

To All and Singular

An exploration of heraldry and its relation to the modern day. As well a design project which will attempt to democratise the knowledge and use of coats of arms.

Ben Platten
M00776148

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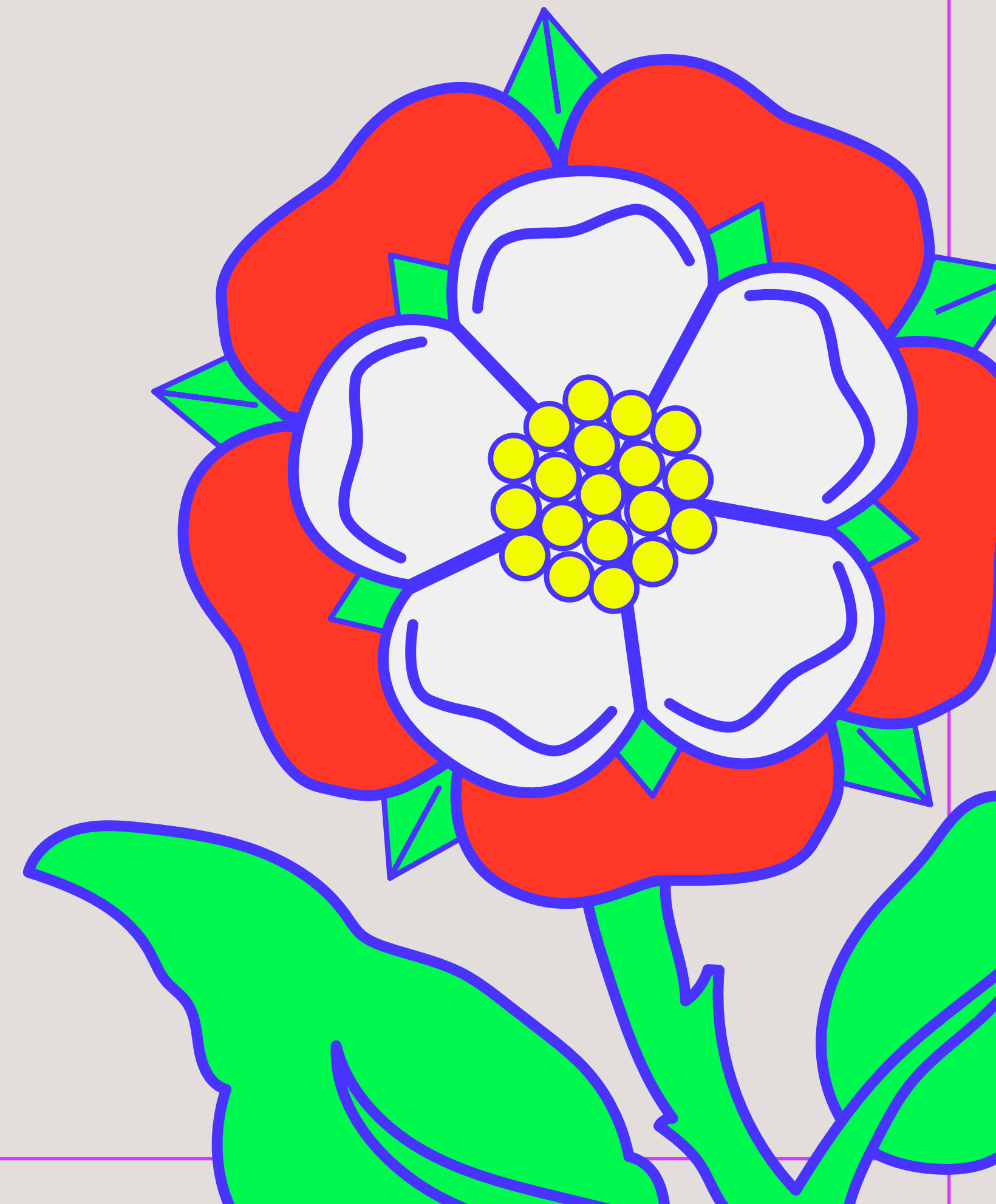
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Introduction

In 1989, Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp acquired the publisher Collins, combining it with their previous acquisition Harper & Row. The two brands were merged in name and logo, and Harper Collins would go on to become one of the 'big five' in English-language publishing. Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv were tasked with combining the torch from one logo with the fountain from the other, and these form the abstracted fire-and-water logo we know today (Fig. 1).

The act of merging identifiers can be traced back almost a thousand years to the time of Geoffrey Plantagenet (Woodcock and Robinson, 1988). At that time if a landed noble married a woman who was known as a heraldic heiress, her arms would be impaled with his (Boutell, C. 1864). Her coat of arms would be compacted so they only took up the left – dexter – half of the shield, leaving room for his on the sinister; they would be together on one escutcheon (fig. 2).

Fig. 1
The logo's composition.

