



Basic Heraldry



What is the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland?



The Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland contains all recordings of coats of arms in Scotland from 1672 to the present day and it is added to daily. Coats of arms cannot be used legally in Scotland unless they are recorded in that Register. The Register is maintained by the Court of the Lord Lyon, the office responsible for heraldic matters in Scotland.

These entries can include a considerable amount of genealogical information although the older entries usually have less detail. By the mid 19th century, recordings often contain details of an individual's descent from his grandfather or earlier even when the individual is being granted a new coat of arms. When a person is re-recording arms borne by an ancestor, often several generations earlier, an account of that person's ancestry back to the forebear will be included. It is usual for people to have some knowledge of whether an ancestor had a coat of arms. The Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland is not a register of genealogical account.

There is a Public Register of Genealogies and Birthbrieves in Scotland which is held in the Court of the Lord Lyon which office also has a large collection of family trees, family histories and other genealogical material.



What is a coat of arms?

- Coats of arms were originally used for military purposes and consisted of an actual coat bearing a distinctive design which was worn over a suit of armour. This enabled the knight to be recognised. The design was also displayed on his shield. On his head he wore a helmet and in time this was surmounted by a crest which identified the wearer from a distance and was used particularly during tournaments.



What is a coat of arms?

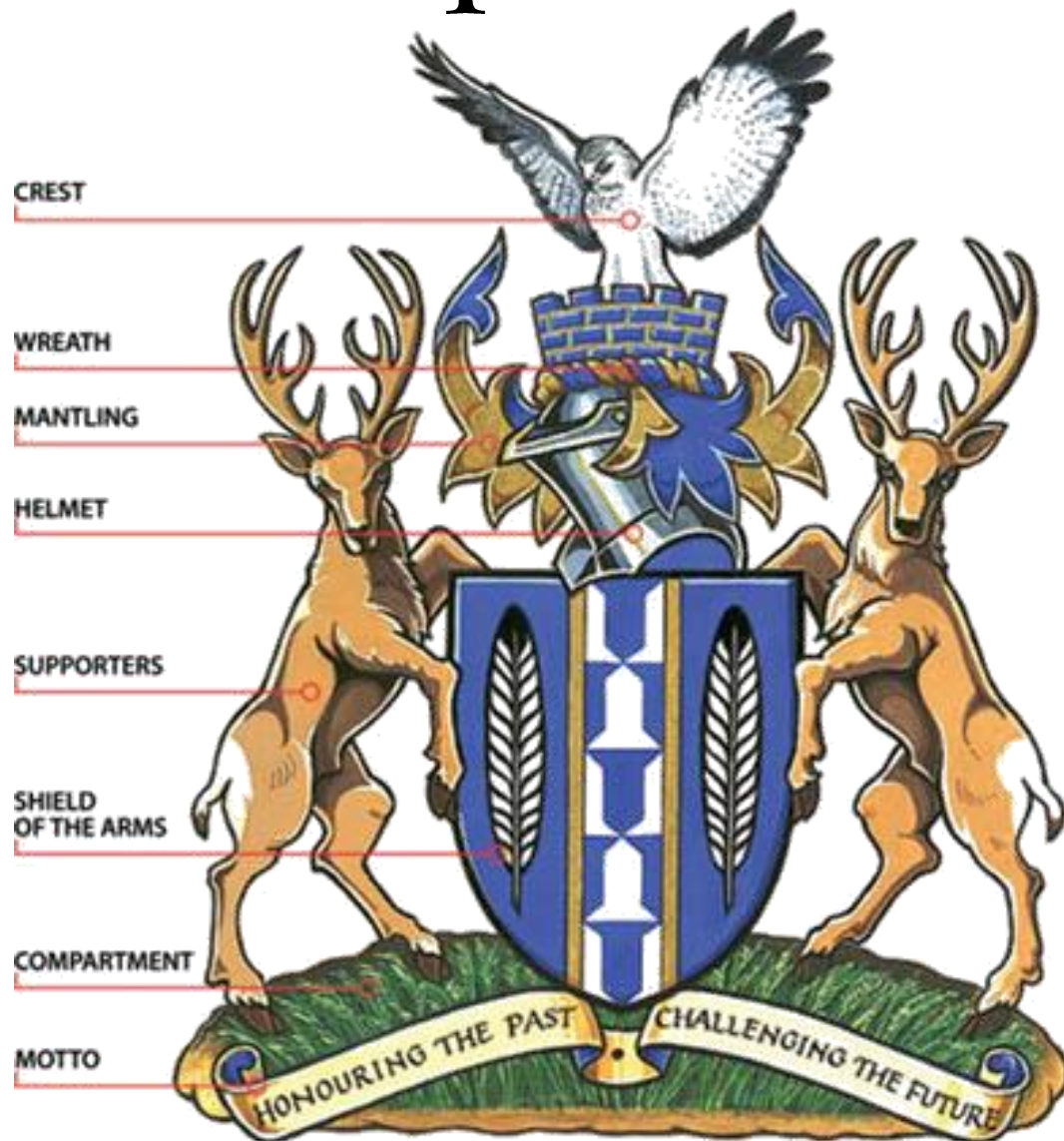
As the military use of coats of arms declined they were adopted for civilian purposes on seals and to identify property.

