

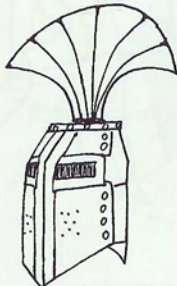
Chapter 2: The heraldic achievement

So far we have only talked about the shield and its devices, but other elements gradually became added to the shield to form what is known as the **ACHIEVEMENT OF ARMS**.

THE CREST

The term “crest” is often misused to refer to the whole heraldic achievement of an individual. In fact, it is only part of it, the bit on the top. The crest developed originally from a fan-shaped metal plate that some knights attached to their helmets to deflect a sword-blow to the head. At first, these were quite plain, but soon people started painting animals or birds on them and cutting the plates to the outline of the device. These flat plates could only be seen properly in profile, however, so it was only a simple step to fashioning the device “in the round” from wood or boiled leather and attaching it to the helmet with rivets. So was born the heraldic **CREST** which, when used in tournaments, soon became another identifying feature of the jousting knight. In the painted records kept by the heralds, the crest soon became a regular feature, being depicted above the shield, the position it occupies today. While each individual still required a distinctive shield, it became quite a common practice for the members of a particular family to use the same crest, so the frequently misused term “family crest” *may* be quite correct, so long as it refers only to the device that goes *above* the shield, not to the shield itself.

The evolution of the crest



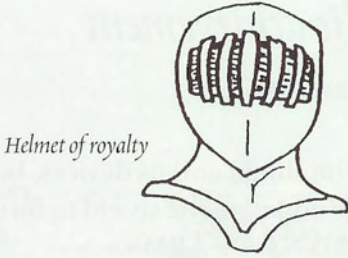
Metal plate



Moulded crest



Crest as part of a coat of arms



Helmet of royalty



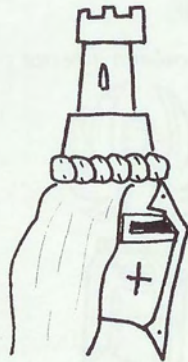
Helmet of a gentleman

THE HELMET, MANTLE AND WREATH

As heraldry evolved from being used only in tournaments and battle, people began painting their arms on all sorts of objects and the heralds started recording them on parchment “rolls of arms”. At first, there would be just the shield, then the shield and crest, and then the artists started showing the crest attached to its helmet. Early on, the choice of the helmet was up to the artist and in most cases showed the style of helmet popular at the time. Later, it became a custom that the type of helmet would indicate the rank of the bearer—as a member of royalty, a peer, a knight, or a gentleman. Of these, only two are likely to be seen in Canada: the gold, full-faced, barred helmet that denotes sovereignty on our Canadian coat of arms, and the steel, side-facing closed helmet that denotes the individual—the usual helmet granted by the Canadian Heraldic Authority. Along with the helmet, there is usually shown what is known as the MANTLE or MANTLING. This originated as a piece of cloth that was often attached to the helmet below the crest and hung down over the shoulders to keep the heat of the sun off the armour. This was held in place by a WREATH of twisted silk which



A hot knight



Realistic mantling



Tattered mantling

also hid the unsightly join between crest and helmet. In depictions of arms, both mantle and wreath are traditionally shown in the two main colours of the arms, with the mantling rather tattered as if hacked about in battle. In fact, most heraldic artists nowadays show the mantling in a highly stylized fashion, so “tattered” that its original form has almost disappeared and it appears as a sort of ribbon-like decoration.

SUPPORTERS AND COMPARTMENT

For the first three centuries of heraldry, the shield and crest, with its associated helmet, wreath and mantling, formed the whole of the heraldic achievement. Then, about the middle of the 15th century, certain nobles began to display another element of their arms, known as SUPPORTERS. These were usually in the form of animal or human figures standing on either side of the shield and, so to speak, “supporting” it. Originally, the supporters were just placed on either side of the shield with nothing to support *them*, but later they were provided with a grassy knoll to stand on and this became known as the COMPARTMENT. The latter quite soon became the resting place for symbolic devices for which room could not be found in the balance of the achievement—such as the mayflowers and thistles in the arms of Nova Scotia and wild roses in those of Alberta. In England, personal supporters are largely restricted to the peerage and certain knightly orders. Canada, with neither peers nor knights, restricts them to eminent persons such as Governors General, Lieutenant Governors, Privy Councillors and the like, plus the senior ranks of the Orders of Canada and Military Merit; and these are for life only and cannot be inherited. However, many corporate bodies such as commercial corporations, universities, pro-



Unsupported supporters

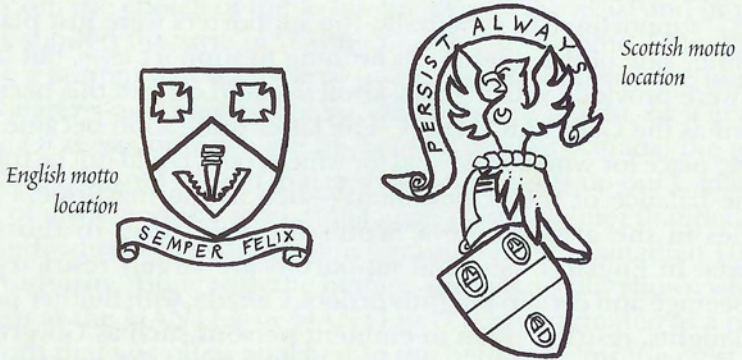


*Supported supporters, with compartment
(Province of Nova Scotia)*

fessional associations and municipalities are also entitled to a grant of supporters.

THE MOTTO

Most coats of arms display some sort of motto, often—but by no means always—in Latin. Most are brief phrases expressing some pious, loyal or moral sentiment, or may play on the name of the bearer or on the main device of the shield or crest. Mottoes are usually displayed on scrolls either below the shield (the English tradition) or above it (the Scottish tradition), at the pleasure of the individual. There may even be two mottoes, one above and one below. Mottoes, while part of a grant of arms in Scotland and Canada, are not considered of major importance and it is quite possible for two persons of quite different families to have the same motto.



THE HERALDIC ACHIEVEMENT

To sum up, a complete coat of arms or heraldic *Achievement* may consist of some eight parts: the *shield*; the *helmet*, *mantling* and *wreath*; the *crest*; the *supporters* and *compartment*; and the *motto*. (See the illustration on page 6.) Not all, or even most, achievements are this complex, however. Most Canadian personal arms do not have supporters and without supporters there is no need for a compartment. It is quite possible, indeed, for an achievement to consist of nothing but the shield and this is common in arms originating in France, where the crest was little used. If there is a crest, it is not obligatory to display it with a helmet and mantling, although it is always shown arising from a wreath. A grant of arms will customarily show every element to which the grantee is entitled (the full panoply of shield, helmet, mantling, wreath, crest and motto, plus supporters and compartment if entitled), but the owner (ARMIGER) may choose to omit certain parts at his own discretion.