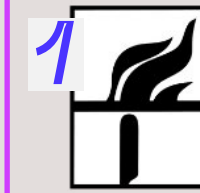
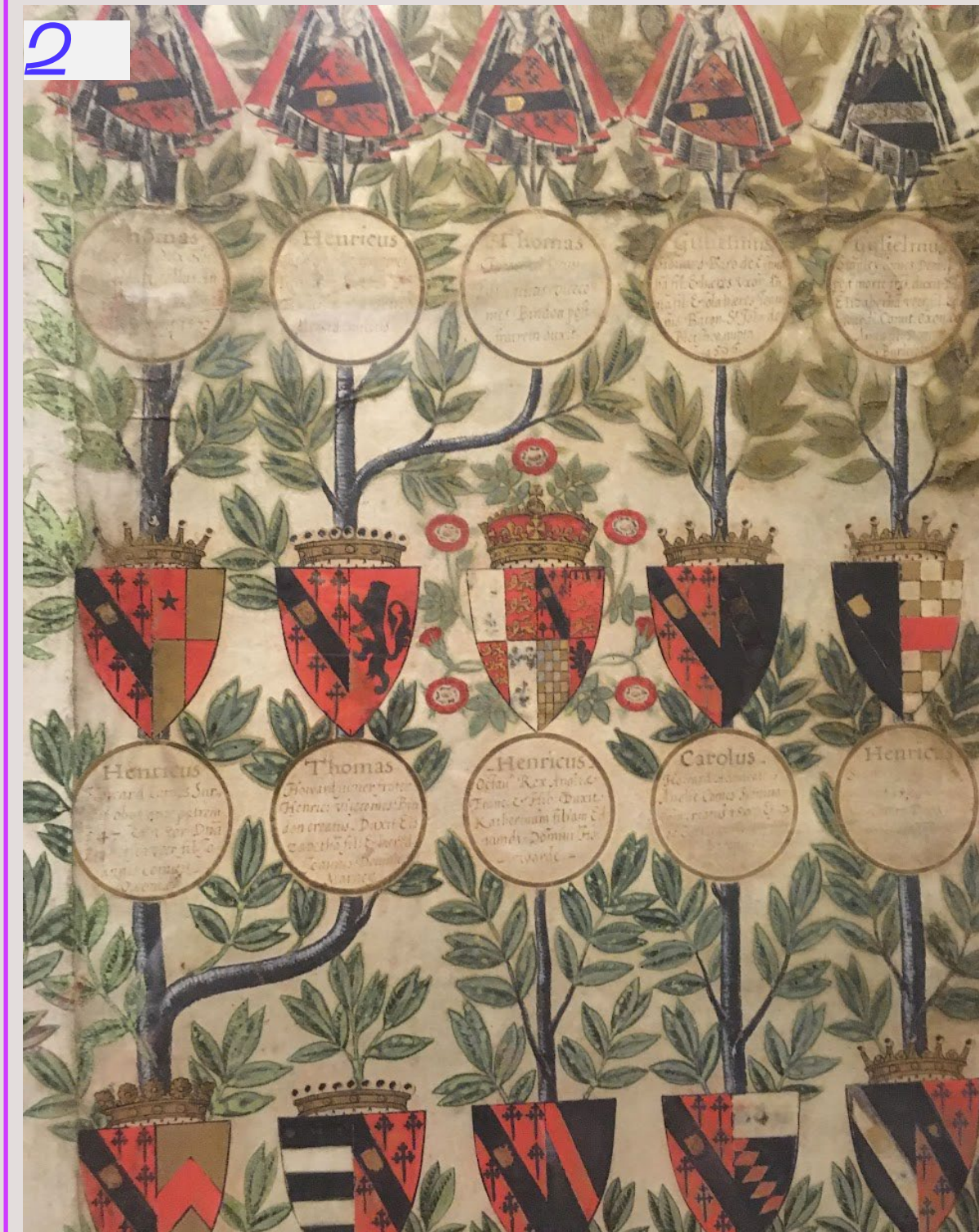
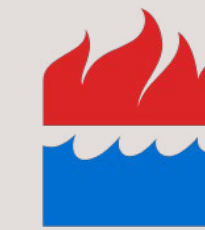
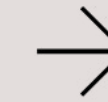


Fig. 2
Illuminated pedigree of Thomas Sackville (c.1536–1608), in Latin, 1599.



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This would represent the merging of two great houses, and their children may adapt this into their own coats of arms. In fact, this process of combining arms at marriage gave rise to the arms of Cecil, 2nd Baron Baltimore (fig. 3) – today is seen as the state flag of Maryland (fig. 4).

Although at one point the heraldic device was an ID, it grew to indicate status and pedigree. (Child, H. 1976 p.19) In today's modern society, with its own issues and advances, does this ancient art form still have a place?

In part one of this report, I plan to dissect the history of heraldry and how it can be used to understand the past, ourselves and those around us. I will explore the genesis of corporate branding via heraldry.

In part two I will juxtapose these ideas against my own experiences – an autoethnographic method. I'll aim to break down the gatekeeping in heraldic circles and review my own internalised pedantry around the subject. I will discuss the misogyny that is pervasive in the college of arms and where that originates.

This will lead to the creation of an educational website, an app, and an exhibition – ultimately aiming to create a more inclusive conversation around heraldry.

Fig. 3
Lord Calverts Arms Quarterly: 1 & 4: Paly of six Sable and Or, a bend paly counterchanged. 2 & 3: Quarterly Gules and Arnet a cross bottony counterchanged.