Most personal coats of arms consist of a shield, helmet, crest and motto. Supporters, the figures or beasts standing on either side of the shield, are only granted to particular groups of people, including clan chiefs, peers, and senior knights in orders of chivalry.

Companies and other corporate organisations such as civic councils, schools, universities, sporting clubs and charities can also have a coat of arms and while some may have shields, crests and mottoes many only have a shield.



Components





Heraldic Terminology

Heraldry uses a specific language which allows for a clear verbal description which those with heraldic knowledge anywhere in the world will be able to interpret into a pictorial version.

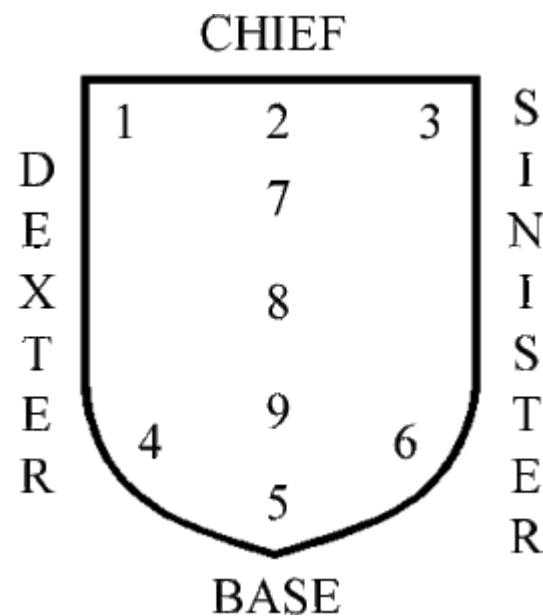
It is this verbal description, or blazon, which determines the design of the arms and in Volume 1 of the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland there are very few pictorial renderings of blazons.



Blazen Points

The following are the points of the shield used in blazons to describe where a charge should be drawn:

- 1 - Dexter Chief
- 2 - Middle Chief
- 3 - Sinister Chief
- 4 - Dexter Base
- 5 - Middle Base
- 6 - Sinister Base
- 7 - Honour Point
- 8 - Fess Point
- 9 - Nombril Point





