

# Welsh Heraldry

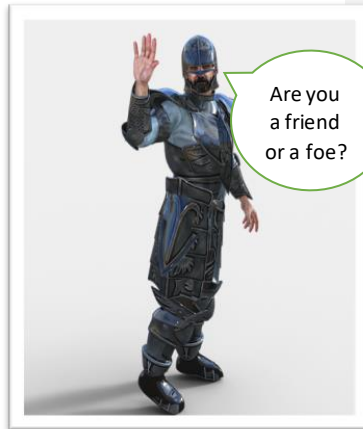


## BACKGROUND

### What is heraldry?

**Heraldry** is the system by which **armorial bearings** or **armorial achievements** (also just called arms) are developed, described, and regulated. Arms came into use when armour, including helmets, developed to cover a soldier from head to foot making him otherwise unrecognizable. In order to be able to tell a friend from a foe on the battlefield, to recognise who was in charge of the battle, and to recognise who your opponents were, soldiers began to paint brightly coloured symbols on their armour and shields. These arms included specific colours and shapes in addition to symbols of a person's family, their personal accomplishments, their rank in society, and even occasionally a pun.

In this activity we are going to learn about the origins of heraldry, the basic shapes and symbols on armorial achievements which we will call **Arms**, the primary differences between Welsh and English arms, and then use this information to develop your own personal Arms. **Task Time: 2 Hours.**



### Medieval Wales

By the middle of the eleventh century, Wales was made up of major regions like **Gwynedd**, **Powys**, **Deheubarth** and **Morgannwg**, and other smaller regions like **Gwent**, **Brycheiniog** and **Rhwng Gwy a Hafren**. These regions were known as kingdoms and each had their own king.



Because there were so many kings in one country this led to constant fighting, as each kingdom attempted to be the most powerful in Wales. The smaller regions and Morgannwg were later absorbed by the major regions or by English invasion during the medieval period. Rulers like Llywelyn ap Iorwerth who was also known as Llywelyn the Great (1173-1240) conquered and ruled most of Wales. His grandson Llywelyn ap Gruffudd or Llywelyn the Last (1223-1282) also held large parts of Wales throughout his reign. Gwynedd became the most powerful kingdom in early medieval Wales until the English conquest of Wales that occurred between 1277 – 1283.

Wales c. 1063-1081

Wales c. 1217

Yellow = Lands ruled by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth

Grey = Lands ruled by other Princes for Llywelyn's

Green = Lands controlled by England



**Key Terms:**

**Heraldry** is the system by which armorial bearings or armorial achievements (also just called arms) are developed, described, and regulated.

**Arms:** Also called **Armorial Charges** or **Armorial Bearings** are the colours, shapes, symbols on a shield.

**ap:** is Welsh for "son of". Llywelyn ap Gruffudd = Llywelyn son of Gruffudd. The Welsh word for "daughter of" is "ferch".

**Differences between English and Welsh Heraldry**

The first record of **heralds**, a person employed to oversee the use of arms and ceremonies, is in 1170 as officials at jousts. Jousts were a type of war-game that were included in tournaments. By 1418, King Henry V issued a writ (law) stating that no one could have a coat of arms unless they had been granted it by the king or it had been inherited from an ancestor. As a result, families across Great Britain began to research and to assign Arms to their ancestors.



Y Groes Nawdd or 'The Cross of Neith' used by Welsh rulers.



Royal arms of Deheubarth which was later inherited by the Earls of Shrewsbury through marriage.

Gules a Lion rampant or within a bordure engrailed

Welsh and English heraldry developed side by side because of contact with Anglo-Norman knights who already used heraldry. Arms were like a personal signature in medieval times rather than a family indicator. In Wales, most Arms are related to ancient **Seals**. Seals were a piece of wax, lead, or other material with an individual design stamped into it, attached to a document like a signature to guarantee authenticity. Seals were used regularly in Wales before Arms became standard.

From 1300 to 1500, a great deal of evidence has survived showing that arms had become common in Wales and could be inherited from an ancestor. Thus, Owen ap Gruffydd bore a lion rampant which one of his many daughters combined into the arms of the House of Cherleton. Welsh heraldry was more concerned with **genealogy** than English heraldry was. Genealogy is the direct line of descent from one person to another. This was because in Wales it was believed that gentility and royalty was inherited from relatives and

could not be granted to a person. This made it important for arms in Wales to have a clear connection to a historically noble family. For example, the eagles of Gwydir which were used by the Wynn family of North Wales was also the proclaimed symbol of Owain ap Gruffudd, who was king of Gwynedd in the 12th century, and of whom the Wynn's were descended from.



**Tangled Terms:** A “coat of arms” is a reference to the heraldic surcoat a knight wears bearing his arms.

Eagles of Gwydir  
*Vert, three eagles displayed in fess Or*

An example of a heraldic surcoat. Imagine how visible this knight would be on a battlefield, he could easily be identified among other knights due to the design and bright colours.

**Key Terms:**

**Herald:** an official employed to oversee the use of armorial bearings, and to oversee tournaments, make proclamations, and carry official messages.

**Coat of Arms:** a surcoat used to cover armour that includes armorial bearings.

**Seal:** a piece of wax, lead, or other material with an individual design stamped into it, attached to a document as a guarantee of authenticity. Seals were used regularly in Wales before Arms became standard.

**Blazon:** a description or depiction of armorial bearings in a correct heraldic manner.

### A very brief history of British Heraldry

#### ❖ 12th Century

The earliest known Shield in England was that which King Henry I gave his son-in-law, Geoffrey of Anjou, when he knighted him in 1127. This is the first arms recorded as passing from one person to another. 1170 brought the first record of heralds as officials at jousts part of war-games known as tournaments.

#### ❖ 13th Century

Heraldry rose with the popularity of tournaments and was so well practiced across Europe that it acquired rules and terminology which are the basis of its present laws and language. Specialists in this field became known as **Heralds** who were also responsible for keeping rolls or records of arms.