Fig. 4
State Flag of Maryland Quarterly, 1st and 4th Paly of six Or and Sable a bend counterchanged (Calvert), 2nd and 3rd Quarterly Argent and Gules over all a cross bottony counterchanged (Crosslands)



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Historical Context

The exact creation of heraldry is not necessarily known; some historians argue it could be traced back to proto-heraldic devices found dating back to ancient Egypt (Rosenblatt, B. 2013; Metzsig, W. 1983). In the early 11th Century, with advances in plate armour technology. Helmets, which had previously been open at the face for visibility, could now be fitted with a hinged visor for protection – at the cost of concealing the identity of the person within (Galbreath and Jéquier, 1977, p. 5). A likely apocryphal story is that in 1066, William the Conqueror's men at The Battle of Hastings thought he had been killed. Leading him to remove his helmet during the fray to reassure his men that he was still alive (Lower, M, 1845, Alexopoulos, T., 2020) – as recorded in the Bayeux tapestry (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5
Duke William (second left) lifts his helmet to be recognized on the battlefield

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Many consider this incident for the inception of English heraldry (Lower, M.A. 1845). The first symbols used were the normal features of a shield, such as the carbuncle which is an elaborate boss (the central metal part of the shield), or hides of vair or ermine, which would give the shield more protection (Wade, W. 1898 p. 12). It then follows that warriors could place visual representations of protection on their physical protection, such as a cross as if asking for the divine to grant them supernatural wards against harm. The people of that time felt closely connected with animals (Oelze, A. 2018) therefore they would choose beasts that represented virtues that they saw in themselves. These arms became more ornate over time as they were appropriated by the societal elite and became more about fashion than function (Fig. 6 and 7).

The system of patterns and colours and symbols were brought into the tourney arena (Pastoureau, 1997, p. 27), where the art of war becomes sport. Like modern-day sport teams, combatants would wear a distinctive tunic to denote who they were for their adoring fans. These were known as coats of arms.

Fig. 6
arms of King Henry III, c. 1255,
showing 3 lions passant

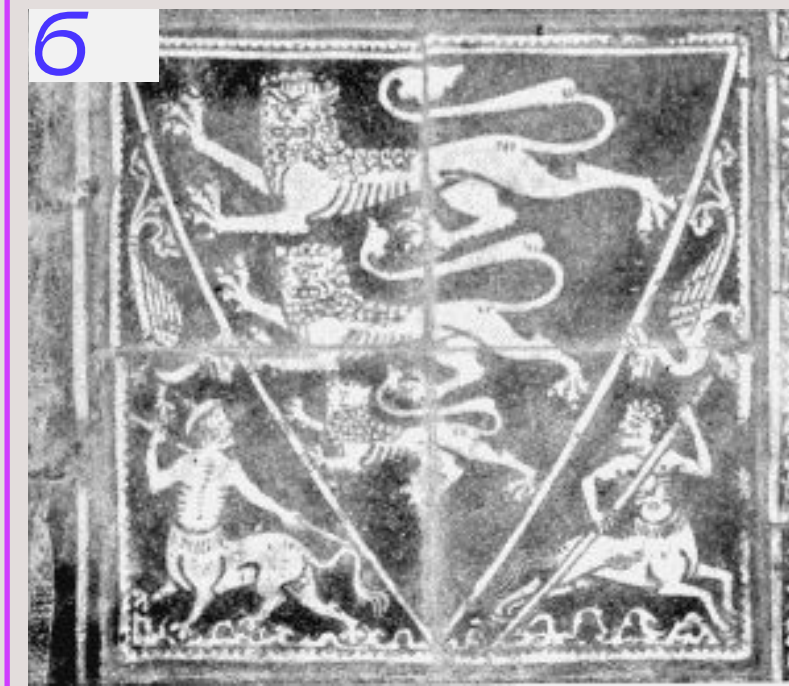
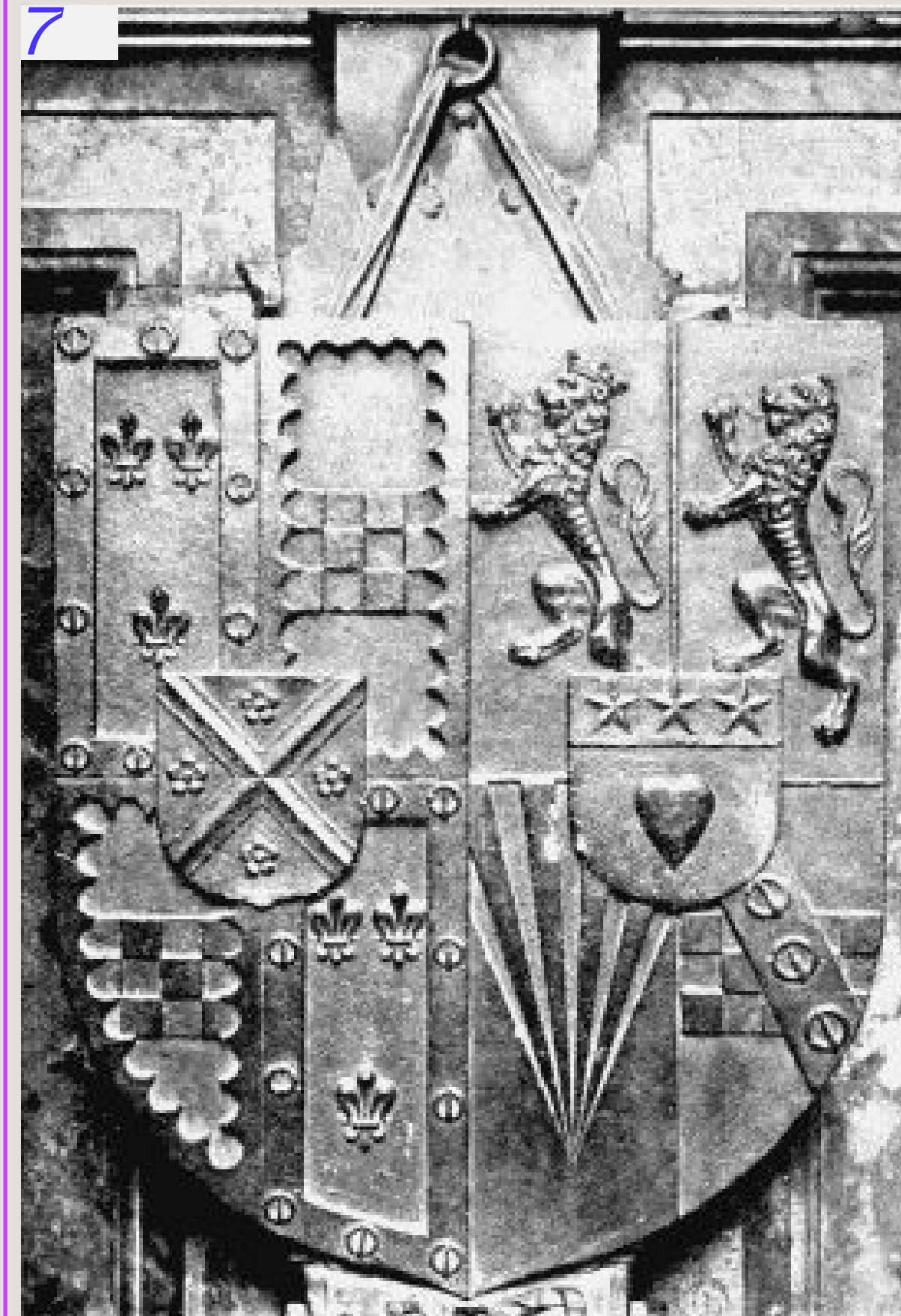