Shield and Lozenge

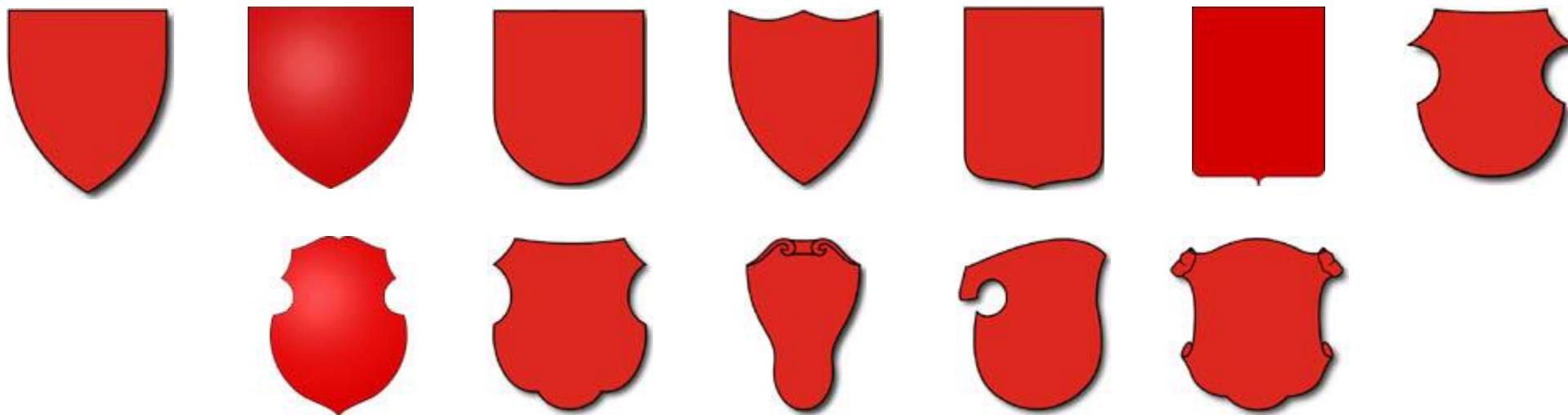
- Escutcheon

- In heraldry, an escutcheon, or scutcheon, is the shield displayed in a coat of arms. The escutcheon shape is based on the Medieval shields that were used by knights in combat. The shape varied from region to region and over time.
- The shield is used in heraldry not only for men but corporate bodies: city corporations, universities and schools, companies, churches and for various official offices.
- As women did not go to war, they did not bear a shield. Instead, their arms were shown on a lozenge — a rhombus standing on one of its acute corners or a cartouche. This continues in much of the world, though some heraldic authorities, notably Scotland, uses ovals for women's arms. In England, Scotland and Ireland, women may, in certain circumstances, display their arms on a shield. In Canada, the restriction against women's bearing arms on a shield has been abrogated. Noncombatant clergy also have used the lozenge and the cartouche or an oval for their armorial display.

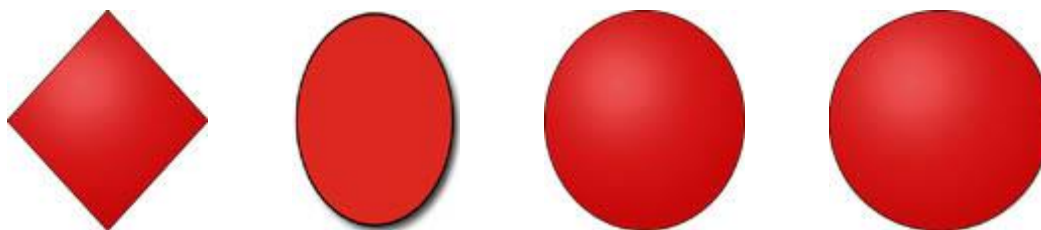


Shield and Lozenge

Shields



Lozenge





Tincture

Tinctures are the colours and patterns used in heraldry. In heraldic terms they are divided into standard "colours", "metals", and "furs". The *Petra Sancta* method was created in 1638 to render colors in black and white images of coats of arms: tinctures are indicated by a hatching convention as shown below, where the dexter half of the shield is coloured and the sinister half hatched to denote the same colour.