#### ❖ 15th Century

In 1418 a writ (law) was issued by Henry V stating no one could use a coat of arms unless they had a grant from a king or had inherited the arms from an ancestor. England incorporated the College of Arms in 1484. Its duty was to standardise, record, and regulate arms so there was no duplication. Tournaments required both a

display of arms and proof of ancestry. Arms became more lavish to distinguish one knight from another with Mottos, Mantling, Helms, Crests, and Supporters appearing.

❖ **16th Century**

With the passing of the tournaments, heraldry changed from a functional art to one of decoration. Mottos, Mantling, Helms, Crests, and Supporters became more elaborate.

❖ **19th Century**

The Victorian Age brought about a medieval revival of simple heraldic design.

## Terminology and Rules of Heraldry

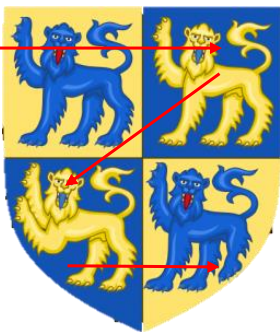
### Blazon

The blazon is the written description of arms, they are described using a mix of Norman French, Latin and English. The description tells the reader the colours, what the devices are and how they are positioned on the escutcheon. This is so the person can know what the arms look like without seeing an image of it. The description starts from the top left-hand corner and moves down left to right.

### Blazon descriptions:

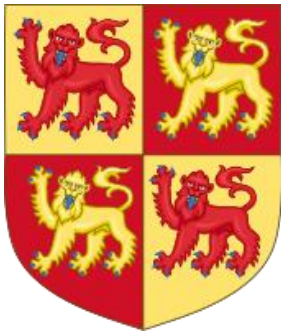
- Escutcheon = the shield
- Field = the front of the escutcheon (shield) where the design also called Charge is
- Charge= the primary design on a Field
- Lozenge = a diamond shape
- Attitudes = the term for positions of supporters or charges
- Tinctures = colours and metals used in heraldry

### Examples:



Arms of Dafydd ap Gruffudd, the brother of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.

The directions of the arrows show the order of how the shield is described, starting with the background i.e. the field



Arms of Gwynedd which had been associated with Llywelyn ap Gruffudd or Llywelyn the Last, who was the last official Prince of Wales.

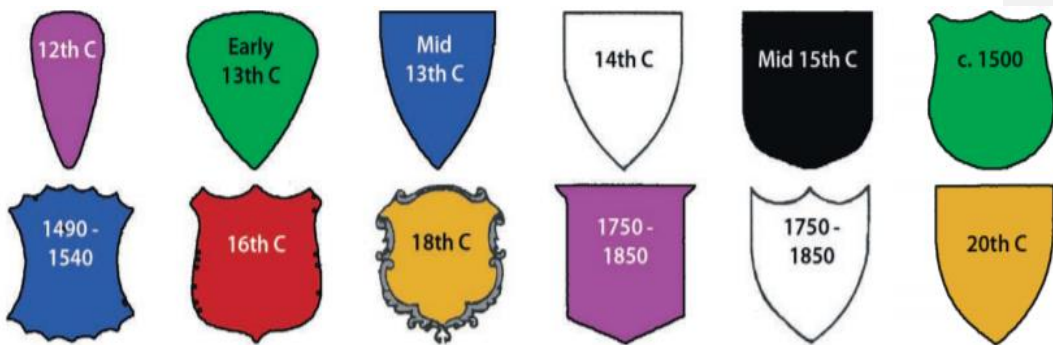
The Blazon for this shield would be: **Per quarterly or and gules four lions passant guardant counterchanged.**

**Key:**

Counterchanged = the colours of the charge (lion) are opposite to the colour of the divided field

Shapes

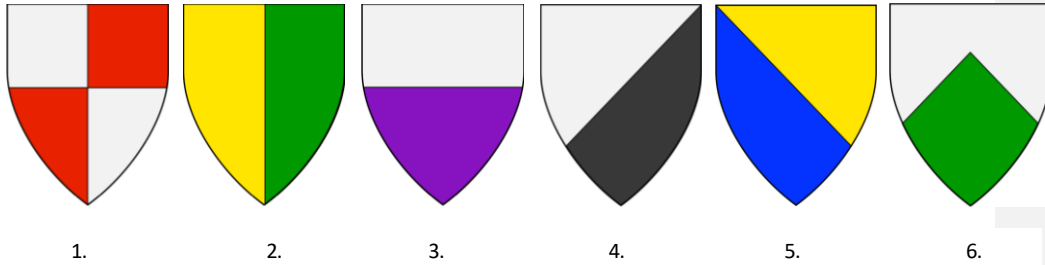
In coats of arms the main designs are displayed on a shield, due to their origins in warfare. The shape of the shield (**escutcheon**) varies over time as shown below, but the front of the shield (**field**) is always the area where the design is displayed.



Divisions of the Field

Divisions of the field means how the front of the escutcheon is divided up, there are many different ways of doing this so only some of the most common examples are shown.

1. *Per quarterly*: the field is divided into four equal sections
2. *Per pale*: The field is divided in half vertically
3. *Per Fess*: The field is divided in half horizontally
4. *Per bend*: The field is divided diagonally from the top right-hand corner
5. *Per bend sinister*: The Field is divided diagonally from the top left-hand corner
6. *Per chevron*: The field is divided by a chevron in the centre

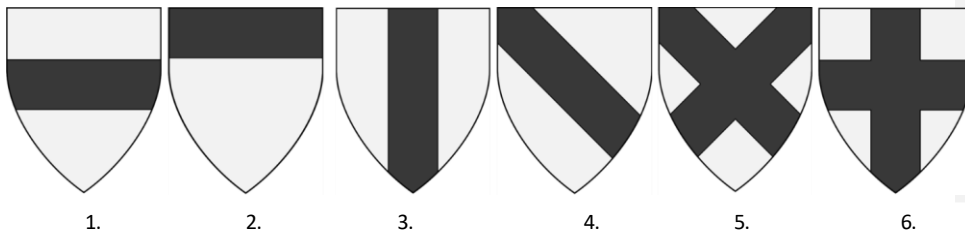


### Ordinaries

These are simple geometric shapes that are put on the field of the escutcheon, while they may look like divisions of the field, they are in fact different because they are part of the design of the arms rather than a structure of it. A way to tell the difference is by the description of the arms, called the **Blazon**, as ordinaries do not have 'Per' beforehand like divisions do. Again, only some of the types are shown below.