Fig. 7
Shield from the tomb of Margaret,
Countess of Lennox (ob. 1578)



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Heralds emerged as experts in distinguishing between the different coats of arms. They managed the combatants of the tourney and recorded their arms. In 1484 the Heralds were granted a charter of incorporation by Richard III. The organisation became known as the College of Arms (College of Arms, 2023) and have been granting arms since – give or take a few skirmishes with the crown. As a part of my research, I visited the College of Arms, which is open to the public on weekdays. It is not a hugely popular attraction, but is interesting to visit: heralds still work in the building.

The Exhibition space is in the High Court of Chivalry (Fig. 7) – where cases based on heraldic intellectual property law were heard. The room contains a few artefacts including Queen Elizabeth II's coronation cushion – a gift of soft furnishings is customary after a coronation. Exhibitions are unlabeled, it is left up to the visitor to interpret on their own.

Fig. 8
Exhibition space at the college of arms and a close up of the display.



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The bulk of a herald's work, along with the creation of new arms, was recording the arms of knights in what is known as a roll for posterity – some of which survive to this day. Rolls of arms (Fox-Davies, A.C. 1909) are codices of armorial bearings recorded from an important battle, tournament, region, order, or by design element (Slater, S. 2002). These rolls can be not only historically educational but also in certain cases like the manesse codex (N/A. 1300), giving us a better understanding of the Knight's inner life via imagery alone (Fig. 9).

From my research, the symbols used in heraldry are not always clear. A bearer of arms could use a charge to mean something completely antithetical to the meaning I might ascribe to it. In his Rhetoric of the Image (1964) Roland Barthes argued that symbols need to have a verbal or textual attachment for us to understand them – meaning we use language to codify the definition of a symbol. Charles Morris however states that "language itself is a plurality of signs" (Morris, C. 1946) – but how were those signs taught to us? Society changes how we read an image, in the way that as a child you learn to understand an image from how authority figures react to that symbol. They, in turn, have been taught by their elders and the wider society to react to those symbols in a similar context.

The "signifier-signified" relationship, as Victor Turner describes, exists between the message and the viewer (Turner, V. 1975). He suggests that a symbol (signifier) must have a general acceptance of its meaning, but anthropologically that depends on the societal lens we are viewing that symbol through. This then makes the place identity of both the viewer and signifier paramount to reading it. These meanings can change from culture to culture, and over time.

Fig. 9
Hawart felling a bear and taking the bear's head for his arms.



