

Scottish Clan and Family Identification

By Elaine Ries

March 21, 2013

Which Clan or Family? Scottish clans (from Scottish Gaelic clann, "children"), give a sense of identity and shared descent to people in Scotland and their relations throughout the world, with a formal structure of clan Chiefs officially registered with the court of the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, which controls the heraldry and Coats of Arms. In the modern age, a clan (and sometimes a sept has its own tartan patterns, usually dating to only the 19th century, and members of the clan proudly wear kilts, skirts, sashes, ties, scarves, and other items of clothing made of the appropriate tartan as a badge of membership and uniform, where appropriate and sometimes inappropriate.

By Tartan

There are no official rules on who can or cannot wear a particular tartan. Up to the present, there has been no official registry of tartans but this changed on the 9th of October 2008, when it was announced that the Scottish Parliament had passed a bill establishing an official register of tartans for the first time. The National Archives of Scotland is creating and will maintain the register. Even though the Lord Lyon does not have jurisdiction over tartans, the Lord Lyon may record a specific tartan which a clan chief or commander wishes to use it as an "official" tartan for their clan.

Originally there appears to have been no association of tartans with specific clans; instead, Highland tartans were produced to various designs by local weavers and any identification was purely regional, but the idea of a clan-specific tartan gained currency in the late 18th century and in 1815 the Highland Society of London began the naming of clan-specific tartans. Many of today's clan tartans are the work of a 19th-century forgery known as the Vestiarium Scoticum. Despite this, the designs are still highly regarded and they continue to serve their purpose to identify the clan in question.

By Crest Badge

A sign of allegiance to a clan chief is the wearing of a crest badge. The crest badge suitable for a clansman or clanswoman consists of the chief's heraldic crest encircled with a strap and buckle and which contains the chief's heraldic motto or slogan. Although it is common to speak of "clan crests" there really is no such thing. In Scotland (and indeed all of the United Kingdom) only individuals, not clans, may possess a heraldic Coat of Arms. Although clansmen and clanswomen may purchase crest badges and wear them to show their allegiance to a clan, the heraldic crest and motto always belong to the chief alone. In principle, these badges should only be used with the permission of the clan chief and the Lyon Court has intervened in cases where permission has been withheld.

Scottish crest badges, much like clan-specific tartans, do not have a long history, and owe much to Victorian era romanticism (early to mid-1800s), having only been worn on the bonnet since that time. The concept of a clan badge or form of identification has some validity, as it is commonly stated that the original markers were specific plants worn in bonnets or hung from a pole or spear. We'll look at that habit in detail a little later.

Cockades

An interesting manifestation of this habit, which was not confined to the Highlands or even to Scotland itself, is the wearing of a symbol in cloth to identify the wearer's allegiance. It was a wide-spread practice throughout Europe and is best-known from its use as a 'cockade' or knot of ribbon in the 18th century. A cockade was pinned on the side of a man's tricorne or cocked hat, or on his lapel. Women could also wear it on their hat or in their hair. A cockade uses distinctive colors to show the allegiance of its wearer to some political faction, their rank, or as part of a servant's or horse's livery. During the Wars of the Roses in 14th and 15th century England, the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions wore cockades of red and white, worked into the shape of a blooming rose.

In pre-revolutionary France, the cockade of the Bourbon dynasty was all white. In Great Britain, a white cockade was worn by those supporting the restoration of the Jacobite monarchy. In contrast, the Hanoverian monarchy they were trying to overthrow wore a cockade that was all black. Elsewhere and at other times up to the present, there was more variety. During the 1780

Gordon Riots in London the blue cockade became a symbol of anti-government feelings and was worn by most of the rioters.

During the American Revolution, the Continental Army initially wore cockades of various colors as an *ad hoc* form of rank insignia, as George Washington wrote:

“As the Continental Army has unfortunately no uniforms, and consequently many inconveniences arise from not being able to distinguish commissioned officers from the privates, it is desired that some badge of distinction be immediately provided; for instance, that the field officers may have red or pink colored cockades in their hats, captains yellow or buff, and subalterns green.”

Before long, the Continental Army reverted to wearing the black cockade they inherited from the British. Later, when France became an ally of the United States, the Continental Army pinned the white cockade of the French *Ancien Régime* onto their old black cockade; the French reciprocally pinned the black cockade on their white cockade, as a mark of the French-American alliance. The black-and-white cockade thus became known as the ‘Union Cockade’.

Cockades were later widely worn by revolutionaries and proponents of various political factions in France and its colonies beginning in 1789. Just as they did in the United States a few years before, the French now pinned the blue-and-red cockade of Paris onto the white cockade of the *Ancien Régime* - thus producing the original *Tricolor* cockade. Later, distinctive colors and styles of cockade would indicate the wearer's faction—although the meanings of the various styles were not consistent, and varied somewhat by region and period.

Echoing their use when Americans rebelled against British rule, cockades – usually made with blue ribbons and worn on clothing or hats – were widespread tokens of southern support for secession preceding the American Civil War.

Interestingly, warplanes today bear insignia of their allegiance, as well as images of their national flags, as well – from the Japanese ‘rising sun’ and the red Soviet ‘hammer and sickle’ to the red, white, and blue circles of the United States and Great Britain. Also from the 18th century various European states used cockades to denote the nationalities of their military.

Ribbon-style cockades were worn on tricorn and bicorn hats just as the French did, and also on cocked hats and shakos; metal cockades were worn at the right side of helmets; small button-type cockades were worn at the front of kepis and peaked caps. And who could ever forget the Third Reich's adoption of the ancient swastika and the black double eagle as national symbols?

