

A Glossary of Heraldic Terms, as explained by Azelin of Wishford

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| A la quise | As near as I can tell, this means ' <i>at the thigh</i> ', and is applied to a leg of a bird or beast, to indicate that the whole leg, and not just the forelimb, is meant. |
| Argent | Silver, or sometimes white. one of the seven basic heraldic tinctures , and specifically, one of the two metals . |
| Armed | Identifies the colour of the weaponry. In the case of a beast, this is usually the claws, teeth, and horns in the case of a human, his sword, axe, or other weapon(s). |
| Azure | Blue. one of the seven basic heraldic tinctures , and specifically, one of the five colours . |
| Bar | A bar is a smaller version of a fess . If there is more than one horizontal line across a shield, of if there is only one but it's unusually small, then it is called a bar, (or if smaller, a barrulet). |
| Barry | Divided into horizontal stripes, of different tinctures . In the case of a whole shield, usually six such stripes; although different numbers can be specified there is almost always an even number. |
| Base | The lower third of the shield. A <i>Base</i> is a charge, similar to a chief , only low instead of high. <i>In Base</i> is a location, meaning on the bottom part of the shield. <i>To Base</i> is a direction; down. |
| Baton | A baton is a bend (a horizontal line) or more likely a bendlet (a narrower line), which has been cut off at both ends, so that it does not touch the edges of the shield. |
| Bend | a BEND is a diagonal line, usually one 5th to one 3rd the size of the shield, from the upper right edge (as seen by the bearer of the shield, not the observer) to the lower left edge of the shield. See also bendlet and baton . |
| Bendlet | A diagonal stripe, narrower than a bend , from the upper right edge (as seen by the bearer of the shield, not the observer) to the lower left edge of the shield. |
| Bezant | A round gold dot. Bezant is the special term for a roundel coloured gold or yellow (or). |
| Border | A border is a wide stripe following the edge of the shield, all the way around. There are a couple of related charges, namely the orle and the tressure . A border always touches the edge of the shield, neither of the related charges ever do. |
| Water Bouget | a stylized representation of a yoke (shoulder harness) with two water-sacks. It's shaped roughly like a capital 'M', but with the descenders enlarged into sacks. |
| Canton | A canton is a smaller version of a quarter . It is a rectangle taking up about 1/9th of the shield, and almost always takes up the upper right (from the viewpoint of the person wearing the shield) corner. This position is called "dexter chief". |
| Checky | composed of a whole bunch of squares of alternating colours, like a checkerboard. |
| Chevron | a chevron in a peaked band across the middle of the shield. It resembles the roof of a house. Generally the intersection of the two line segments forming the chevron meet at, or slightly above, the centre of the shield. When chevrons are unusually small, or when they occur in multiples, they are frequently called Chevronells |
| Chief | A chief is a horizontal stripe along the top edge of the shield. It is usually between 1/5th and 1/3rd the height of the shield itself. |
| Cinquefoil | A Cinquefoil is a five-lobed leaf-shape. It often appears pierced . Some fairly common variants are a Trefoil , (three-leaves) and a quatrefoil , (four leaves) |
| Color | Of the seven basic tinctures , five are COLOURS. These are Azure, Gules, Sable, Vert, and Purpure. (Blue, Red, Black, Green, and Purple, respectively). |
| Compony | or sometimes <i>Gobony</i> means that a charge (almost always an ordinary) is made up of a single row of alternating rectangular chunks, perpendicular to the edge of the ordinary. If there were two rows, the term <i>counter compony</i> would be used. More than two rows would be checky . |
| Cotise | A bend cotised is a bend with a smaller <i>bendlet</i> on each side of it. |
| Couped | Cut off. If said of a body-part, it means that the charge has a smooth edge where it was separated from the rest of the body, as opposed to a jagged edge, which would be erased . If said of an ordinary , it means that the charge ends before reaching the edge of the shield, rather than extending full length. |
| Crescent | In the shape of a moon in it's first quarter, with the horns pointing up. If the horns point to the dexter side of the shield, it is called an increscent, if the horns point to the sinister side of the shield, it is called a decrescent. Presumably this has something to do with the moon in it's waxing and waning phases. |
| Cross | Crosses come in many variants, most of which have their own special name. When the word CROSS appears without qualification, it means an ordinary constructed of one horizontal stripe and one vertical one, intersecting in the middle of, and extending to the edges of, the shield. There is an excellent discussion of crosses on Carl Lemke's pages . |
