

DEVICES VS. BADGES

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In the SCA, we can register names, devices, and badges with the College of Arms. The question that this article addresses is *For any given occasion, is it more appropriate to use a badge or a device?* Of necessity, it also addresses the related question of *What do devices and badges say?*

Let me start off by defining a few words:

- Device: In the SCA, it is considered the particular heraldic symbol of an individual or branch, referring to him, her, or it, exclusively, or to its ruling noble, in the case of a kingdom, principality, or barony. Unique devices can be registered with the SCA College of Arms, subject to certain rules and standards.
- Arms: Once a person has been given Arms by royal authority in the form of either an Award of Arms, a Grant of Arms, or a Patent of Arms, the term *arms* refers to that person's device (see above). This may take place even when the person so honored has yet to register a device with the SCA College of Arms.
- Badge: Real-world badges are nearly always fieldless. Badges are typically used to represent awards/orders, fighting units, guilds, or households. They mark someone as being affiliated with someone else, and they mark stuff as belonging to someone. SCA badges, unlike devices, may also be registered to two individuals jointly.

You may have heard the difference between devices and badges summarized as “my device is me, and my badge is mine.” This is useful for memory, but both incomplete and not always accurate. Still, there is a distinction between the meaning of a device and that of a badge. Here goes...

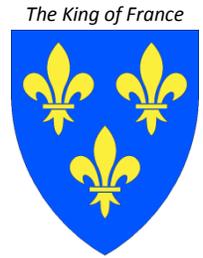
The use of a device:

A Herald wearing a tabard of the Royal Arms of An Tir



An individual's device indicates him or her particularly. That is, if a banner of my device is flown at an SCA event, it indicates that I am (at least ceremonially) present. Nobody but me should wear a surcôte of my arms, and a herald wearing a tabard of my arms is ceremonially speaking as my voice. Written documents sealed with my device are thereby identified as being written by me, in the same way as a letter or contract bearing my signature does. Just imagine if everyone competing in the Crown Lists had a personal herald, attired in a tabard of their personal arms, to present them to the Crown in invocation court.

Tangible items marked solely with my personal device are designated as part of my estate, normally inseparable from the remainder of the estate, *even if I am no longer the owner of the estate*. This doesn't come up much in the SCA, but to use a medieval example, items bearing the royal arms of France (Azure, three fleurs-de-lis Or.) would belong to the French Crown, regardless of who the current monarch was, and would pass to each successive monarch, even if the previous monarch were still alive.



The Royal Arms of An Tir
Flown at an Event



As a result, putting the royal arms of An Tir up at an event could be interpreted as declaring that the King of An Tir is ceremonially present at the event. Putting the royal arms of An Tir on the bumper or rear window of your personal vehicle technically identifies that vehicle as being property of the Crown of An Tir, and painting the royal arms of An Tir on an award scroll is tantamount to saying that the award is given by authority of the King of An Tir.

Tangible items bearing the devices of many people (such as a cathedral with the arms of many people emblazoned in its stained-glass windows) honor those individuals or indicate that those individuals are donors to the church, members of a class of people honored by that church (such as an order of knights, or the attributed arms of certain saints, etc.). Sometimes, in period, professional heralds would wear a tabard bearing the arms of the various employers for whom they had worked.

The King of An Tir wearing
the Royal Coat of Arms



The use of branch arms is much the same, except that the device represents the branch itself as if it were a municipal or corporate entity, and in the case of a barony, principality, or kingdom, the entity's "self" is vested in the person of the baron, prince, or king, respectively. As such, when a person is crowned King of An Tir, he typically lays aside the use of his personal device until he steps down from the throne, and instead uses the royal arms of the kingdom during his reign.

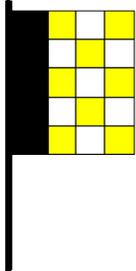
The use of a badge:

A badge designates affiliation more than identity. While only the King of Scots may use the Scottish Royal Arms (Or, a lion rampant gules armed and langued azure within a double tressure flory-counterflory of the second.), any Scot may fly a flag of the St. Andrew's cross (Azure, a saltire argent.). Similarly, when we use a populace badge, we are not claiming to be the owner of the badge, but merely affiliated with the owner.



So if you're looking for an appropriate window decal for your personal vehicle to indicate your affiliation with the Kingdom of An Tir, you should use a window decal depicting one of the An Tir populace badges—not the royal arms.

An Tir ensign



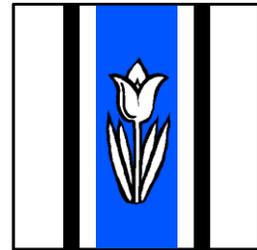
An Tir Populace Badge (1 of 2)



An Tir Populace Badge (2 of 2)



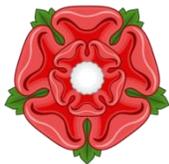
Midhaven Populace Badge



If you give a belt favor bearing your badge to someone (a squire, protégé, apprentice, student, personal champion, household member, your children, etc.) you thereby mark them as being affiliated with you somehow. A fighting unit may wear matching livery, all displaying the badge of their unit. Likewise, there may be a particular badge established for the use of the retinue, guards, or servants of a particular noble. Even mercantile enterprises may use heraldic badges as a livery for their employees.

Tangible property (usually other than clothing) marked with a badge indicates that it is property of the owner of the badge, or made by the owner of the badge, or in some other way is affiliated with the owner of the badge personally (i.e. not simply as part of the

Lancaster Rose



owner's estate, but personal property). with a badge could wearer is a household, or affiliated with that

King of England



rather his/her Clothing marked indicate that the member of a guild, order that is badge. As a

York Rose



medieval example, in the Wars of forces (fighting for King Henry forces (fighting for King Edward IV) they were attired in the badges of Lancaster and York (the red rose and the white rose, respectively) because both sides claimed the throne, rendering use of royal badges confusing.

If I've left you totally confused, I guess you can always revert to the old saying, "My device is me, and my badge is mine."