

FORMAL LAYOUT OF ARMS

Two distinct roles can be identified, a functional role and a heraldic role.

Heraldic aspects of arms -
The Shield, Wreath, Helmet, Mantle and Motto



THE MANTLE

Originally a mantle protected the knight against the strong sun and chafing of metal. The embellishments originate from supposed battle tears, indicative of bravery

THE CREST -

Borne upon the helmet and above the wreath. The crest made from light wood or boiled leather was a rallying point when the shield or standard was down

THE HELMET

Normally shown in profile to the dexter of the shield (the right hand side as viewed from behind the shield). Stature of a person is shown by the number of bars on the helmet and whether or not the visor is opened or closed, a helmet facing forward with open visor is indicative of royalty. The most common is in profile to the dexter, visor closed with bars, this being the helmet of an esquire

THE WREATH

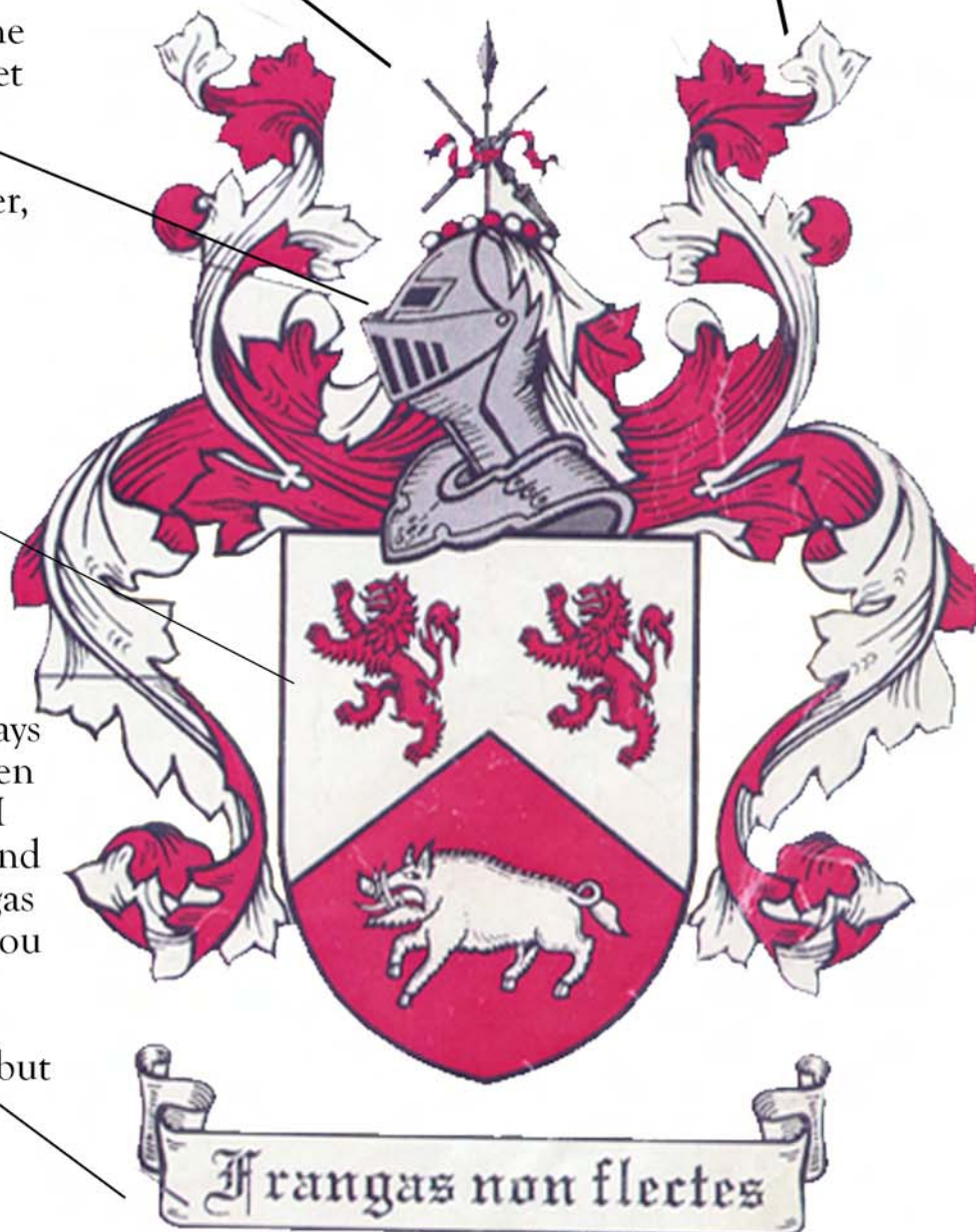
A wreath of two, the major colours of the shield, above the helmet and below the crest

THE SHIELD

Obviously for protection; in heraldry it is the main part of the arms, i.e. for identification

THE MOTTO

Sometimes a battle cry, nearly always a later addition, its meaning is often specific to a family, for example: "I saved the King." "Over for over" and in the example shown here "Frangas non flectes" which translates as thou may'st break, thou shalt not bend me." Mottos are chiefly found in Latin, French, English and Gaelic but also in Greek.





The Right to Bear Arms

At first, armorial bearings were probably like surnames, assumed by each warrior at his freewill and pleasure, his purpose being to distinguish himself and his followers from others. It is not known exactly when the bearing of Coats of Arms first became hereditary, but heraldry did not come into general use until the crusades.

The earliest heraldic document, still in existence today, is The Roll of Arms of the Barons and Knights of the Reign of Henry III. At a later date, the granting of arms became the prerogative of the King, but this was subject to wide-scale abuse.

In the early part of the sixteenth century, important reforms were instituted. Royal commissions were instructed to investigate and record the use of Coats of Arms and to require people to produce authority for bearing and using Coats of Arms. Their decisions are recorded in documents called Heralds' Visitations, which set forth the principal hereditary Coats of Arms.

All persons who can prove descent from an ancestor whose armorial ensigns have been acknowledged in any one of the Visitations are entitled to carry those arms by right of inheritance. However when no such descent can be shown, the person must, if possible, prove himself to be descended from someone whose right has been admitted from a grantee, or he must become a grantee himself. The customers on the whole do not have this right and what we actually supply are reproduction Coats of Arms awarded to a family name.