Plant Badges

Clan badges are another means of showing one's allegiance to a Scottish clan, family, or cause. These badges, sometimes called plant badges, consist of a sprig of a particular plant. They are usually worn in the bonnet behind the Scottish crest badge; they can also be attached at the shoulder of a lady's tartan sash, or tied to a pole and used as a rallying standard. Many clans connected historically or that occupied lands in the same general area, sometimes shared a common plant badge. According to popular lore, plant badges were used by Scottish clans as a form of identification in battle. However, many of the badges attributed to clans today are completely unsuitable for even modern clan gatherings. Plant badges are commonly referred to as the original clan symbol; however Thomas Innes of Learney claimed the heraldic banners of clan chiefs were the earliest means of identifying Scottish clans in battle or at large gatherings.

Here are some of the traditional clan-plant badges:

Clan	Plant Badge
Arthur	Wild myrtle
Brodie	Periwinkle
Buchanan	Oak
Campbell	Bog myrtle
Crawford	Boxwood
Cumming	Pussy willow
Donnachaidh	Bracken
Drummond	Holly

Forbes	Broom
Gordon	Ivy
Grant, Gregor	Pine
Gunn, MacLeod	Juniper
Innes, MacKay	Bulrush
MacAlister	Heath
MacFarlane	Cranberry
MacRae	Club moss
Morrison	Driftwood
Rose	Rosemary
Stewart	Rose
Wallace	Oak

Heraldic Banners

These are more correctly identified as the banners or flags of the clan chiefs, since they involve heraldic images that are legally personal possessions of the chiefs. They were usually made of tapered cloth of various colors with the arms, badges, and mottos superimposed. They were modeled on the personal heraldic standards of knights, lords, and clan chiefs used throughout Europe in the late Middle Ages. Many of these historic flags still exist, but they are really not appropriate for general clan use.

Types of Banners

Standard - an elongated shape, tapering from 4 feet down to 2 feet, with the fly edge split and rounded (lanceolate). The length is according to rank, from over 20 feet for the Sovereign down to 10 feet for a Knight, Baron or Chief. It bears Arms as on the shield, with the tail parted per

fess with the Crest, Badge and/or Supporter, plus the motto on one or more ribbons. The Standard is set before the Chief's tent as a Headquarters flag and does not indicate that the Armiger is in residence) rather than carried like a banner. A Standard requires a separate grant by the Lord Lyon and is only made under certain conditions.



Guidon – one-third shorter than a Standard and tapering to a round, unsplit end at the fly. These are assigned by Lord Lyon to individuals who have supporters to their arms, and to others who have a following – those in a position of leadership or some official position.

Pennon – a smaller, elongated flag 4 ft long with a pointed, rounded or swallow-tailed end, designed to be displayed on a lance, assigned by Lord Lyon King to an Armiger who applies for one. It is emblazoned with the personal heraldic badge or other armorial ensign of the owner.



Pennoncelle or Pincel – a modification of a pennon, 4 feet long x 2 feet high at the hoist and tapering away to a point, bearing the Crest Badge and perhaps the Motto on the livery colors. This is flown by anyone officially representing or delegated by the Chief, so tents at gatherings and games usually fit the bill. HOWEVER, it is allotted only to Chiefs or particular Chieftain-Barons only upon the specific authority of Lord Lyon.



Banner – a square or rectangular upright representation of the Arms designed for carrying in warfare or tournaments, but now flown as a “house flag” when the Armiger is in residence and is NOT the flag of the Clan or Family.. Originally, conspicuous gallantry in battle was marked by cutting off the tail of the Standard or Pennon, turning it into a Banner. Strictly speaking, the sizes and shapes are:

Square banner – Sovereign, 54 inches square; Dukes; 4 feet square; Earls, 3 feet square; Viscounts and Barons, 3 feet square; Baronets and feudal barons, also 3 feet square; other Armigers, 23 inches wide x 30 inches high

Rectangular banner – typically in the ratio 3:2, or 5:4 when flown as the “house flag” of an Armiger.

Carrying flag – should be sized (width x height): Peers, 4 feet x 4.5 feet; Feudal Barons, 3 feet x 4 feet; Chiefs, 30 inches x 40 inches; Chieftains, slightly larger.



Gonfalon – vertically-hung banner bearing the Coat of Arms, widely used in processions and carried before the Armiger (such as a Chief).



Ensign – small, decorated (often with a gold fringe) of the livery colors, bearing full Achievement of Arms, usually on a stiff backing.

Table banner – similar to an Ensign, but designed for an Armiger to put on the dinner-table.

Pipe banner – similar to a Banner, but of a size to fit on the longest drone of pipes (usually 2 feet) and decorated with gold fringing, tassels and the like. The pipe banner for a Chief who is also a Peer or a Feudal Baron should have a rounded end extending beyond the length, and any other Chief a split rounded end.

If you are interested in applying for Arms on your own or want to understand the requirements for Arms, visit www.brucedurie.co.uk or contact Professor Durie at gen@brucedurie.co.uk (he's really well connected; he's is one of those 'much acclaimed' guys).

Clan members sometimes carry and display versions of these heraldic banners, but this is not appropriate, according to the Lord Lyon. They are not the flags of the clans themselves, any more than the Royal Lion banner is an alternative flag of Scotland. We are well within bounds in identifying ourselves as members of a clan or family with the clan banners we typically carry in festivals and parades – consisting of clan crests imprinted or stitched onto tartan cloth. While written clan names on banners is considered *outré* by those adhering strictly to protocol, no one seems to mind, for it helps those unfamiliar with traditional methods of clan identification.