1. *Fess*: A thick line across the field horizontally
2. *Chief*: A thick line horizontally across the top of the field
3. *Pale*: A thick line vertically down the centre of the field
4. *Bend*: A thick line diagonally across the field from the left-hand corner
5. *Saltire*: Two thick lines crossing diagonally in the centre of the field
6. *Cross*: A horizontal and a vertical line crossing in the centre of the field

Commented [RH1]: This should be bend sinister



### Lines of Division

The lines involved on the field don't always have to be straight lines. The edges of divisions and ordinaries can have ornamental patterns as long as its repetitive.

Some examples of different lines used are:

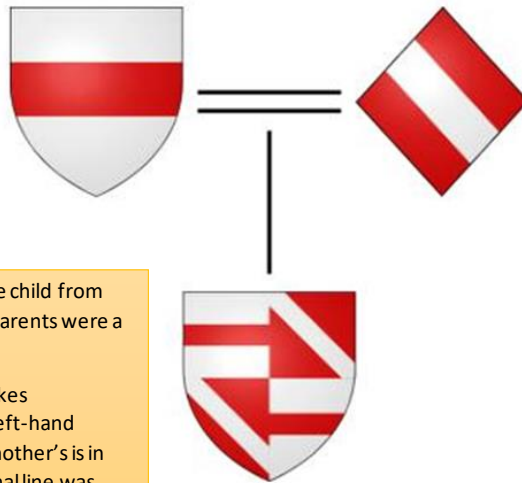
1. *Indented*: small zig-zags
2. *Wavy*: big waves
3. *Embattled*: half squares connected on a line



4. *Raguly*: half squares slanted connected on a line

Quartering

Quartering is when arms of different people are combined to make one new escutcheon, this is usually done for the children of a couple who both have rights arms, in order to show both sides of their family. This process can become very complicated so this example is the simplest form it can be.



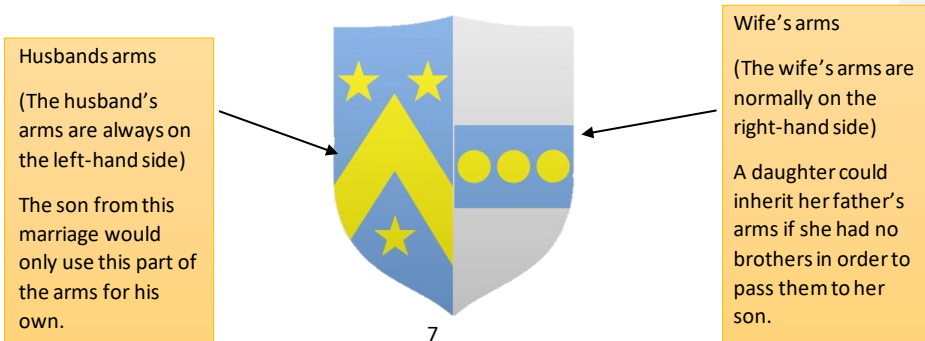
This shows what the shield of the child from this pair would look like if both parents were a heraldic heir/heirress.  
 Notice that the father's shield takes precedence by being in the top left-hand corner of the child's, while the mother's is in second place because the paternal line was viewed as more important.

Women and Arms

The first Grant of arms to a woman came about in 1558 and was granted to Dame Mary Mathews. Women already could inherit or carry the arms from their father, as was the case with the daughter of Owain ap Gruffudd mentioned above. They were also allowed to pass arms down to their children. In 1561 a regulation was put in place so that single women and widows used a lozenge shaped shield. A married woman had the option to carry either her own arms or that of her husband.

Impaling

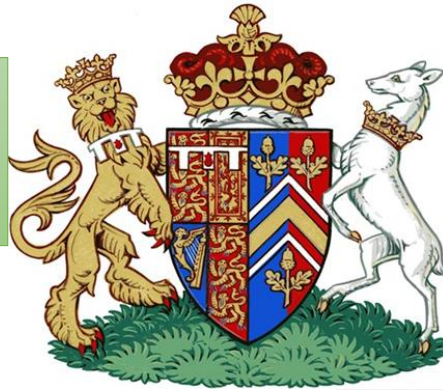
Impaling is the process where two sets of arms are combined onto one escutcheon, side by side. This usually happens once a couple have married; they combine their arms to show the union of the families. This is also used when the wife is a heraldic heiress, a daughter could inherit her father's arms if she had no brothers in order to pass them to her son. The first son from the marriage will only use their father's arms.



Arms of the Duchess of Cambridge before she married Prince William



The Duchess of Cambridge's arms after her marriage to Prince William. It shows her arms next to those of Prince William with her own supporter. This is known as impaling.



### Graphical Charges

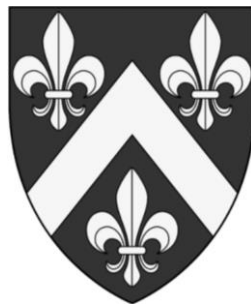
As more and more people began bearing arms, there needed to be more ways to distinguish social ranks and individuals from the same family. Therefore, graphical charges were created, these included all forms of animals, people, plants, objects and mythical creatures. These also allowed the person to further express themselves, for example, a military man may have swords on his shield. The charges can be in heraldic colours or in their natural colour, where they are referred to as "proper".



Arms of Hedd Molwynog, a descendant of Rhodri Mawr who was king of Gwynedd in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Hedd is similar to the word hydd which means stag, so its suggested that this was the reason behind the arms.