Tincture

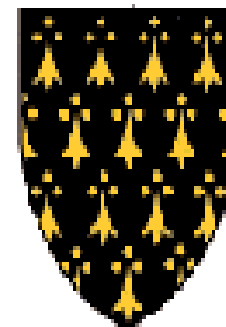
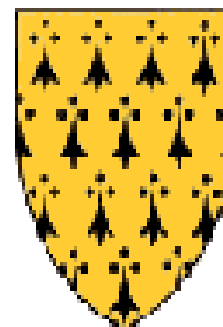
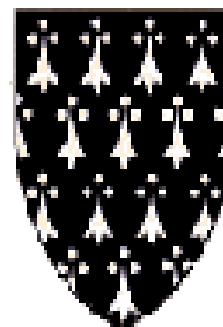
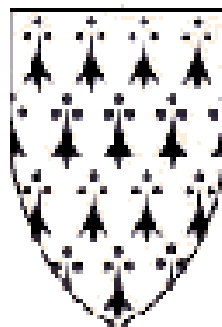
- Or – gold or yellow
- Argent – silver or white
- Gules – red
- Azure – blue
- Sable – black
- Vert – green
- Purpure – purple



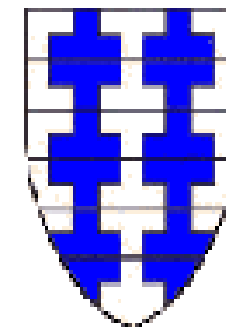
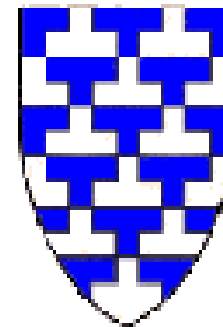
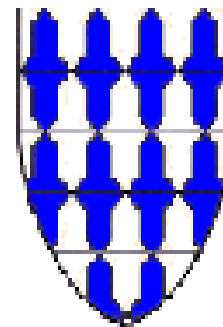
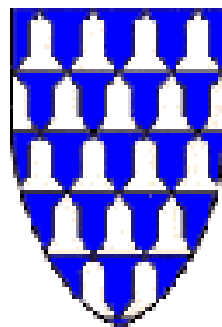


Tincture-Furs

- Ermine
- Ermines
- Erminois
- Pean



- Vair
- Countervair
- Potent
- Counterpotent



Ordinaries or charges



Ordinaries and charges (in heraldic terms) are designs or emblems within an escutcheon (shield).

- the chief is the upper portion of the shield.
- the fess is a broad horizontal stripe across the centre of the shield.
- the pale is a vertical stripe in the centre of the shield.
- the chevron is a construction shaped like an inverted letter 'V'.
- the bend is a diagonal stripe
- the saltire is a diagonal cross, often called 'Saint Andrew's cross'.
- the cross can have many variants.

Ordinaries or charges



chief



fess



pale



chevron



bend



saltire



CROSS

Crest

A crest is a component of a heraldic display, consisting of the device borne on top of the helm. Originating in the decorative sculptures worn by knights in tournaments and, to a lesser extent, battles, crests became solely pictorial after the 16th century (the era referred to by heraldists as that of "paper heraldry").

A normal heraldic achievement consists of the shield, above which is set the helm, on which sits the crest, its base encircled by a circlet of twisted cloth known as a torse. The use of the crest and torse independently from the rest of the achievement, a practice which became common in the era of paper heraldry, has led the term "crest" to be frequently but erroneously used to refer to the arms displayed on the shield, or to the achievement as a whole.





Helmets or Helms

The usage of heraldic helmets in Britain is as follows: gold helmet with bars for the royal family; silver helmet with gold bars for peers; steel helmet with gold bars for the non-peerage Scottish feudal baron; open steel helmet shown affronté for knights and baronets; steel tournament helm for Scottish clan chiefs; closed steel helmet for esquires and gentlemen.

