

= Crest (heraldry) =

A crest is a component of an heraldic display , consisting of the symbol or 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 devices 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 .

= = Origin = =

The word ' crest ' derives from the Latin *crista* , meaning ' tuft ' or ' plume ' , perhaps related to *crinis* , ' hair ' . Crests had existed in various forms since ancient times : Roman officers wore fans of feathers or horsehair , which were placed longitudinally or transversely depending on the wearer 's rank , and Viking helmets were often adorned with wings and animal heads . They first appeared in a heraldic context in the form of the metal fans worn by knights in the 12th and 13th centuries . These were primarily decorative , but may also have served a practical purpose by lessening or deflecting the blows of opponents ' weapons (perhaps why their edges came to be serrated) . These fans were generally of one colour , later evolving to repeat all or part of the arms displayed on the shield .

The fan crest was later developed by cutting out the figure displayed on it , to form a metal outline ; this evolved in the late 13th and early 14th centuries into a three @-@ dimensional sculpture . These were usually made of cloth , leather or paper over a wooden or wire framework , and were typically in the form of an animal ; also popular were wings , horns , human figures , and panaches of feathers . These were probably worn only in tournaments , not battle : not only did they add to the already considerable weight of the helm , they could also have been used by opponents as a handle to pull the wearer 's head down .

Laces , straps or rivets were used to affix the crest to the helm , with the join being covered by a circlet of twisted cloth known as a torse or wreath , or by a coronet in the case of high @-@ ranking nobles . Torses did not come into regular use in Britain until the 15th century , and are still uncommon on the Continent , where crests are usually depicted as continuing into the mantling . Crests were also sometimes mounted on a furred cap known as a chapeau , as in the royal crest of England .

= = Later development = =

By the 16th century the age of tournaments had ended , and physical crests largely disappeared . Their illustrated equivalents consequently began to be treated as simply two @-@ dimensional pictures . Many crests from this period are physically impossible to bear on a helm , e.g the crest granted to Sir Francis Drake in 1581 , which consisted of a disembodied hand issuing from clouds and leading a ship around the globe (representing God 's guidance) .

In the same period , different helms began to be used for different ranks : sovereigns ' and knights ' helms faced forwards (*affronté*) , whereas those of peers and gentlemen faced to the right (*dexter*) . In the mediaeval period crests would always have faced the same way as the helm , but as a result of these rules , the directions of the crest and the helm might be at variance : a knight whose crest was a lion statant , would have the lion depicted as looking over the side of the helm , rather than towards the viewer . Torses also suffered artistically , being treated not as silken circlets , but as horizontal bars .

Heraldry in general underwent something of a renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries , and many of the illogicalities adopted in previous centuries were discarded . Crests are now

generally not granted unless they could actually be used on a physical helm , and the rules about directions of helms are no longer rigidly observed .

= = Usage = =

The use of crests was once restricted to those of ' tournament rank ' , i.e. knights and above , but in modern times nearly all personal arms include crests . They are not generally used by women (with the exception of reigning queens) and clergymen , as they did not participate in war or tournaments and thus would not have helms on which to wear them . Some heraldists are also of the opinion that crests , as personal devices , are not suited for use by corporate bodies , but this is not widely observed .

On the Continent , particularly Germany , crests have a far greater significance than in Britain , and it is common for one person to display multiple crests with his arms ; certain high @-@ ranking noblemen are entitled to as many as seventeen . This practice did not exist in Britain until the modern era , and arms with more than one crest are still rare . In contrast to Continental practice , where a crest is never detached from its helm , a Briton with more than one crest may choose to display only one crested helm , and have the other crests simply floating in space . Though usually adopted through marriage to an heiress , examples exist of secondary crests being granted as augmentations : after defeating the Americans at the Battle of Bladensburg , Robert Ross was granted , in addition to his original crest , the crest of an arm holding the US flag with a broken flagstaff .

After the 16th century , it became common for armigers to detach the crest and wreath from the helm , and use them in the manner of a badge , displayed on crockery , carriage doors , stationery , etc . This led to the erroneous use of the term ' crest ' to mean ' arms ' , which has regrettably become widespread in recent years . Unlike a badge , which can be used by any amount of relatives and retainers , a crest is personal to the armiger , and its use by others is considered usurpation . In Scotland , however , a member of a clan or house is entitled to use a ' crest @-@ badge ' , which consists of the chief 's crest encircled by a strap and buckle inscribed with the chiefly motto .

Marks of cadency are generally not used with crests , though it is not incorrect to do so , and the British royal family continue this practice . It is , however , widely observed in England that no two families may use the same crest . This is in contrast to Scottish practice , in which crests are less significant , and are often borne in the same form by a great many people , even when no blood relationship exists between them . As a result of this lack of need for differentiation , Scottish crests tend to be far simpler than their English counterparts .

The usual torse around the crest is frequently replaced by some kind of coronet , known as a ' crest @-@ coronet ' . The usual form is a simplified ducal coronet , consisting of three fleurons on a golden circlet ; these are not , however , indications of rank , though they are not generally granted nowadays except in special circumstances . In some modern examples , the crest features both a crest @-@ coronet and a torse , though this practice is deprecated by purists .

= = Orders of chivalry = =

Perhaps the only places physical crests are still seen are the chapels of Britain 's orders of chivalry : the Order of the Garter 's St George 's Chapel , the Order of the Thistle 's Thistle Chapel , and the Order of the Bath 's Henry VII Chapel . Within each chapel are rows of stalls for use by the knights ; above these stalls are placed each knight 's sword and crested helm . These are carved out of lime wood and painted and gilded by Ian Brennan , the official sculptor to the royal household .