Blazon: *Sable a stag passant argent attired or*



Arms of Collwyn ap Tangno, a medieval lord in North Wales. He was decedant of Cunedda who was ruler of Gwentydd in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Blazon: *Sable a chevron between thre fluer de lis argent*



### Mottos

Armorial bearings will often have a motto written underneath the shield, they often descended from war cries which were used on the battlefield in order to rally the troops. For example, Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd was wife to Gruffudd ap Rhys, and mother of Lord Rhys. Gwenllian's husband was away in Gwynedd when a Norman army attacked Dehubarth, South Wales in 1136. Gwenllian led an army of Welsh soldiers into battle against the Normans at Kidwelly. She was killed in battle. Years after her death Welsh soldiers would shout "For Gwenllian" or "Revenge for Gwenllian" before going into battle. These battle cries are the basis of mottos. They are most often written in Latin but can be in English, French, and Welsh. In Scotland the mottos are written above the crest.



Example: **Mostyn family** of North Wales

**Motto:** *Auxilium Meum A Domino => My Help is from God*

### Mantling

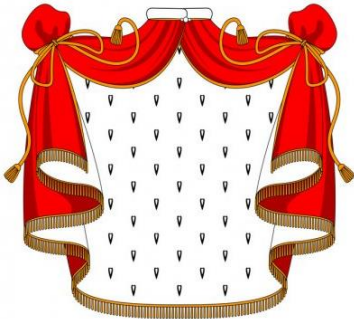
Mantling is a decorative part of a coat of arms, which surrounds the crest, it could contrast with the shield but often matched or complimented it. This became a lot more extravagant in the seventeenth and eighteenth century as the mantling was drawn to look more like **foliage** rather than a piece of cloth. Some families from ancient nobility didn't approve of this practice so chose to stick with the simpler designs of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.



Example: **Llandudno Coat of Arms** granted in 1959

Notice the blue and white mantling which matches with the waves on the shield, also the arms include two lions from the Gwynedd arms that were used by some kings of Gwynedd

The Llandudno town motto is "hardd, hafan, hedd" in Welsh means "a beautiful haven of peace".



This is an example of what mantling can also look like, but it is less common due to the changes in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

### Helms

Most coats of arms have a helm above the shield, these are variants of a knight's helmet. They also show the rank of the person by the design and position of the helm.



Sovereign



Peer e.g. Duke, Viscount



Knight



Esquire

### Crests

Arms can have a crest which sits above the helm and can be different forms of crowns or coronets, which dictate the rank of the person such as duke or count. It can also be figures such as animals, a bible, a figure like a feather, a coronet, or any combination of these things.



Cirlet of the Prince of Wales

#### Badge of Wales graded in 2008

It includes St. Edward's Crown, which is the crown of the monarch showing that Wales is under the crown of the United Kingdom.

The Mantling around the Badge of Wales represents the English Rose, the Welsh Leek, the Irish Clover, and the Scottish Thistle.

Motto: *Pleidiol Wyf I'm Gwlad* is Welsh for "I am true to my country"





**Coat of arms of Conwy**

The Crest is oak sprigs with a red demi-dragon holding a bible with a Celtic cross

Motto: Tegwch i bawb in Welsh means "Fairness to All"

**Key:**

**Circlet:** the metal ring/base of a crown or coronet without a cap (piece of fabric on the inside)

**Coronet:** a small crown which signifies a person's rank

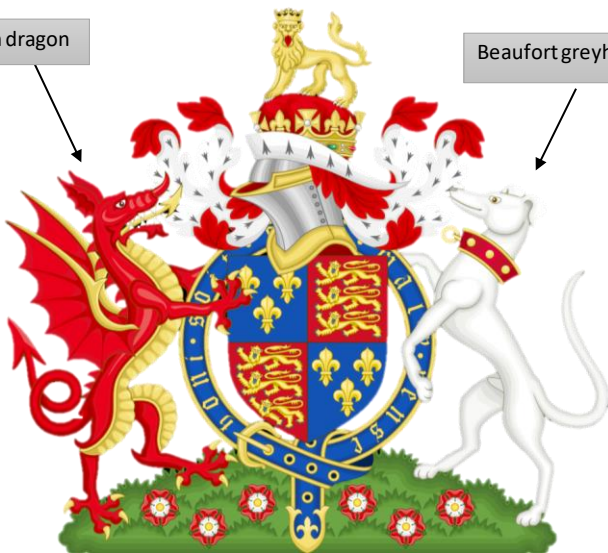
**Sprig:** a small shoot/twig of a plant

**Supporters**

Supporters are the figures that are on either side of an escutcheon on arms. They support the shield by holding it upright or by protecting it. These figures are most often animals and can be real or fictional. Like other parts of arms, supporters were often used to describe the owner or tell about their heritage.

Welsh dragon

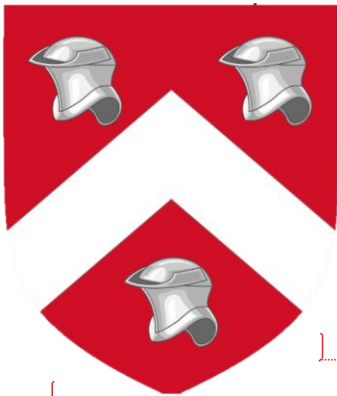
Beaufort greyhound



**Coat of arms of Henry VII**, who was king of England but had Welsh ancestors through his father's family.

Henry VII descended from Ednyfed Fychan, who was a Welsh nobleman and warrior that served some of the kings of Gwynedd, like Llywelyn the Great.

The supporters are a Welsh dragon and a greyhound. These supporters were used to show Henry VII's Welsh heritage and the greyhound is a symbol of his mother's family (the Beauforts), which gave him his claim to the English throne.



**The Tudor arms before Henry Tudor became Henry VII.**

These are the arms used by Ednyfed Fychan who was a Welsh nobleman from North Wales. The arms were granted to him by King Llywelyn the Great for killing three Englishmen. The helms were originally three severed heads but after the English conquest they were converted to helms.

Blazon: *Gules a chevron between three helmets argent*

**Commented [RH]2:** I'm unsure if Llywelyn the Great should be referred to as King, because I don't think they are not often referred to as kings and I don't know if it would cause confusion later in their learning.

**Attitudes of supporters and charges**

Supporters and charges on escutcheon can be shown in a variety of positions, which are referred to as attitudes. Our example shows a lion but these attitudes are used for all supporters and charges regardless of what animal they are.