| Crosslet | A cross crosslet, (and I have never seen the term appear except in that phrase) is an equal-armed cross, where each arm is itself crossed by a smaller line. |
| Crowned | Wearing a crown. |
| Dancetty | Dancetty means a big, jagged back-and-forth line, either a line of division or an ordinary can be dancetty. In the case of a dancetty ordinary, both edges are jagged, and they follow each other in phase, like the stripes on Charlie- |

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| | Browns shirt. If the jags are small, then the term indented is used. Indented, however, can apply to a single edge, if so specified. |
| Dexter | The left edge of the shield as seen by an observer, or the right edge as seen by the bearer of the shield. (assuming the bearer is right-handed.) |
| Difference | Distinguishing mark(s). There was a fairly standard set of special marks that could be applied to a coat of arms to distinguish it from another coat from which it was derived. In the case of sons, these marks are determined by birth order in a system called <i>cadency</i> which I'm not going to get into. |
| Displayed | Displayed is a term indicating that a winged creature (almost always a bird, and usually an eagle) is upright, facing the viewer, with it's feet down and it's wings at full extension. Unless specified differently, the wingtips will be pointed toward the top corners of the shield. If the wingtips are pointed down, like on the back of a US quarter, then the description is "an eagle displayed, wings inverted". |
| England | Shorthand for a gules field with three lions passant or , the arms of England. |
| Engrailed | A <i>Line of division</i> , where the edge between two colours has concave semi-circular bites taken out of it, leaving a wave-pattern. This is related to invected where the wave-pattern is convex. |
| Erased | Always used of a body part, most often a head. Erased means the part has a jagged edge where it was separated from the rest of the body, as distinct from couped which would have a smooth edge, as if cut. |
| Ermine | Ermine and its related furs , Counter-Ermine , Erminois , and Ermines are a very stylized representation of the tails of small furry creatures (Weasles, stoats, ermine, all the same thing....) into a larger cloth. The fur of an ermine is white, and the tip of it's tail is black; thus, Ermine . Black with white spots is Counter-Ermine or Ermines . Gold with white spots is called Erminois , and the reverse, black with gold spots, is Pean . |
| Escutcheon | A small shield-shape. A coat of arms that has a pictures of another shield on it has an escutcheon. This charge should be drawn in a way that makes it obvious that it's not a field with a border; generally placing it a little higher than on-centre will accomplish this. |
| Estoille | An estoille is a wavy armed star-shape, filled in, which represents a <i>star</i> amazingly enough. This is distinct from a mullet , which probably represents a spur. |
| Face | (or mask) A beast's head turned so that only the face is seen. This could also be termed <i>an xxx's head Cabbossed</i> . or <i>Caboshed</i> . For some reason, MASK seems to be applied to fox-heads, FACE to leopards, and CABOSSED to cattle. |
| Fess | A fess is a wide horizontal stripe across the middle of the shield. It usually is 1/3rd to 1/5th the height of the shield. A fess is classed as an ordinary , and has as it's diminutives the bar and the barrulet . |
| Fleur de lis | A fleur-de-lis is an abstract representation of a lily or an iris flower. It's hard to describe in words, so look at the picture. The plural is <i>fleurs-de-lis</i> , and a semy of them would be <i>fleury-de-lis</i> . There are some edge-treatments, where the edges of lines of divisions are shaped like fleurs-de-lis, or perhaps the ends of a cross. In that case, the terms <i>Fleury (flory)</i> or <i>Fleuretty</i> are used. There are some technical differences between these uses, but I won't get into them here. |
| France | Shorthand for an azure field, with a semy of fleurs-de-lis , the arms of France. |
| Fret | A fret is a moderately complex shape composed of two crossed diagonal lines through the middle of a diamond-shaped outline, with all the lines "interlaced" or woven over and under each other. If a shield is covered with connected frets, it is called Fretty . People in a hurry or trying to save effort frequently draw fretty just as a bunch of interwoven diagonal lines, without the diamonds. |
| Furs | Furs are special patterned combinations of tinctures; They are not technically considered either metals or colours , but rather a neutral sort of in-between tincture. The most common furs are Ermine and it's variants; counter-ermine, erminois, and pean, and Vair and it's variants; counter-vair, vair-en-point, and vair-in-pale. |