Monarch and family



Peer



Baronet or knight



Esquire or gentleman





Crown or Coronet

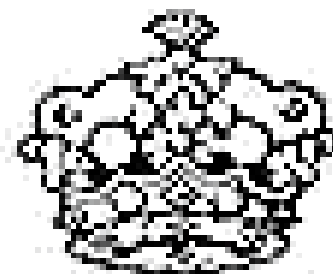
If the bearer of a coat of arms has the title of baron or higher (or hereditary knight in some countries), he or she may display a coronet of rank above the shield, usually below the helm in British heraldry, and often above the crest (if any) in Continental heraldry. In this case, the appearance of the crown or coronet follows a strict set of rules.



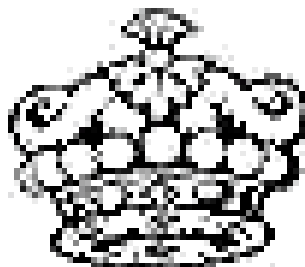
Duke



Earl



Marquess



Viscount



Baron

Coronets of Rank



Torse or Wreath

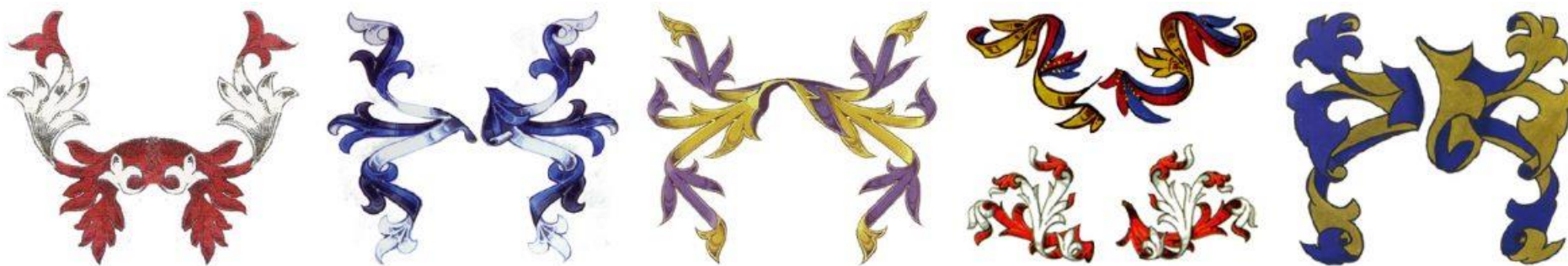
Covering the join between the crest and the helm, the torse or wreath is a twisted strand of six folds, possibly originating as a lady's favour (love token). It alternates the two principal tinctures (metal and colour) in the arms, the first fold on the dexter side (the viewer's left) being of the arms' metal tincture.





Mantling

Originally attached to the helm, a mantle or small cloak hung down the back probably as protection from the sun. It is now a decorative accessory displayed each side of the crest and shield and, like the torse, reflects the tinctures of the arms: the principal colour on the outside and the principal metal on the lining.





Supporters

Supporters are human or animal figures or, very rarely, inanimate objects, usually placed on either side of a coat of arms as though supporting it. In many traditions, these have acquired strict guidelines for use by certain social classes. On the European continent, there are often fewer restrictions on the use of supporters. In the United Kingdom, only peers of the realm, a few baronets, senior members of orders of knighthood, and some corporate bodies are granted supporters. Often, these can have local significance or a historical link to the armiger.

If the armiger has the title of baron, hereditary knight, or higher, he may display a coronet of rank above the shield. In the United Kingdom, this is shown between the shield and helmet, though it is often above the crest in Continental heraldry.

Another addition that can be made to a coat of arms is the insignia of a baronet or of an order of knighthood. This is usually represented by a collar or similar band surrounding the shield. When the arms of a knight and his wife are shown in one achievement, the insignia of knighthood surround the husband's arms only, and the wife's arms are customarily surrounded by an ornamental garland of leaves for visual balance.



