common, the shield is quartered. The fourth quarter often repeats the first, while the second and third quarters show the arms of other families connected by blood. On tombs of the 16th century you will find heraldry used to boast of numbers of important ancestors, shields crammed with up to 32 "quarters".

If a wife is an heraldic heiress her arms occupy a small shield in the centre of the large one – an **escutcheon of pretence**. In the Royal Arms of Georges I to IV the arms of their kingdom of Hanover appear in an escutcheon of pretence.

Where arms are displayed on a lozenge instead of a shield this indicates that they are the arms of a woman. Do not confuse such a lozenge with a **hatchment** which is also lozenge-shaped. The series of volumes by Peter Summers called *Hatchments in Britain* (full set at NADFAS House, see Bibliography in Church Recorders Handbook) will describe any hatchments in a church. This is mainly accurate but there are occasional errors.

Colours (**tinctures**) play an important part in identifying arms. If the representation is uncoloured – as on a brass, or a bookplate, or on unpainted stone, look carefully for any hatchings. These represent the colours in a standard way (shown in *Inside Churches*). If the arms are coloured, check whether they tally with the family's usual colours – re-paintings over the ages can depart from original colours, and even from original devices (eagles have been known to become cocks). **Whenever there is a discrepancy, record it.** See Memorials Sample Pages for an example of how to do this. All initial letters of colours must be in caps and the names given in full. If the arms are uncoloured and not hatched but the tinctures are known then the names of the tinctures must be bracketed eg (Or) in the recording.

Remember that blazons must be indented in the Record. For the correct way to set them out consult Sample Pages and the Heraldry paragraph in General Information for Recorders. in the Church Recorders Handbook.

Identification

The value of the Record can be enhanced if the arms can be identified. Remember it is important to indicate whether the identification is certain or partly informed guesswork.

Guidelines for Heraldry 2

On a memorial, an identification is usually achieved via the inscription but remember that the arms may not be correctly represented. The family name must only follow a correct blazon. If there is some discrepancy then the name must not be attached to the blazon. The family name is recorded in square brackets eg [SMITH]

An impalement or quarterings will probably display the wife's arms which may also be gleaned from a memorial inscription.

Other sources for identification of arms include

- other memorials or tombs in church or churchyard
- parish registers
- local history records
- Burke's *General Armory* (see Bibliography). This lists names of families with their arms. Useful but not entirely reliable
- *Papworth's Ordinary of Arms* (see Bibliography). This is the reverse of Burke, giving arms with lists of families said to have borne them. Also not entirely reliable

Reading a Peerage, such as *Debrett* is a simple way to familiarise yourself with the heraldic way of blazoning. Each family's coat of arms is both illustrated and described in the official language. You can then follow more easily the blazoning which your heraldry expert provides.

See the Bibliography for further reading.