| Garb | A tied bundle of grain. Unless otherwise specified, the grain will be wheat. |
| Gules | Red. One of the seven basic heraldic tinctures , and specifically, one of the five colours . |
| Gemels | A pair of bars or barullets. Gemels is from the latin word for TWIN. I am occasionally confused by phrases like "two bars gemelles", and find myself unable to decide if the writer meant two bars, and was being redundant, or if he actually meant a total of four. The more I think about it, the more i come to believe that four bars is correct, (It might be helpful to think of "a" bar gemels as a bar voided.) What all this means is that, until I fix them, some of the pictures are drawn wrong.... |
| Guardant | With the head turned to face out of the shield. Normally, the head faces in the same direction as the beast. Since beasts normally face to dexter (right, from the viewpoint of the person carrying the shield.), that's the way the head faces. <i>guardant</i> means facing the viewer, reguardant means facing the tail of the beast, which will usually be to sinister. |
| Indented | Indented means that the edge(s) of whatever is being described have a continuous row of wedge-shaped bites taken out, as if it had been trimmed with pinking shears. the bites are smaller than they would be, if the term dancetty were used. |
| Invected | A <i>Line of division</i> , where the edge between two colors has convex semi-circular bites taken out of it, leaving a wave-pattern. This is related to engrailed where the wave-pattern is concave. |
| Inverted | Turned upside down. |

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| Jessant | Shooting forth. This appears so frequently in connection with leopards and fleurs-de-lis that a stock phrase " <i>Jessant-de-lis</i> " has been invented to describe it. Depending on where you look, the fleurs (or whatever else) are shooting out of the beasts mouth. |
| Label | A label is a horizontal stripe, with a number of projections called <i>points</i> sticking down from it. There are three points, unless another number is specified, and they can be either rectangular or dovetailed. (I've never seen one with actual points.) The horizontal stripe usually extends from edge to edge across the shield, but not always. The label is a mark of <i>candency</i> for the eldest son. |
| Langued | Tongued. Describes the color of the beasts tongue. |
| Lozenge | A lozenge is a solid diamond-shaped charge. An exceptionally narrow lozenge would be called a <i>Fusil</i> , and a lozenge voided by another would be a mascle . One other variant is when the lozenge is not voided, but rather pierced with a round hole; in which case it's called a <i>Rustre</i> . |
| Martlet | A martlet is a semi-stylized bird, without a beak or feet. It is always shown statant or standing, in profile, with it's wings down. (close) |
| Mascle | A diamond-shaped outline. A mascle, sometimes spelled " <i>muscle</i> ", is a voided lozenge . |
| Metal | Of the seven basic tinctures , only two are METALS. These are Argent and Or. Argent is silver, or white, while Or is Gold, or yellow. |
| Moline | Said of a cross. The word is derived somehow from mill-rind, and means that the cross looks like a cross composed of two mill-rinds, but that's not terribly usefull information unless you know what a mill-rind looks like.... The cross in question has the ends split and pulled apart. |
| Mullet | A mullet is a solid (filled-in) star with strait arms. (This is the most obvious way that a mullet differs from an estoille , which has wavy arms. Unless otherwise specified, a mullet has 5 points. The charge probably represents a spur, and frequently appears "peirced". |
| Nebuly | A <i>Line of division</i> shaped roughly like the alternating projections and sockets of puzzle pieces. |
| Of the Field | of the same colour, metal, or fur as the underlying basic shield tincture. In SCA heraldry, the term is not used, whatever tincture was meant would simply be repeated in the blazon. |
| Of number | Having that many parts. A shield <i>Barry of six</i> is composed of sixe stripes of alternating colors. A mullet of six has six points. |
| Or | Gold, or sometimes yellow. One of the seven basic heraldic tinctures , and specifically, one of the two metals . |
| Ordinary | An ordinary is one of a group of very common charges on a shield, most of which are composed of one or more stripes in various places or directions. There doesn't seem to be any absolute rule as to what is an ordinary and what is a sub-ordinary, but a typical list would include Fess, Bend, Pale, Cross, Saltire, Chief, Chevron, Pall, Border, and probably one or more of Lozenge, Quarter, Gyron, and Canton. |
| xxx-Wise | (Orientation) Most charges have a standard "rightside up" position. When there is a charge that doesn't, or when the charge is being placed in other-than-default position, you need to describe how the charge is turned. The most common phrases are Fess-Wise (widest axis left-to right), Pale-Wise (widest axis up and down), and Bend-Wise (diagonally). Note that this is different from the placement of the charge(s)... |