Supporters



Lion rampant
regardant



Lion passant gardant
(properly called a léopard)



Lion couchant



Lion statant



Lion's head erased



Sea-lion



Griffin sergeant



Stag trippant



Stag lodged



Stag at gaze



Stag's head
cabossed



Dolphin hauriant



Compartment

a compartment is a design placed under the shield, usually rocks, a grassy mount (*mount vert*), or some sort of other landscape upon which the supporters are depicted as standing. Care must be taken to distinguish true compartments from items upon which supporters are merely resting one or more feet, or, sometimes, mere heraldic badges or pure decoration under the shield, and, conversely, care must also be taken in very unusual cases.

It is sometimes said to represent the land held by the bearer. As an official part of the blazon it is a comparatively late feature of heraldry, often derived from the need to have different supporters for different families or entities, although sometimes the compartment is treated in the blazon separately from the supporters.

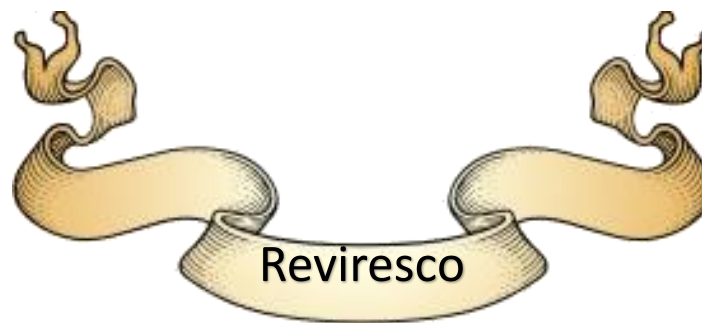




Motto

In heraldry, a motto is often found below the shield in a banderole; this placement stems from the Middle Ages, in which the vast majority of nobles possessed a coat of arms and a motto. In the case of Scottish heraldry it is mandated to appear above the crest. Spanish coats of arms may display a motto in the bordure of the shield. In heraldic literature, the terms "rallying cry" respectively "battle banner" are also common, which date back to the battle cry, and is usually located above the coat of arms.

In English heraldry mottos are not granted with armorial bearings, and may be adopted and changed at will. In Scottish heraldry, mottos can only be changed by re-matriculation, with the Lord Lyon King of Arms. Although very unusual and perhaps outside standard heraldic practice, there are some examples of the particular appearance of the motto scroll and letters thereon being blazoned; a prominent example is the obverse of the Great Seal of the United States(which is a coat of arms and follows heraldic conventions), the blazon for which specifies that the motto scroll is held in the beak of the bald eagle serving as the escutcheon's supporter.





Who can use a coat of arms?

Coats of Arms in Scotland can only belong to one person at a time. There is no single coat of arms which all people of the same name can use – often miscalled a 'family coat of arms'. As coats of arms originated in order to identify a person it is clear that it would not be practical if more than one person could use exactly the same design.

Arms descend to the heir in each generation of the person to whom they were originally granted and other descendants who bear the same surname may apply for a slightly different version of the arms to be recorded in the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland.

In Scotland the shields of unrelated people with the same surname may bear similarities as the design will be based on the shield of the clan chief, the head of the family.



Who can apply for a coat of arms?

The Lord Lyon King of Arms is responsible for granting all coats of arms in Scotland and will consider Petitions, as applications for arms are called, from people who are legally domiciled in Scotland and those who were born in Scotland. The Lord Lyon can also consider petitions from people living in Commonwealth countries which do not have their own heraldic authorities. Normally the Lord Lyon would expect there to be some Scottish connection. A grant of arms is not automatic and there is no statutory right to a coat of arms.

Descendants bearing the same surname of someone who already has a coat of arms recorded in Scotland can apply for a matriculation or re-recording of the ancestor's arms, either with a small difference or without if they are the heir. The Lord Lyon will allow a matriculation if the applicant can prove their descent by the production of statutory records, such as birth, marriage and death certificates, entries in the Old Parish Registers, wills and testaments.



Further information

For more detailed information on heraldry and its use in Scotland and on recordings after 1916, enquiries should be directed to the Court of the Lord Lyon, HM New Register House, Edinburgh EH1 3YT. Information can also be found on the [Court of the Lord Lyon's](#) website.