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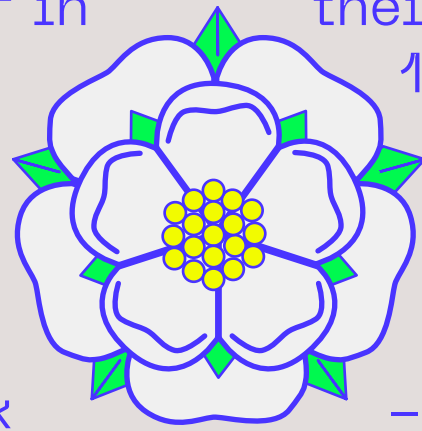
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The use of historical symbols could be used to evoke the history of a community. In Yorkshire, there are common motifs shared between the coats of arms of civil authorities. The main symbolic reference is the White Yorkist Rose which was adopted by Edmund Duke of York (Newton, G. 2019) as his personal symbol at the beginning of the fifteenth-century civil wars between York and Lancaster in their vie for the English throne (Edgar, J.G. 1859). This device is then used as a collective symbol for that area's allegiance to the Yorkist division in the Wars of the Roses.



The people of York – over half a millennia later – still feel a sense of pride instilled by this heraldic device and use it (Fig. 10) to represent their sense of place and community and a friendly rivalry with Lancashire-based Football teams. The York Rose is referenced in the Leeds United F.C. identity (Fig. 11) to represent the team's positioning in Yorkshire and its loyalty to it. There are many other examples of how heraldic devices have been distilled down into football team logos.

Fig. 10
Arms of Hornsea town council

Fig. 11
Leeds United Football Club displaying the white rose



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An excellent example is the logo of the England national football team. The escutcheon (Fig. 12) bears three lions on a semé (a field of smaller identical charges) of Tudor roses. If we dissect the logo, the device is taken from the English royal family whose main charge is indeed three lions (Isherwood, G. 2015). This relates to a time when individuals who owned property often used their arms as the arms of their land. However, this logo was not granted by the monarchy but was designed using specific symbology that would be understood internationally.

The success of this brand goes even deeper, as it also summons a feeling of national loyalty via the Tudor Rose. The lions may represent an enduring device for kings and queens of England, but it's the field of red and white roses that cements it as truly English for its citizenry. While the family that originated the symbol died out centuries ago (Davies, C.S. 2012), this symbol of English unity remains deeply entrenched in their semiology of place (Isherwood, G. 2015). Individuals bring their own personal selves when responding to the use of understood signifiers of place and loyalty. This can form a community of separate personalities who feel part of a larger group when they see another bearing the same device, thus signalling their allegiance.

Fig. 12
Three Lions on a shirt. The 1974 logo of the England football team.



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These themes of allegiance and loyalty are at play when historic cultural symbols are co-opted by political movements. Fascism in Germany and Italy arose around the same time period and yet had very different symbology but based on a similar idea. They both looked to their own past; the Fasces (Fig. 13) in Italy were appropriated from an ancient Roman symbol which meant political power, as a bundle of sticks is harder to break than one on its own. The Italian public would recognize this symbol, but it would hold little relevance to others. (Anti-Defamation League. 2013).

The Nazi party on the other hand turned to Norse Pagan ritualism, calling upon the imagery of runic lettering to summon ideas of powerful warriors. The 'SS' symbol designed by Walter Heck was adapted from the rune Sieg representing victory (Yenne, Bill. 2010). In Umberto Eco's list of 14 typical features of "Ur-Faschism" from the essay of the same name, cult of tradition comes in at the very top (Eco, U. 1995). More recently historic images were invoked in the January 6th riots, along with new dog whistles from the past and present. (Fig. 14)

Fig. 13
The bundle of sticks with axe in the centre of the Fascist logo.



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Fig. 14
Don't tread on me. Traditional symbols seen at the US Capitol on Jan 6th 2021 included Betsy Ross and Gadsden flags, both from 1775.

Coats of arms can be seen dotted around the City of London, and a large percentage of these are of the City's Livery companies. They were once guilds that maintained marks of high standards for craftsmen and merchants, and are now charitable organisations (Jagger, P.D. 2014; Herbert, W. 1837). As they have been operating for hundreds of years, one can find the graphic devices of different companies in places the company owns or operates. For instance, the Mercers Company owns much of Covent Garden (Chesher, J. 2022). One only need look for the maiden issuant from the clouds to find Mercers' property (Fig. 15 to 18).

Fig. 15
Coat of arms of The Mercers Company.

Fig. 16
Ironmonger Lane, EC2

Fig. 17
Langley House, Long Acre, Covent Garden

Fig. 18
Shelton Street, WC2



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What if, however, the creation of heraldry could unlock a new sense of personal identity? One study into art therapy and its links to heraldry showed promise, in combating depression and existential anxiety (Johnson, D.P. 1979). The study highlights one patient who was a widow and an empty-nester. She had built her sense of identity around her husband and children, a very common reality in Western society, and when bereft of both she found herself without self-identity, and seemingly without purpose. Through her investigations into heraldry and the creation of her own personal arms, the patient rediscovered aspects of herself she was suppressing.

