

# Tudor Heraldry and Ranks of English Nobility

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This brief article describes the basic ins and outs of early English heraldry and a description of the uses of the major noble titles.

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Arms of Elizabeth I

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Although the actual origins of heraldry are still being debated, we begin with 12th century Europe.

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The use of heraldry began with the development of more sophisticated armor. When the face became invisible behind closed helmets, a system had to be developed that allowed instant recognition.

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The adopted signs quickly became objects of pride and were jealously guarded. A son would inherit his father's markings and carry them into battle in his turn.

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The use of heraldry flourished in tournaments originally held to give practice in the use of the lance. The armorial decorations at these jousts were supervised by heralds under command of a Marshall and a Constable. These officers are the origins of the College of Arms.

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The use of gunpowder made armor obsolete. However, heraldry not only survived but flourished. Arms were displayed on seals which was useful since a majority of people in the middle ages couldn't read.

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Since heraldry flourished, it needed to become regulated. It was necessary to have a language that not only accurately described the arms, but one that others could understand. The language used was Norman French. It is still being used to this day.

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Dukes

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A duke is the highest non-royal title in British peerage. Dukes are technically princes since they descended directly from a King. A duke is addressed as His Grace. The younger sons are addressed by the title Lord and then their Christian name. Daughters are titled Lady. The eldest sons of dukes have precedence immediately below marquesses and use one of their father's secondary titles.

The Duke of Norfolk is Premier Duke of England and is also Earl Marshall. See [The Duke of Norfolk Worship Page](#)

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Marquess

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The second most important title in peerage is the Marquess. In Scotland the preferred spelling for pre-Union titles is Marquis which reflects France's influence. When you see Marquis spelled in the French manner you will know it refers to a Scottish peerage established before the time of James I. The title is from "march" which means boundary, as in that

once hostile area between England and Wales. A man defending such a frontier was known as a Lord March. That evolved into Marquess. A Marquess is "The Most Hon." and his children are addressed identically to those of a duke. The eldest son also bears one of his father's subsidiary titles.

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## Earls

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The word Earl is from the Anglo-Saxon magnate known as an ealdorman who was a local ruler. The original term is from "jarl" - a powerful Viking Noble. Many former Prime Ministers were made earls when they left office. Until the 17th century an earl was invested by the Sovereign with the sword he wore at his waist - hence the term 'a belted earl'. Some Scottish earldoms pass through the female line. The present Earl of Mar is a woman. The eldest son of an earl always bears one of his father's (or mother's) secondary titles. The other sons are "Hon." Daughters are styled Lady.

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## Viscounts

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Scottish Viscounts are known as the Master of "Whatever". Such designations are not courtesy titles but ancient and honorable designations. The children of a Viscount are called "Hon." even if the Viscount in question has a secondary title of baron. Recently, the title has been used to reward distinguished people who deserve more than a barony to get them into the House of Lords. Even if a Viscount has a secondary title of baron, it is not used by his heir. All the children of a Viscount are 'Hons.'

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### Barons

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Barons are the lowest rank of peerage, yet are the most ancient of all titles. The children of a baron are called "Hon." and their heirs bear no subsidiary title with one exception. In Scotland many eldest sons are entitled to the designation of "Master". Some of the oldest English and Scottish baronies pass through the female line. Life Peers are considered the equals of hereditary barons with the exception that their title dies with them.

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### Baronets

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King James I invented the title in 1611, partly to raise money and partly to encourage development of distant provinces. Baronets were recruited from the old untitled landed gentry. Queen Victoria considered baronetcies useful for "ennobling the middle class". Baronets created since the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been called " of the United Kingdom". Baronetcies were created widely in the last hundred years to honor doctors, lawyers, business leaders, writers etc. There have been no baronetcies created since 1964.

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A coat of arms is obtained in only two ways. 1st - by applying for a grant of new arms, or 2nd - by proving descent from someone who was legally entitled to the use of arms. Just because someone with your last name has a coat of arms, doesn't entitle you the use it officially - because it really is not your coat of arms or family crest!

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Ever been offered a search of some database for your family's coat of arms by some shop or shopping mall vendor? Anyone offering you a coat of arms "over the counter" for a sum of money is ripping you off. Save the money and buy a good graphics program instead. The whole family will have fun designing an "informal" coat of arms that is unique to your family. Alternatively, you can consult an internationally recognized institution and have a coat of arms / family heraldic crest made for you and officially registered (a grant of new arms). This can become costly, but it is truly "official" and legitimate, and you won't look like a fool who displays "his" fake, so-called heraldry with pride.

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Arms of Elizabeth II

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Royal arms are different from standard coats of arms. They stand for sovereignty of the ruler. They pass by conquest and are not necessarily hereditary. When a new dynasty takes over, they usually quarter the existing coat of arms with their own. However, the personal arms of the Tudors were never added to the royal arms of England.

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Three lions as the arms of England were used by Kings John, Henry III, Edward I, and Edward II.

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The quartering for France was introduced by Edward III

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The shield quartered with France and the three English lions was used by Edward II and Richard II (who impaled his arms with those of St. Edward the Confessor) and Henry IV. Henry IV reduced the number of Fleurs-de-lis to 3.

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The shield remained unchanged until the end of the reign of Edward VI (son of Henry VIII)

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Arms of Edward VI

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Mary I did not change the arms. But, when she married Philip of Spain, she always bore them impaled with the arms of Spain.

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Elizabeth I used the same shield as her predecessors. However, she did prefer the dragon to be in gold instead of red. The dragon symbolizes Wales.

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When Elizabeth I died and King James VI of Scotland became James I of England, he united Scotland and England. The shield was changed to add the arms of Scotland (A lion rampant within a double tressure flory and counterflory gules) Got all that? If you look at the arms of James I, in the top right quadrant you will see a lion standing on its hind legs facing left. Those are the arms of Scotland. The harp represents Ireland.

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Arms of James I

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