

Heraldic Symbolism

Whenever I show someone a coat of arms, the first question about the design is: "What is the significance of the symbols?"

Opinion differs greatly depending on which author you are reading. The general belief is that when ancient Herald's designed coats of arms for individuals they took into consideration the traits qualities, and personality of the individual. With this in mind they created a design to reflect those characteristics.

My own personal belief...is that it is a wife's tale. This opinion is based on the fact that the experts can't agree on the meanings, themselves. I believe that designs were created to be practical, functional and possibly with the idea to command respect from others if not to scare them. Example: severed heads, blood drops, mythical creatures, etc.

Much in the same way every genealogist dreams of uncovering an ancestor with a royal bloodline, people researching past coats of arms hope to find a design filled with symbolism and meaning.

Here is a list I have compiled from various sources indicating the symbolism of some of the charges and colors found in heraldic designs.

ANCHOR: This is suppose to represent hope.

ANTLERS: Strength and Fortitude.

ARM CLAD IN ARMOUR: Represents a person with qualities of leadership.

ARM NAKED: Symbolizes an industrious person.

ARROW: Readiness for battle.

BATON: Token of Authority.

BATTLE AXE: Symbolizes the execution of military duty.

BEAR: Strength, cunning, and protection toward one's kin and family.

BEE: Efficient Industry.

BLACK: (Sable) Consistency or grief.

BLUE: (Azure) Truth and Loyalty

BOAR: Symbol of bravery, one who fights to the death.

BOAR'S HEAD: Hospitality.

BOW: Readiness for battle.

BULL: Bravery, Valour, generosity. The horns represent strength and fortitude.

CAMEL: Patience and perseverance.

CASTLE: Symbol of safety. CAT-A-MOUNT: This is a puma, or mountain lion. Represents liberty, Vigilance and courage.

COCK: A symbol of courage and perseverance. Considered a badge of a hero.

CRESCENT: (A slivered moon) bestowed upon a person who has been honored by his sovereign.

CUTLASS: A curved sword usually used by sailors, indicating a warrior of the sea.

CYPRESS: Symbolic of death and eternal life thereafter.

DOLPHIN: In heraldry the dolphin has scales, and is brightly colored usually green and red or scarlet unless otherwise stated. Is said to represent swiftness, diligence and love.

DRAGON: represents valour and protection.

EAGLE: A person of deeds, noble nature, bravery and alertness.

EAGLE DISPLAYED: An eagle with it's wings spread, symbolizes protection.

EAGLE, DOUBLE HEADED: Protection, the joining of two forces.
ESCALLOP: A scallop shell. Signifies a traveler to far away places. Also the symbol of a naval commander.
ESTIOLE: A star with six wavy points (looks like a starfish). Celestial goodness, and noble personage.
FALCON: Bravery, foresightedness, and leadership.
FETTERLOCK: A device used to hobble horses. A symbol of victory.
GOAT: Symbolizes a person who wins through politics rather than war.
GOOSE: Resourcefulness.
GREEN: (Vert) Hope, joy and love.
GRIFFEN (GRYPHON): Valor and bravery.
GOLD: (OR) Generosity and elevation of the mind.
HAND: Faith, sincerity and justice.
HARP: A person with good judgement.
HAWK: One who never rests until the objective is achieved.
HEART (burning): Intense burning affection.
HEART (human): charity and sincerity.
HIND: a female deer, symbolizing peace and harmony.
HOLLY: Truth.
HORSE: Readiness for all events.
HORSESHOE: Good luck, safeguard against malicious spirits.
LAUREL: Peace and triumph.
LION: Dauntless courage.
MERMAID: Eloquence.
MULLET: A star of five points; represents divine quality from above.
OAK TREE: Symbolizes great strength and age.
OSTRICH: Willing obedience and serenity.
OTTER: A person who lives life to the fullest.
PASSION NAIL: A symbol of suffering.
PEACOCK: Power, beauty and knowledge.
PELICAN: (Usually bleeding at the chest) Represents self-sacrifice, and charity.
PHEON: (A large thick arrow head) Readiness for battle.
PORTCULLIS: (A fortified gate) Protection in an emergency.
RAINBOW: Good times after bad.
RAM: A leader, a person of authority.
RAVEN: Divine Providence.
RED: (Gules) A warrior, brave and strong but generous and just. A martyr's color.
ROCK: Safety, protection and refuge.
ROSE: Grace and beauty.
SALAMANDER: Protection
SERPENT/SNAKE: Symbol of wisdom.
SHIP: Pertains to sailors, men of the sea or ancient voyages.
SHIP: (without mast) Disaster at sea.
SILVER: (Argent) Peace and sincerity.
SPEAR/TILTING LANCE: An honourable warrior, or vallant knight.
SPUR: Gold for a knight and silver for an esquire. Readiness, and preparedness.
STAG: (A Male Deer) One who will not fight unless provoked. Symbol of peace and harmony.
STORK: symbolizes close parental bond. Vigilance if holding a rock.
SUN: (In Splendor - with rays and a smiley face) Glory and splendor. The fountain of life.
SWAN: Poetic harmony and learning.

SWORD: Justice and Honor.

TOWER: Safety and grandeur.

TREE TRUNK: Symbolic of new life sprouting from old.

UNICORN: Extreme courage.

VINE TREE: (Grape Vine) Strong and lasting friendship.

WHEEL: Symbol of fortune.

WINGS: Swiftiness and protection.

WOLF: reward of perseverance and hard work.

WYVERN: (A Creature with a dragon head, two legs like a rooster and a serpent tail which is barbed at the end) Valour and protection>



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