What I found interesting in this paper was the personal journey it took to develop the coat of arms itself. This is what I believe separates great heraldry from amateur heraldic devices. You can simply pluck shapes, colours, and charges out of thin air based on your current mood, but to make a truly timeless coat of arms you must dig into the very core of a person's identity. This is heightened by the fact that arms have a societal weight to them, and are used to showcase to society how the bearer is to be perceived.

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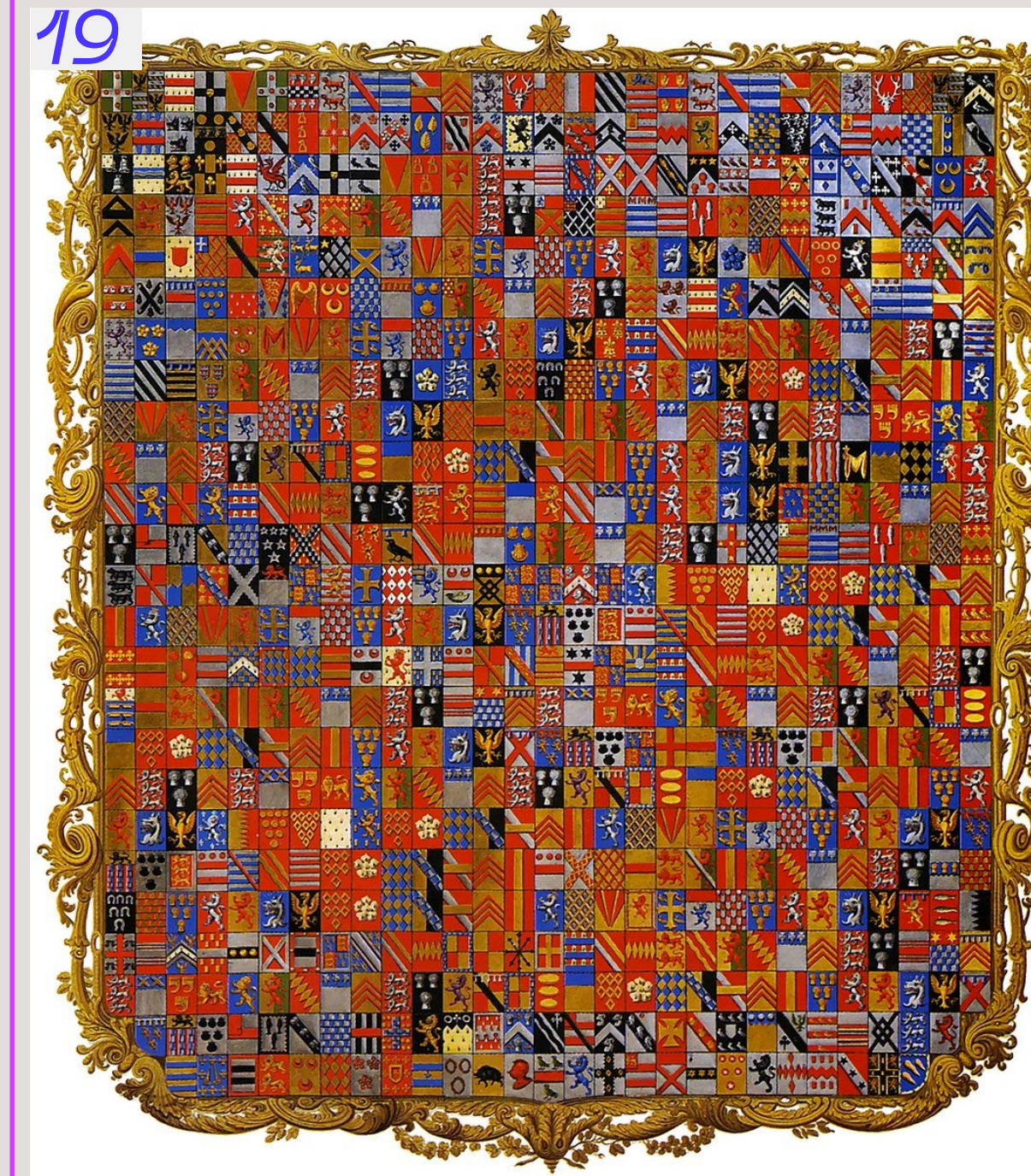
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Today, we use emojis on our social media pages to signal our identity – perhaps to attract those with similar interests or spark debate. In the US, it's common to have a heart in the colour tied to your political party (Li, J et al. 2020). Country flags, LGBT+ symbols, and right-wing 'dog whistles' are all common. They succinctly express complex ideas, and let users distil their accomplishments, ideals or upbringing symbolically – just like grants of arms.

What of the individuals who have inherited arms? Contrary to popular belief, arms are not "passed down" by last name but – as they exemplify an individual – can only be passed on after that person dies, and only to one other usually male heir. Candidly, what it tells the signalled is that the bearer wants to be known for their powerful familial ties (St John Hope, W.H. 1913). For instance the 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos – whose arms are well-known for having no fewer than 719 quarterings (Fig. 19). If we were to look critically at Buckingham's arms, any message becomes muddled in a horrifying patchwork of charges. What is tragic is that his identity is lost.