1. Rampant: standing upright with three legs raised
2. Rampant Guardant: standing upright looking out from the shield (**Note: Guardant can be added to any other position if the figure is looking out from the arms or shield**)
3. Passant: on three legs with one front leg raised
4. Statant: on all fours
5. Salient: standing upright with two front legs raised
6. Couchant: lying down with front legs stretched out in front
7. Sejant: sitting with head raised



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



Part of the **Mostyn coat of arms** which shows a lion rampant

*Per bend ermine and ermines with a lion rampant or*

If only half of the figure is shown that is known as “demi”. For example, half of a lion would be known as demi-lion. These are often used as a crest on a arms, like supporters and charges, these can be any creature, real or mythical.



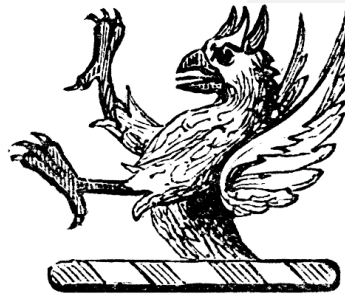
#### Flintshire coat of arms

This design is based off the arms of Edwin of Tegaingl who owned land where Flintshire is today and formed one of the royal tribes of North Wales.

The crest is a demi-dragon holding the feather of the Prince of Wales.

Blazon: Argent on a Cross enrailed fleury Sable between four Cornish Choughs proper a Masle of the field between four Plates

Motto: 'Gorau Tarian, Cyfiawnder - The best shield is justice.



Demi-griffin

**Activity:** Label the crest, mantling, helm, supporter, shield and motto on the coat of arms of Anglesey below.



### Tinctures

Originally the colours for coats of arms were limited due to pigments and dyes being expensive, but over time as more arms developed, more colours became available.

Original colours:

- Gules (Gu) Red
- Vert (Vt) Green
- Azure (Az) Blue
- Sable (Sa) Black
- Purpure (Purp) Purple

Metals:

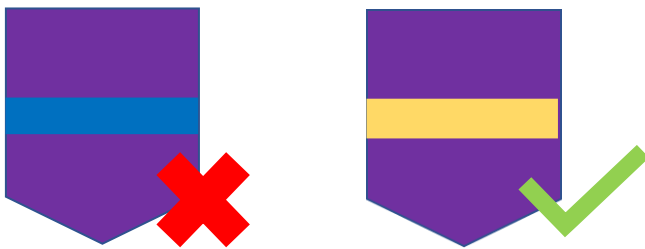
- Argent (Ar) Silver
- Or (Or) Gold

To make sure the shields were as clear as possible, two rules were created:

1. Designs of colours could not be placed on a field of colour
2. Designs of metals could not be placed on fields of metal

} These rules don't apply to Furs and graphical charges which are in their proper colours.

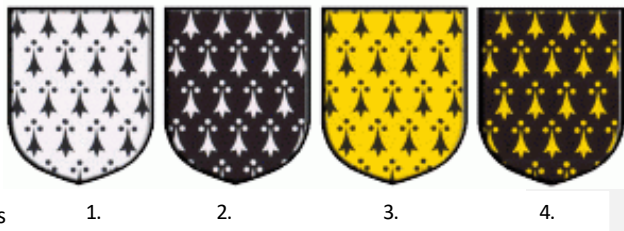
For example, a purple shield cannot have blue lines but can have gold lines as gold is a metal not a colour.



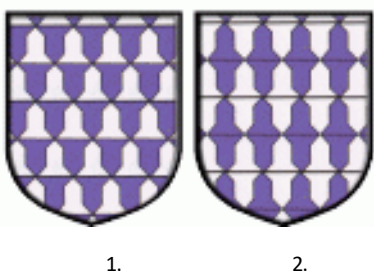
### Furs

Furs is a term used to describe certain types of patterns used on shields, as they represent the fur of either a stoat or grey squirrels. These furs are called Ermine (stoat) and Vair (grey squirrel)

1. *Ermine* => White with black markings
2. *Ermines* => Black with white markings
3. *Erminois* => Gold with black markings
4. *Peau* => Black with gold markings



1. *Vair* => Blue with white markings
2. *Counter-vair* => White with blue markings



**Activity:**

This is the arms of Owain Glyndwr, who led the last uprising against English conquest. His arms combine the arms of the kingdoms of Powys and Dehaubarth, because he descends from both royal houses. (Look at the top of Page 5 for guidance.)

Using what you have learnt, write the blazon for this shield:



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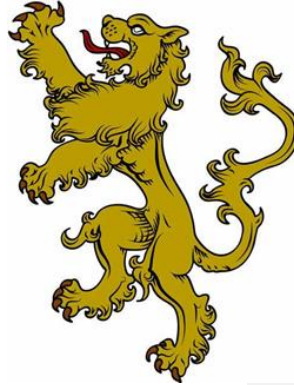
### Meanings behind charges and colours in heraldry

In heraldry many animals and colours have meanings, and it is these meanings that families want to convey to those who see their arms. For example, if they want to say they are brave they would use a lion on their arms. If they wanted to say they were loyal and brave they might use a green or blue lion or a red dog. Remember when you are decoding arms to start with the escutcheon or shield because it is the most important and then read the symbols from top to bottom and from left to right around the shield. In this way, reading an armorial bearing can be very similar to reading a comic book.