| Orle (and tressure) | An orle is what you would get if you painted a border on a shield, and the re-painted the outer half of the border back to the colour of the underlying shield. It's basically a line following the edge of the shield, without touching it. If the line is an unusually thin one, it might be called a tressure , but I've never seen a single tressure, only double-ones, with one thin line inside the other. |
| Overall | This has nothing to do with pants. Overall means just that, over anything else that might be in the way. Overall is usually used when a shield is quartered, to indicate that a charge or ordinary covers the whole shield, not just one quarter, but the term is also used when an ordinary is intended to blot out (parts of) underlying charges, or if charges are intended to blot out (or extend beyond) underlying ordinaries. |
| Pale | A vertical stripe down the centre of the shield. A pale is one of the ordinaries . The diminutive of a pale is a pallet, which is a thinner stripe. A shield can be divided per-pale, in which case, the left and right sides are different colours. |
| Paley | A shield that is divide into an even number of vertical stripes is paly. This is distinct from a shield of one tincture, with vertical stripes of another on it, since in that case, both sides of the shield will be the same colour, and there will be an odd number of stripes of one of the two colours. |
| Passant | Describes a (usually 4-limbed) creature as walking, depicted with three feet on the ground, with one of the front feet lifted and extended as if taking a step. Compare to statant , rampant , and salient . |
| Patonce | As far as I know, the term patonce is only applied to crosses. A cross patonce is one that has the ends "floreated", which is to say, in a shape like the top of a fleur-de-lis. |
| Pattee | Said of a cross; the arms start out narrow at the intersection, and get wider toward the ends. |
| Per xxx... | The phrase "per xxx..." means that the shield is divided as if by a very thin ordinary of the specified type. Thus "Per fess" means divided in half horizontally, because a fess is horizontal, per bend is diagonal, per pale is vertical, and per pall is a "Y" shaped division, and per saltire is divided by 2 crossed diagonal lines. It's possible to divide the shield Per Cross but this is usually called "quarterly". |

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| Pierced | A pierced charge is one that has a round hole in the middle of it. This hole usually shows the tincture of whatever is under the pierced charge, but there can be a different tincture instead. In such a case, the blazon would read "...A <i><charge> pierced <tincture>..</i> " | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pile | A wedge shaped charge, with the point down near the bottom of the shield, and the top part touching the upper edge. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| IN xxx | (Placement) Frequently, multiple charges are mentioned as being <i>IN</i> xxx, where xxx is an ordinary . This means that the charges are arranged in the shape of that ordinary. <i>In fess</i> means the charges are in a horizontal line, <i>In pale</i> is a vertical line, <i>In cross</i> means both. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Plate | A round silver dot. Plate is the special term for a roundel colored silver or white (argent). | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Point | In most contexts, this is a location near the bottom of the shield, about in the centre of the base . The phrase " <i>a point pointed</i> ", however, means a triangular charge emerging from the bottom of the shield, and coming to it's apex at that spot. If you take a chevron , and shove it down until it's almost fallen off the shield, and no tincture shows underneath it, that's a point pointed. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Proper | Proper just means coloured in whatever colour you would most likely find the object in the real world. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Quarter | a square chunk taking up one fourth of the shield. If the shield is divided both per fess and per pale, then each of the four sections is a quarter . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Quarterly | Divided into four quarters. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Naming quarters | When a shield is divided into four quarters, it is frequently necessary to describe what's in each of the quarters separately. The upper right (From the viewpoint of the person carrying the shield) is #1, the upper left is #2, #3 is below #1, and #4 is below #2. Thus, "2 and 3 an eagle" means that there is an eagle in the upper left and lower right corners of the shield. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Quevee | Tailed. Generally applied to lions, the phrase " <i>Double Quevee</i> " or " <i>Quevee Forchee</i> " means that the beast has two tails. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rampant | Describes a 4-limbed creature (usually a beast of prey) as being reared up until only one hind foot is touching the ground. Compare to statant , passant , and salient . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Reguardant | With the head turned to face backwards. Normally, the head faces in the same direction as the beast. Since beasts normally face to dexter (right, from the viewpoint of the person carrying the shield.), that's the way the head faces. guardant means facing the viewer, <i>reguardant</i> means facing the tail of the beast, which will usually be to sinister. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rose | An heraldic rose is a stylized flower, with five petals, seen head-on. Protruding from between each petal is a spiked leaf, called a <i>barb</i> . Toward the centre of the flower there may be one, or more often, five, dots of a different tincture. The rose would then be <i>seeded</i> of that tincture. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Roundel | <p>A filled-in circle. Roundels of each colour have their own special name, as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Argent</td><td>Plate</td></tr> <tr> <td>Or</td><td>Bezant</td></tr> <tr> <td>Azure</td><td>Hurt</td></tr> <tr> <td>Sable</td><td>Ogress</td></tr> <tr> <td>Gules</td><td>Torteaux</td></tr> <tr> <td>Vert</td><td>Pomme</td></tr> <tr> <td>Purple</td><td>Golpe</td></tr> </tbody> </table> | Argent | Plate | Or | Bezant | Azure | Hurt | Sable | Ogress | Gules | Torteaux | Vert | Pomme | Purple | Golpe |
| Argent | Plate | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Or | Bezant | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Azure | Hurt | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sable | Ogress | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gules | Torteaux | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vert | Pomme | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Purple | Golpe | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sable | Black. One of the seven basic heraldic tinctures , and specifically, one of the five colours . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Salient | Describes a 4-limbed creature as leaping up and forward, such that the two rear feet are on the ground, and the two front feet are extended forwards. Compare to rampant , passant , and statant . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Saltire | An ordinary composed of two crossed diagonal stripes, in an 'X'. Sometimes spelled <i>Saltier</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Semy | or Semee; both mean that the area described is covered with strewn charges. Semee of mullets , therefore, would mean that there are an arbitrary number (but probably more than 6, where practical) number of star-shapes scattered about, in no particular arrangement. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sinister | The right edge of the shield as seen by an observer, or the left edge as seen by the bearer of the shield. (assuming the bearer is right-handed.) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Statant | Describes a (usually 4-limbed) creature as standing stationary, with all four feet touching the ground. Compare to rampant , passant , and salient . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tincture | Coats of arms are coloured in using combinations of 7 basic TINCTURES, of which two are metals and five are colours . There are also a number of furs. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Undee | sometimes spelled <i>Ondee</i> , means undulating... It is a broad, shallow form of wavy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vair | Vair, along with it's variants (no pun intended) counter-vair , vair-en-point , and vair-in-pale are among the common heraldic furs . Since it's almost impossible to describe vair at all, much less the variations, without pictures. (to come later) I'll stick to saying that it's a bunch of interlocking bell-shapes, coloured blue and white (azure and argent), unless other tinctures are named. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| Vert | Green. One of the seven basic heraldic tinctures , and specifically, one of the five colours . |
| Voided | A voided charge is one that has it's center blotted out by a smaller version of the same charge, leaving just the outline. Voiding generally is only used on simple geometric charges, and is usually the same colour as whatever's under the charge. It is possible for the voided part to be a third colour, in which case that colour must be named. |
| Wavy | is a deeper, narrower sine-wave shape than is undee . |