Fig. 19
Buckingham's complicated arms.



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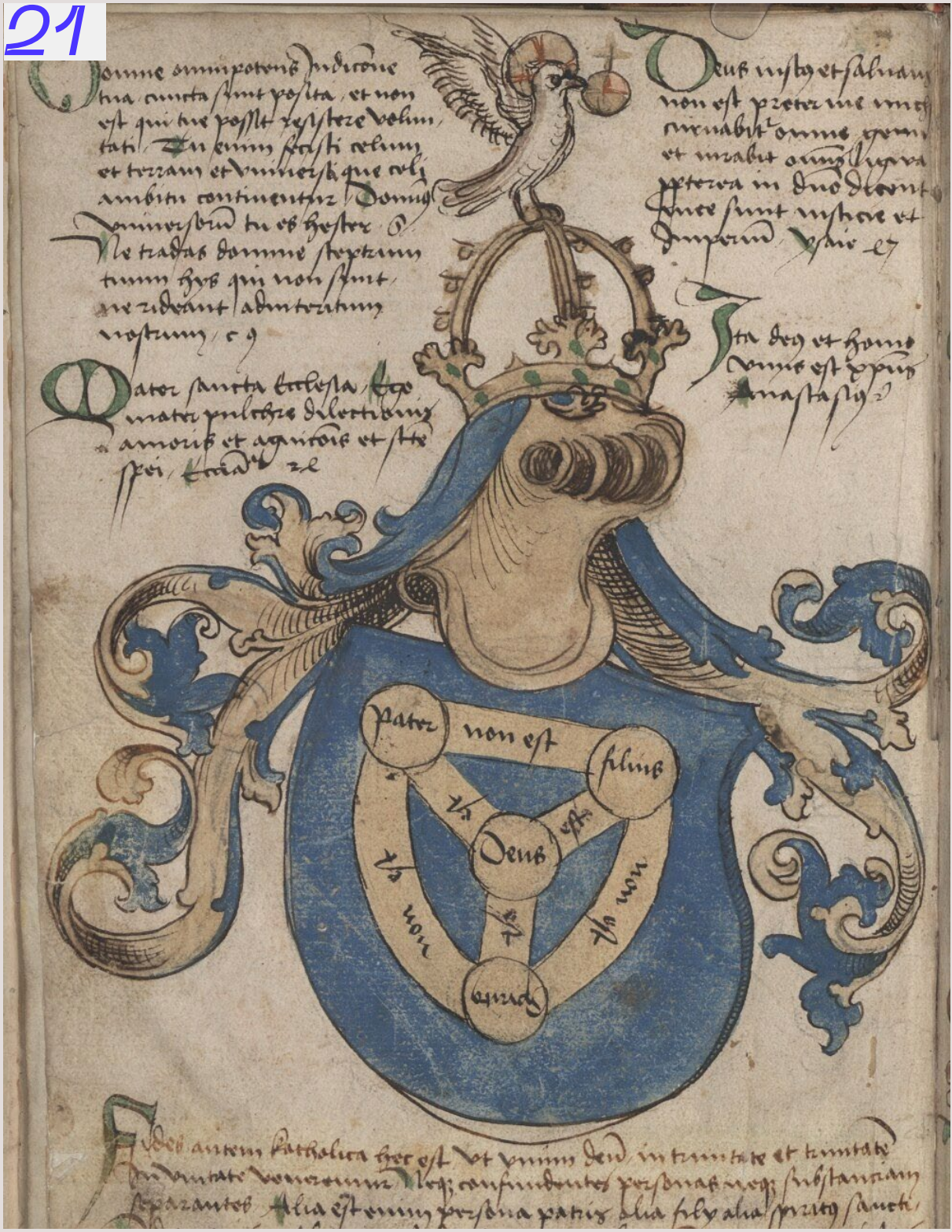
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What points to a pure vision of identity through heraldry is not arms that were used in history but attributed arms. These were fabricated for figures, fictional or not, by heralds who took it upon themselves to show what people thought of these figures and the popular culture of the day in which they were designed. There are hundreds of these arms but I will focus on the arms of Satan and God. Satan's arms (Fig. 20) are a field Gules, Three frogs proper and a fess Or (Friar, S. and Ferguson, J. 1993). The meaning behind the amphibious addition comes from the Book of Revelations as issuant from the false prophet's mouth "Three unclean spirits like frogs."

God's arms are less standardised which is consistent with the deity as new branches of Christianity appear due to disputes over the corpus of the divine (Fig. 21). A common theme however is the shield of the trinity. This came out of the desire to give form to the ephemeral (Neubecker, O. et al., 1977). Blue is a divine colour, representing lightness and spirituality (Pastoureau, M. 2001) – as well as the rarity of the pigment itself, in contrast to the common blood-red of Satan's arms.

