

Symbolisms of Heraldry

The following *coat of arms symbols* have been excerpted from W. Cecil Wade's "The Symbolisms of Heraldry or A Treatise on the Meanings and Derivations of Armorial Bearings".
Published in London in 1898.

Colors and Metals

Or, yellow or gold - Generosity.

Argent, white or silver - Peace and sincerity.

Sable or black - Constancy, sometimes grief.

Azure or blue - Loyalty and truth.

Gules or red - Military fortitude and magnanimity.

Vert or green - Hope, joy and sometimes loyalty in love.

Purpure, purple - Royal majesty, sovereignty and justice.

Tenne or tawney - Worthy ambition.

Murray or sanguine - Not hasty in battle, and yet a victor.

Heraldic Lines

Nebulee or Nebuly - The sea or water.

Engrailed and Invected - Earth or land.

Indented - Fire.

Dancette - Water.

Ragulee or Raguly - Difficulties which have been encountered.

Embattled - Fire or the walls of a fortress or town.

Ordinaries

Chief - Dominion and authority.

Cross - Chevron - Protection.

Fess - Military belt or girdle of honor.

Bar - For "one who sets the bar of conscience, religion and honor against angry passions.

Pale - Military strength and fortitude.

Palet - Same as Pale.

Pile - Same as Pale.

Canton - Bearing of honor. When borne charged, it often contains some special symbols granted by the sovereign in reward for the performance of eminent service.

Quarter - Bearing of honor. Similar to the Canton.

Bend - Defense or protection.

Battune Sinister - Marks a royal descent that is barred by illegitimacy from succession to the throne.

Orle or Tressure - Preservation or protection.

Flasques - Given by a king for virtue and learning, and especially for service in embassy.

Voiders - Given to gentlewomen who have deserved highly.

Bordure or Border - Frequently adopted as a "difference" between relatives bearing the same arms.

Gyron - Unity.

Common Charges

Lion - Deathless courage.

Tiger - Great fierceness and valor when enraged to combat; one whose resentment will be dangerous if aroused.

Bear - Ferocity in the protection of kindred.

Wolf - Denotes valiant captains that do in the end gain their attempts after long sieges and hard enterprises. One whom it is dangerous to assail or thwart.

Rhinoceros - Great ferocity when aroused.

Elephant - Courage and strength.

Heraldic Tiger - Same as Tiger.

Leopard - Valiant and hardy warrior.

Panther - As a lion may be said to signify a brave man, so may a panther a beautiful woman, which, though fierce, is very tender and loving to her young, and will defend it with the hazard of her life.

Horse - Readiness for all employments for king and country.

Bull or Ox - Valor and magnanimity.

Boar - A fierce combatant when at bay, and ceases fighting only with its life, and therefore may be properly applied as the armorial bearing of a warrior.

Goat - Emblem of that martial man who wins a victory by the employment rather of policy than valor.

Lamb - Gentleness and patience under suffering.

Ram - Authority.

Hares and Rabbits - One who enjoys a peaceable and retired life.

Squirrel - Sylvan retirement being the delight of its bearer.

Hedgehog - Provident provider.

Beaver - Industry and perseverance.

Fox - One who will use all that he may possess of sagacity, wit or wisdom in his own defense.

Talbot, Mastiff and Greyhound - Courage, vigilancy and loyal fidelity.

Cat or Cat-A-Mountain - Liberty, vigilance, forecast and courage.

Camel - Docility, patience and indefatigable perseverance.

Bee - Well-governed industry.

Ant - Symbolizes a man of great labor, wisdom and providence.

Spider - Wisdom, labor and providence in all affairs.

Grasshopper - Wisdom and nobility.

House Snail - Deliberation and perseverance.

Double Eagle and Eagle - Signifies a man of action, ever more occupied in high and weighty affairs, and one of lofty spirit, ingenious, speedy in apprehension and judicious in matters of ambiguity.

Alerion - Signifies one who having been maimed and lamed in war, was thus prevented from fully asserting his power.

Wings - Celebrity, sometimes protection or coverture.

Feathers (usually ostrich) - Willing obedience and serenity.

Falcon or Hawk - One eager or hot in the pursuit of an object much desired.

Hawks or Falcons Bells - One who feared not to signal his approach in either peace or war.

Owl - One who is vigilant and of acute wit.

Peacock - Beauty and pride of carriage.

Pelican - Devoted and self-sacrificing charity.

Stork - Filial duty, emblem of a grateful man.

Swan - A lover of poetry and harmony.

Goose and Duck - A man of many resources.

Gannet - To subsist by the wings of his virtue and merit, having little land to rest upon.

Swallow - One who is prompt and ready in the dispatch of his business.

Cock - Courage, always ready for battle, ready to fight to the death.

Dove - Loving constancy and peace.

Raven - One who, having derived little from his ancestors, has through Providence become the architect of his own fortunes or one of an enduring constancy of nature.

Crow - Signifies a settled habitation and a quiet life.

Dolphin - Charity and a kind affection towards children.

Tortoise - Invulnerability to attack.

Unicorn - Extreme courage.