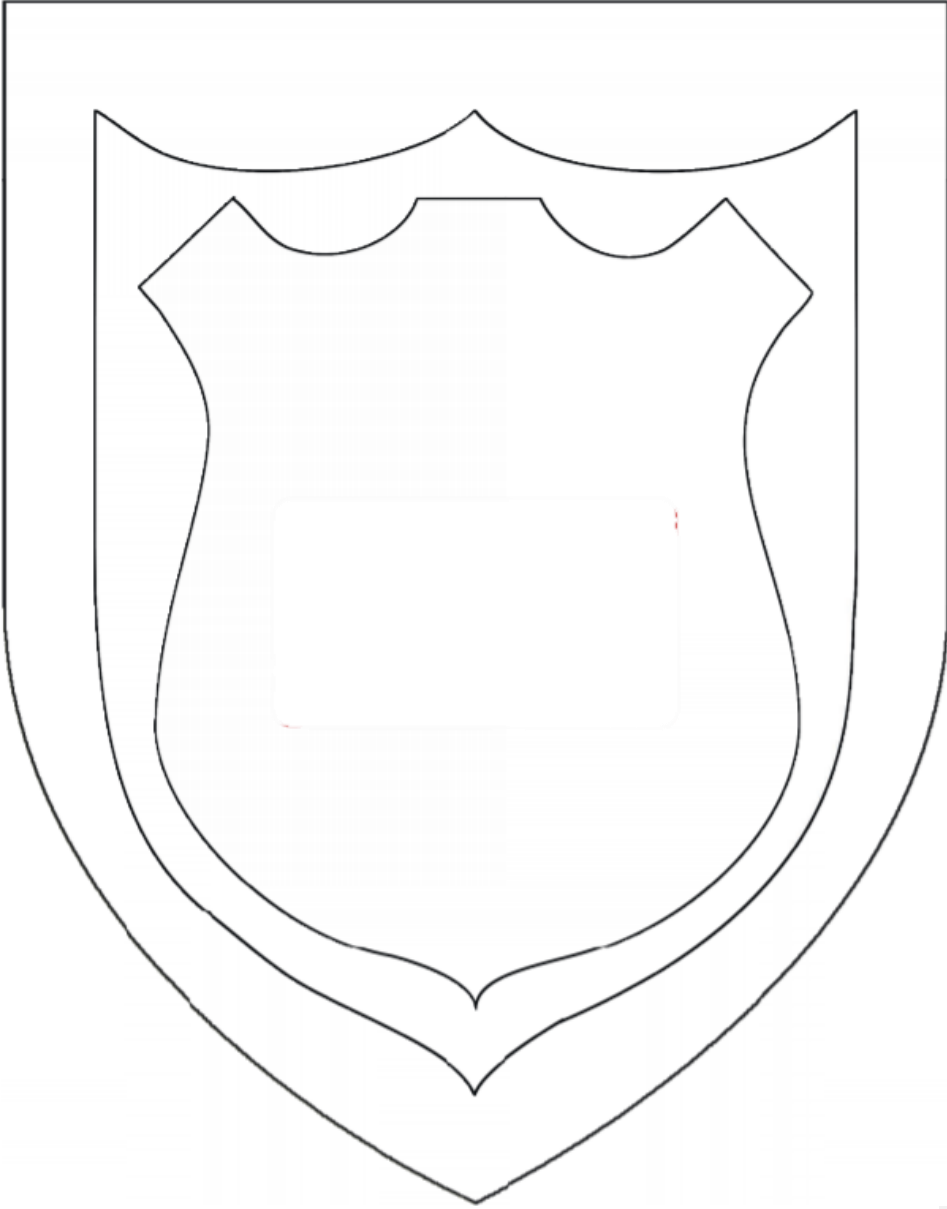


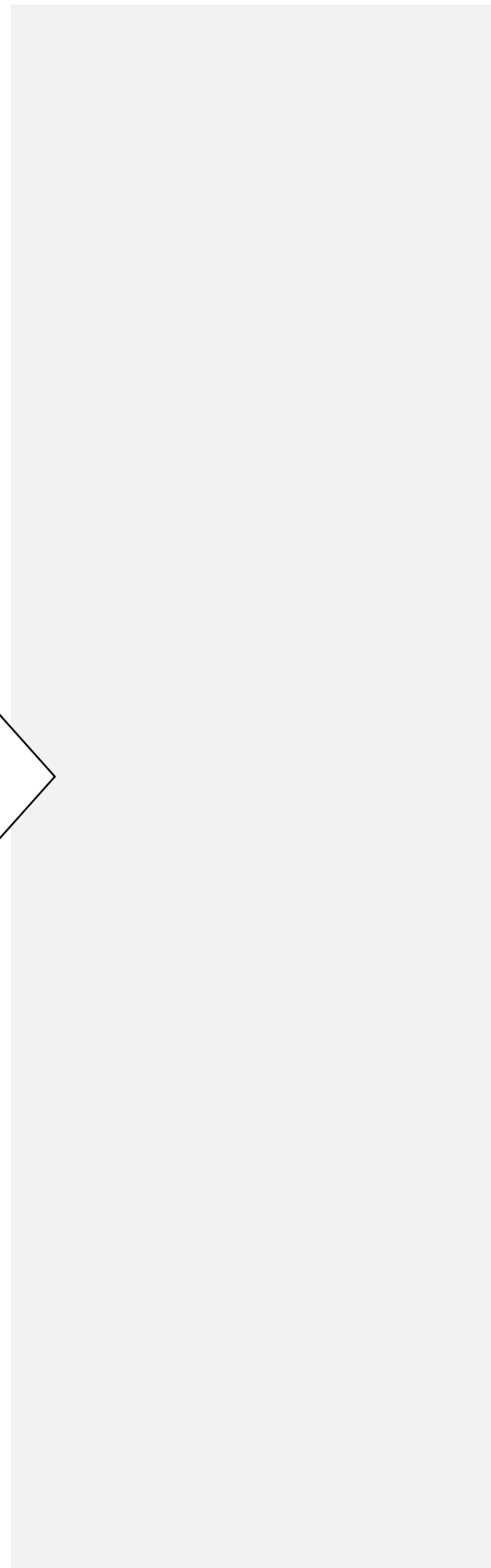
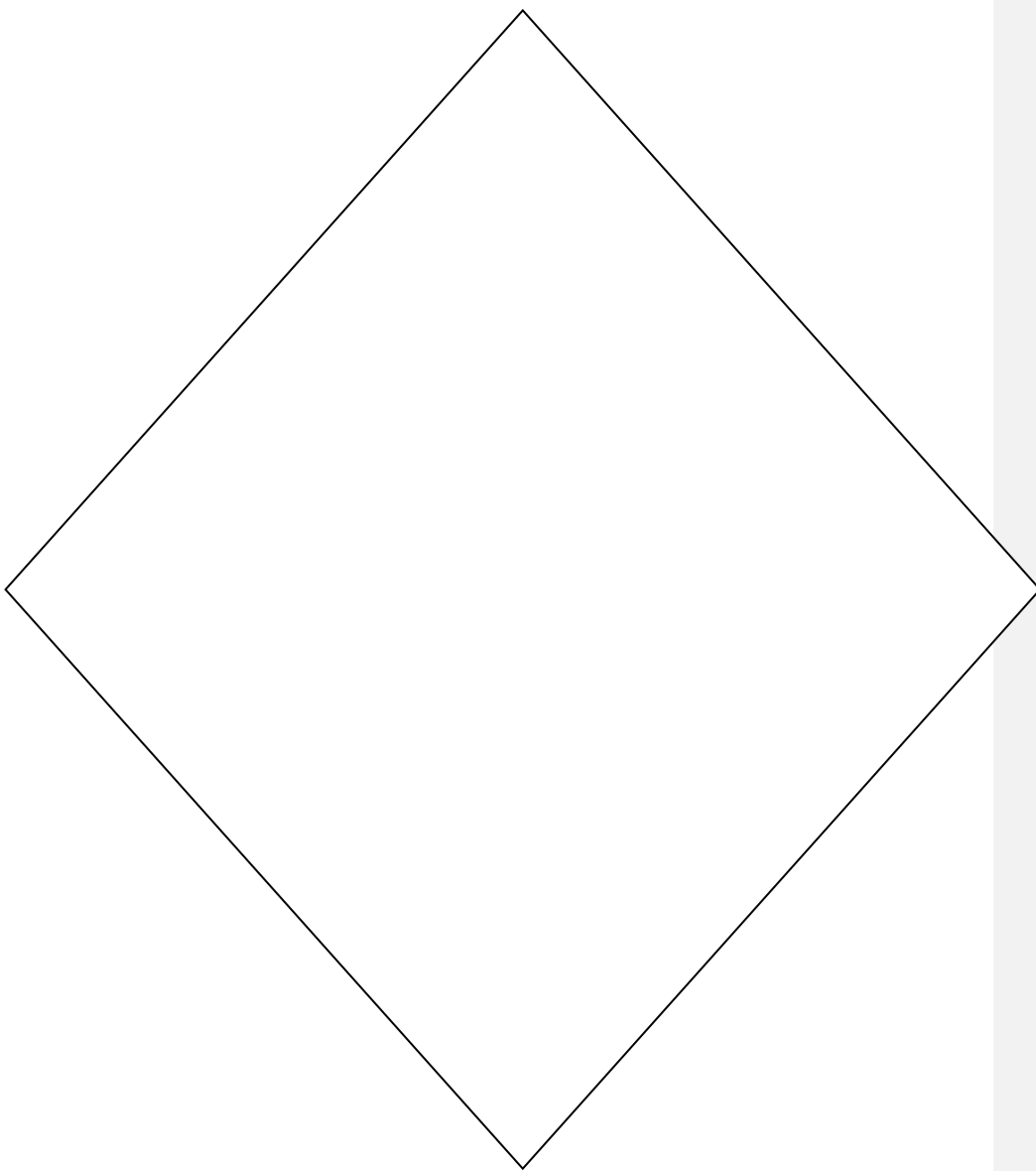
- Lions = bravery
- Dogs = faithfulness and reliability
- Stags = wisdom and long life
- Eagles = power and nobility
- Hares = speed
- Badgers = endurance or 'hanging on'
  
- Gules = courage or military strength
- Vert = hope or loyalty in love
- Azure = strength and loyalty
- Sable = consistency or sometimes grief
- Purpure = sovereignty or justice
- Argent = sincerity or peace
- Or = generosity

