

The Armorial Register Limited

Guidance on the use of

Personal Arms

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So, you've just been granted new arms, or perhaps you've assumed new armorial bearings, but you're not quite sure how you should use them and may perhaps not be familiar with the general practice in the use of coats of arms. Congratulations, you are now armigerous, you are an armiger.

How you use your arms is mostly entirely down to you; some armigers are quite ostentatious in their use of arms, others not so much. They are your arms and how you use them is entirely at your discretion. Having said that, there is one cautious note worth bearing in mind, that of business use. If you are self employed we would advise against using your personal arms for use in your business because one day you may wish to sell it, perhaps upon your retirement, and if your arms have become so deeply embedded in the identity of your business, prospective purchasers may feel they have some right to the arms associated with the business but they don't, the arms are your personal arms and the fact that they can't be transferred with the business may in fact have a detrimental effect upon its value.

So, how do you use your new arms. At its core, arms are the visual equivalent of their owner's name and personal identity. So, wherever you believe that it is appropriate to display your name it will also be appropriate to display your arms, either along with your written name or instead of it. Both Name and Arms stand for the same thing, your personal identity.

Many persons who have Arms ('armigers') show great ingenuity in the decorative use of their Arms, and have done so for many centuries. Here are some suggestions:

Signet Rings, usually nowadays made of solid gold, with a wider flat area called the 'table' to carry the engraving usually within an oval shape. The harder 9 or 18 carat alloys wear better than the purer 22 or 24 carat alloys which are much softer.

The Crest, or Crest and Motto, or the Shield of the Arms alone can be engraved on the table in reverse, to produce an impression on sealing wax the right way round. It is perfectly correct to show either Crest or Shield, whichever you may prefer.

Such rings can be passed on to the original armiger's successive heirs in the Arms for many generations and the Hallmark on the ring will identify which of the successive holders was the original owner. Signet rings are often given by armigers to their eldest sons on the latter's coming of age. These should bear the armiger's Arms with the addition of a 'label of three points' which is the mark of the heir to the Arms.

When, upon the original armiger's death, the heir inherits the Arms he can pass on this ring with the heir's mark to his son in turn.

Wives of armigers may similarly wear their husband's Arms or Crest on a ring or brooch.

Mottoes can be included on rings showing the armigers' Crests, but their very small size will often render the lettering unintelligible.

The Wreath, sometimes called the torse, which appears beneath the Crest should always be included, to indicate that the device above it is a heraldic Crest.

Using ones arms on personal stationery can be done by any of the following ways:-

(a) Use your Crest , shown on the Wreath;

(b) Use your Crest, on its Wreath, with your Motto below;

(c) Use your Shield of Arms alone;

(d) Use your whole 'Achievement', comprising Shield, Helmet and Mantling, Wreath, Crest and Motto.

Bear in mind the actual space you have available, options (a) and (b) are usually shown at a small size, about one centimetre high, and placed immediately above the name/address. (c) and (d) are larger, about two centimetres high and are usually placed in the top left corner of the sheet with the printed address in the top right corner. Any of these options, and not necessarily the same one, can also be shown on the back flap of envelopes and on calling cards.

Personal Arms on stationery can be printed in full colour, including gold, or can be printed equally correctly in monochrome. The latter is more usual. Make sure that the printer is aware that you hold the copyright to any images they may use and must under no circumstances be used for anyone else.

There is no reason why an armiger's wife should not use his arms on her own personal stationary (there may be different customs as to the form of display dependant upon country of domicile so please check first).

Nowadays, it would be most unusual for any of us to find the right occasion to bear our arms upon a shield in public but one way that we can easily display our armigerous status is by flying a flag. All armigers have the automatic right to display their Arms on a personal banner. 'Banner' is the correct name for a personal flag, There are other armorial flags that are appropriate such as a Pennon and Standard which are special flags of a quite different shape. Banners are generally of rectangular shape, of the proportion 5 wide and 4 high. They can actually be of any size depending on the site where they are flown and should be large enough for their devices to be intelligible. Size, therefore, can vary from 5 metres wide x 4 metres high for the top of a high tower, to 12.5 centimetres x 10 centimetres for a table decoration.

Flags can be made of any material suitable for their purpose but take into account where it is going to be flown. A flag flown from a flag pole outdoors is going to have to be far more hardwearing than one used for display on a pole behind your desk.

It is important to note that all banners should show only what appears on the armiger's Shield of Arms, extended as necessary to fill the rectangular shape entirely.

The 'Livery Colours' of an armiger are the two main colours of his Arms and can be most easily discerned in the wreath which appears between the Helm and the Crest. It is composed of alternating twists of the Livery Colours. There is no reason why Livery Colours shouldn't be used in any way you might feel suitable, whether it is in a decorative sense or as bunting. These things are limited only by your imagination.

Use of ones arms to denote ownership of the books in ones library, no matter how modest it may be, in the form of an ex-libris, or bookplate, has for centuries been a splendid way to express ones individuality; bookplates come in as many different forms as there are arms and, once again, their design is limited only by your imagination.

Seen less nowadays than in the heyday of the great houses, it is still perfectly correct for an armiger to have his domestic silver engraved with any of the options listed in section above for stationery. The Crest is usually used on smaller pieces such as the handles of forks and spoons, the Arms or full Achievement on larger pieces such as bowls or salvers. The armiger's name or monogram is usually omitted in these uses, as he can be identified from the Arms shown and dated from the silver's hallmarks.

Although nowadays perhaps less seen, possibly because it is prohibitively expensive, many armigers have stone carvings of their Arms, most usually the full Achievement, built into their houses where they are the more splendid and permanent equivalent of his name on a brass plate beside the door. They usually are placed on stone panels over the lintel of the front door, or in the triangular space over dormer windows, often with the appropriate date alongside.

Much use of Arms is also made on tombstones and other memorials, usually as a grand heading to the inscriptions beneath.

Good luck, and remember, heraldry should be fun. Enjoy your new arms and make the best use of them that you can.