Griffin - Sets forth the property of a valorous soldier whose magnanimity is such that he will dare all dangers, and even death itself, rather than become captive.

Dragon - A most valiant defender of treasure.

Cockatrice - Terror to all beholders.

Sphinx - Omniscience and secrecy.

Pegasus - Exceeding activity and energy of mind whereby one may mount to honour.

Harpy - Ferocity under provocation.

Mermaid - Eloquence.

Centuar - For those who have been eminent in the field.

Hydra - The conquest of a very powerful enemy.

Phoenix - Resurrection.

Stag, Hart, Buck and Deer - Policy, Peace and Harmony.

Horns and Antlers - Strength and Fortitude.

Escallop Shell - One who has made long journeys or voyages to far countries, who had borne considerable naval command or who had gained great victories.

Other Shells - Protection of Providence.

Heart - Charity, sincerity.

Flaming Heart - Ardent affection.

Hand - Faith, sincerity and justice.

Red Hand - Usual mark for a baronet if borne on a small escutcheon.

Arm - A laborious and industrious person.

Gauntlet - Signify a man armed for the performance of martial enterprise.

Leg - Strength, stability and expedition.

Shoe - Same as Leg.

Foot - Same as leg.

Human Head - Honor.

Blackamoor Head - Deeds of prowess in the Crusades.

Skulls - Mortality.

Crossed Thigh-bones - Mortality.

Eye - Providence in Government.

Millstones - The mutual converse of human society.

Sceptre - Justice.

Trident - Maritime dominion.

Crown - Royal or seigniorial authority.

Celestial Crown - Heavenly reward.

Pastoral Crosier - The emblem of a shepherd's watchfulness over his flock, and denotes episcopal jurisdiction and authority.

Annulet or Finger Ring - Fidelity.

Lozenge - Honesty and constancy, also held to be a token of noble birth.

Billets - Their first bearer was a man who obtained credence, knowledge and faith in his words and deeds, and who was secret in his affairs.

Pen - Emblematic of the liberal art of writing and of learned employments.

Inkhorn - Same as pen.

Harp - Contemplation.

Lyre - Same as harp.

Scythe - Hope of a fruitful harvest of things hoped for.

Sickle - Same as Scythe.

Anchor - Succor in extremity and the Christian symbol of hope.

Ship, Lumphiad or Galley - All such symbols would point to some notable expedition by sea, by which, perhaps, the first bearers had become famous.

Cubes, squares or dice - Constancy, wisdom, verity probity, and equity.

Lozenge - Same as Cubes.

Axe -- Execution of military duty.

Purse - A frank and liberal steward of the blessings that God has bestowed .

Tower or Castle - Grandeur and solidity. Sometimes granted to one who has held one for his king, or who has captured one by force or stratagem.

Bridge - Signifies a governor or magistrate.

Pillar or Column - Fortitude and constancy.

Snake - Wisdom.

Scaling Ladder - One who was fearless in attacking.

Crosses - Symbolic of some Christian experience or sentiment.

Trestles and stools - Hospitality.

Cushions - Marks of authority.

Angels, Cherubs and Seraphs - Dignity, glory and honor.

Estoiles - Emblems of God's goodness or of some eminence in the first bearer above the ruder sort of men.

Mullet - Denotes some Divine quality bestowed from above.

Gold Spur - Dignity of knighthood.

Silver Spur - An esquire.

Sun - Glory and splendor.

Crescent - Signifies one who has been enlightened and honored by the gracious aspect of his sovereign.

Moon - Serene power over mundane actions.

Fire - Zeal.

Lightning - The effecting of some weighty business with great clarity and force.

Rocks - Safety, refuge and protection.

Portcullis - Effectual protection in emergency.

Hunting Horn - One who is fond of high pursuits.

Trumpet - Ready for the fray.

Cannon, Mortars, Cannon Balls and Grenades - Well bestowed on those who have dared their terrors in sieges and battles.

Sword - Indicates the bearer to a just and generous pursuit of honor and virtue in warlike deeds.

Arrows and Arrowheads - Martial readiness.

Spear or Lance - Knightly service and devotion to honor.

Spear Heads or Pheons - Dexterity and nimbleness of wit to penetrate and understand matters of highest consequence.

Shield - A defender.

Saddles, Stirrups and Spurs - Preparedness for active service.

Horse Shoe - Good luck.

Trunk of a Tree - An object of veneration.

Fusil - Travel and labour.

Shacklebolt - Victory in war.

Water Bougets - Conferred on those who had brought water to an army or besieged place.

Catharine Wheel - Emblem of one who is prepared to undergo great trials for the Christian faith.

Escarbuncle - Supremacy.

Buckles - Victorious fidelity in authority.

Clarion or Rest - Same as Trumpet.

Beacons or Cressets - One who is watchful for the commonwealth or who gave the signal in time of danger.

Chains - A reward for acceptable or weighty service.

Fusil of Yarn - Negotiation.

Fret - Persuasion

Gold Roundles - One who has been found worthy of trust and treasure.

White Roundles - Generosity.

Wheel - Fortune.

Cornucopia - Bounty of Nature's gifts.

Chaplets and Wreaths - Granted for special service