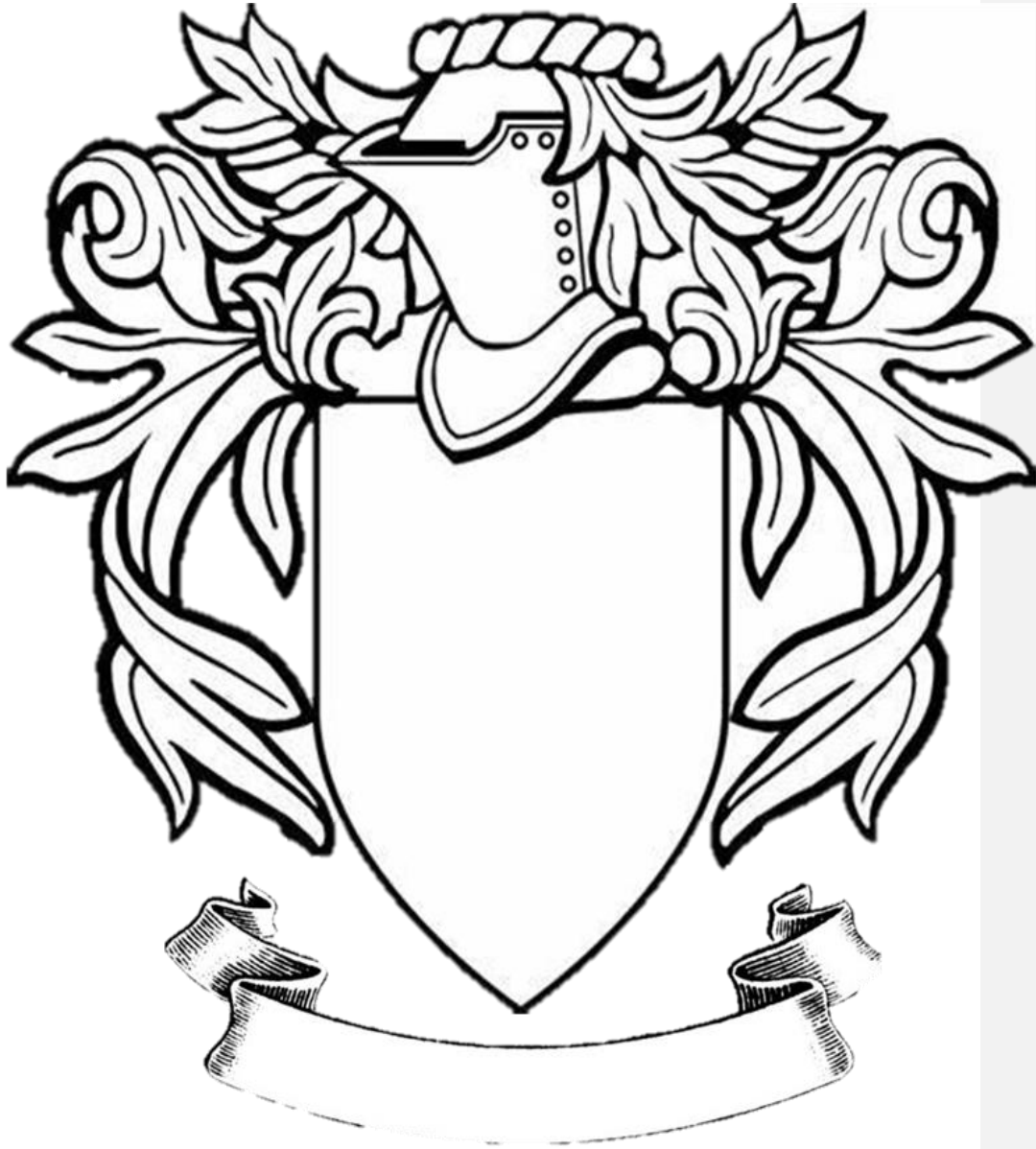


### Design your own or your family shield or lozenge

Using what you have learnt, design a shield and lozenge for yourself which represents you, your family, or both. You can use any combination of the examples given above or you can design your own. Once you have completed your shield and lozenge you can use them to create a coat of arms by choosing to combine them, a colour scheme that matches, and adding mantling, a crest, and a motto. Templates are below.







## HERALDRY QUIZ

1. If a person had a red and gold shield, what meanings would they be trying to show?

Courage/military strength and generosity

Bravery and justice

Peace and hope

Generosity and loyalty

2. What rank of person uses a gold helm on their coat of arms?

Duke

Esquire

Sovereign

Knight

3. Describe what a lion passant would look like.

Sitting with head up

Standing on two legs with one front leg raised

Lying down with front legs stretched out in front

Standing on three legs with one front leg raised

4. What is a blazon?

The decorative part which surrounds the escutcheon

The written description of the coat of arms

The writing at the bottom of the coat of arms

The figures that stand at the sides of the escutcheon

5. What is the name of the fur that is black with gold markings?

Ermine

Ermines

Pean

Erminois

6. Which family's coat of arms has a red field with a silver chevron and three helms?

Tudors

Mostyns

Wynns

Owain Glyndwr

7. What does a chief ordinary look like?

A thick band horizontally across the middle of the field

A thick band horizontally across the top of the field

A thick band vertically down the centre of the field

Two diagonal lines that cross in the centre of the field

8. Describe what impaling is.

Having an escutcheon with a small escutcheon in the centre

Combining two sets of arms onto one escutcheon side by side

Having two sets of arms quartered on one escutcheon

Having two escutcheons in one coat of arms

9. Why were the colours used in heraldry limited to only a few options?

People only wanted a few colours

The pigments and dyes were expensive

It was easier to design arms with only a few colour options

It made the designs clearer with simple bold colours

10. What is the purpose of a supporter on a coat of arms?

To make the coat of arms intimidating

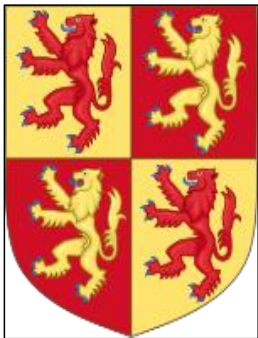
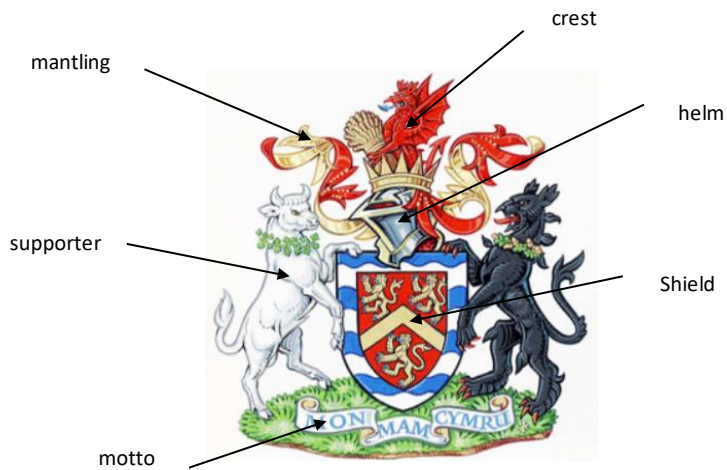
To hold up the escutcheon/ defend it

To make the coat of arms more decorative

To hold up the mantling

**Answers:**

**Activity:** Label the crest, mantling, helm, supporter, shield and motto on the coat of arms of Anglesey below.



**Activity:**

This is the arms of Owain Glyndwr, who led the last uprising against English conquest between 1400-1415. His arms combine the arms of the kingdoms of Powys and Dehaubarth.

Using what you have learnt, write the blazon for this shield:

**Answer**

Per quarterly or and glues four lions rampant counterchanged.

Quiz answers:

1. Courage/military strength and generosity
2. Sovereign
3. Standing on three legs with one front leg raised
4. The written description of a coat of arms
5. Pean
6. Tudors
7. A thick band horizontally along the top of the field
8. The combining of two sets of arms onto one escutcheon side by side
9. The pigments and dyes were expensive
10. To support the escutcheon by holding it up or defending it

### References:

The Heraldry Society: <https://www.theheraldrysociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Heraldry-For-Beginners.pdf>

The Project Gutenberg EBook of A Complete Guide to Heraldry, by Arthur Charles Fox-Davies: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41617/41617-h/41617-h.htm>

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