

The Society of Scottish Armigers

The Use of Personal Arms

Information Leaflet No.9
The Use of Personal Arms



1. This leaflet is intended for the guidance of persons who have recently been granted Arms, and may perhaps not be familiar with the general practice in the use of their Arms. More or less ostentatious use may be made, entirely at the owner's discretion.

2. THE BASIC PRINCIPLE is that Arms are the visual equivalent of their owner's name and personal identity. Therefore, wherever it is appropriate to display the owner's name it is also appropriate to display his Arms, either along with the written name or instead of it. Both Name and Arms stand for the same thing, their owner's personal identity.

Many persons who have Arms ('armigers') show great ingenuity in the decorative use of their Arms and have done so for many centuries. But the main contemporary uses are as follows.

3. Signet Rings

Signet rings are generally made nowadays of solid gold, with a wider flat area called the 'table' to carry the engraving usually within an oval shape. The harder 9 or 18 carat alloys wear better than the purer 22 or 24 carat alloys which are much softer. The Crest, or Crest and Motto, or the Shield of the Arms can be engraved on the table in reverse, to produce an impression on sealing wax the right way round. It is perfectly correct to show either Crest or Shield, as the armiger prefers.

Such rings can be passed on to the original armiger's successive heirs in the Arms for many generations. The date stamp in the assayer's hallmark on the ring will identify which of the successive holders was the original owner. Signet rings are often given by armigers to their eldest sons on the latter's coming of age. These should bear the armiger's Arms with the addition of a 'label of three points' (Fig.1) which is the mark of the heir to the Arms. When, upon the original armiger's death, the heir inherits the Arms he can pass on this ring with the heir's mark to his son in turn.



Fig. 1

Wives of armigers may similarly wear their husband's Arms or Crest on a ring or brooch, but if the husband's Arms are shown they should appear on a diamond or lozenge' shape (a rhombus) or on an oval shape instead of a Shield (fig. 2).

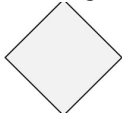


Fig. 2

Mottoes can be included on rings showing the armigers' Crests, but their very small size will often render the lettering unintelligible. The Wreath (fig. 3) which appears beneath the Crest should always be included, to demonstrate that the device above it is a heraldic Crest.



Fig. 3

4. Stationery

It is perfectly correct for an armiger to reproduce on his stationery any of the following, which are listed in order of their general popularity:

- (a) His Crest, shown on the Wreath (Fig. 4);



Fig. 4

(b) His Crest, on its Wreath, with his Motto above (Fig. 5);



Fig. 5

(c) His Shield of Arms (Fig. 6);



Fig 6

(d) His whole 'Achievement', comprising Shield, Helmet and Mantling, Wreath, Crest and Motto (Fig. 7).



Fig. (7)

Options (a) and (b) are usually shown at a small size, about half an inch high, and placed immediately above the name/address. (c) and (d) are larger, about an inch high and are usually placed in the top left corner of the sheet with the printed address in the top right corner. Any of these options, and not necessarily the same one, can also be shown on the back flap of envelopes and on calling cards.

It is correct for an armiger who owns a commercial business to display his Arms on its stationery and so on, provided they accompany his own name rather than that of the company as the Arms are his, not the company's. This practice carries the danger that the Arms become part of the company's 'image' and, should the armiger eventually wish to sell his company, the Arms may NOT be sold with it, probably to the prospective buyer's disappointment.

Personal Arms on stationery can be printed in full colour, including gold, or can be printed equally correctly in monochrome. The latter is more usual. Artists' reproduction drawings supplied for the purpose should always be recovered from the printers after the order is completed. They will serve again in the future, and are the owner's property, not the printers.

It is correct for an armiger's wife to display his Crest or Crest and Motto on her own personal stationery. But if she wishes to adopt option (c) above, the Arms should be drawn on a 'lozenge' or diamond shape or on an oval instead of on a Shield, as the lozenge is the shape appropriate to ladies.

5. Flags

All armigers have the automatic right to display their Arms on a personal banner. 'Banner' is the correct name for a personal flag, 'Standards' are special flags of a quite different shape. Banners are generally of rectangular shape, of the proportion 5 wide and 4 high. They can be of any size depending on the site where they are flown and should be large enough for their devices to be intelligible. Size therefore can vary from 5 yards wide x 4 yards high for the top of a high tower, to 5 inches x 4 inches for a table decoration.

All armigers are entitled to fly their banners on the bonnets or offside wings or bumpers of their personal cars, where 10 inches wide x 8 inches high is about the usual size. Car flags should be removed when the armiger is not in the vehicle, and of course they are liable to attract vandals.

Flags can be made of any material suitable for their purpose. For flying from a flagpole or over an armiger's house, the normal cotton or cotton and nylon bunting is the most usual and hardest wearing material. It is economic to order several copies at a time from the flag makers, as they do fray and wear out eventually in the wind.