Fig. 20
Satan's arms from The Douce Apocalypse 1265

Fig. 21
Arms of the Trinity from The Wernigerode Armorial 1486



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Symbiosis

Whilst primarily distinct, the personal and communal overlap in the corporate sphere. Here, we can begin to discuss how heraldry links to today and can give us a brief nod to our past. A corporation is both communal and personal by nature as it is both made up of distinct employees and yet is run (often) by one figurehead. This is not unlike a monarch who has attached their own arms to a country. It has been observed by many scholars of heraldry that corporate logos have evolved from coats of arms (Bantjes, M. 2018; Droulers, D. 2016). A strong parallel which can be drawn between trademarks and arms is Blazon (the syntax in which arms are expressed in heraldry, in Norman English) which is extremely precise in its description of the piece. It is sufficiently precise that someone could recreate it exactly from the description alone. In both cases, if there is any infringement or impersonation the guilty party could well find themselves taken to court.

There are some examples of arms transfiguring into corporate branding, with the Barclays logo (Fig. 22, 23). The blue eagle that UK consumers know today derives from the coat of arms granted in 1938 – although the symbol goes further back to the 1700s. It's certainly understandable that a bank would want to evoke themes of longevity and stability by choosing a heraldic basis for its logo.

Fig. 22
Barclays Coat of Arms.

Fig. 23
Timeline of Barclays logo.



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If one wanted to use a coat of arms as a logo, what would work in a modern context? A good logo has to be instantly recognizable even when scaled down. In his video essay, Linus Boman (2020) refers to a full coat of arms simply reduced in size as resembling a "squashed cockroach". So what is a designer to do? William Metzиг, a Graphic designer working in the 1950s, created numerous 'updated arms' for clients (Metzig, W. 1983). These have, however, become dated by today's standards and still are too elaborate for modern logos (Fig. 24).

Starbucks "siren" (Fig. 25) is also a heraldic beast known as a Melusine (Fig. 26) more common in Germany than in Britain (Fern, J. 1980)

Fig. 24 Metzиг's armorial design.

Fig. 25 Starbucks logo progression.

Fig. 26 Illustration of a Melusine in a heraldic shield.



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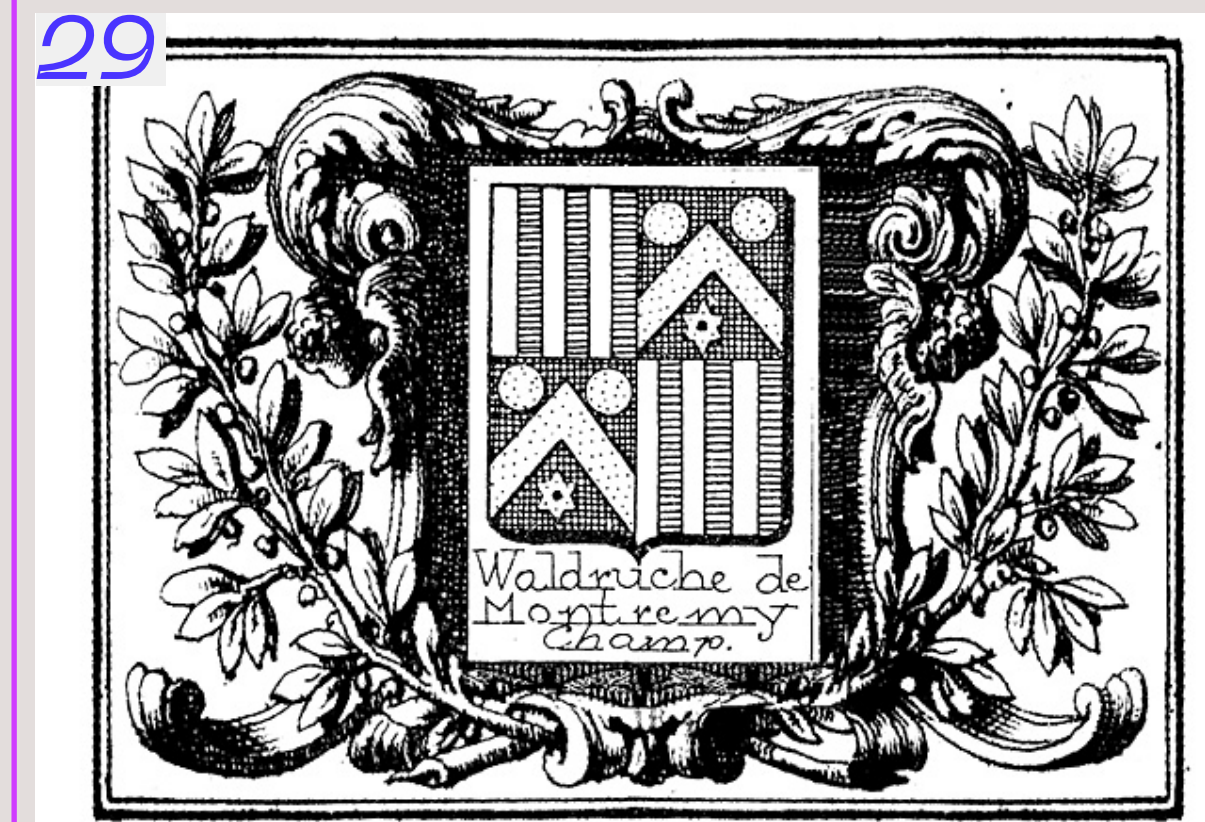
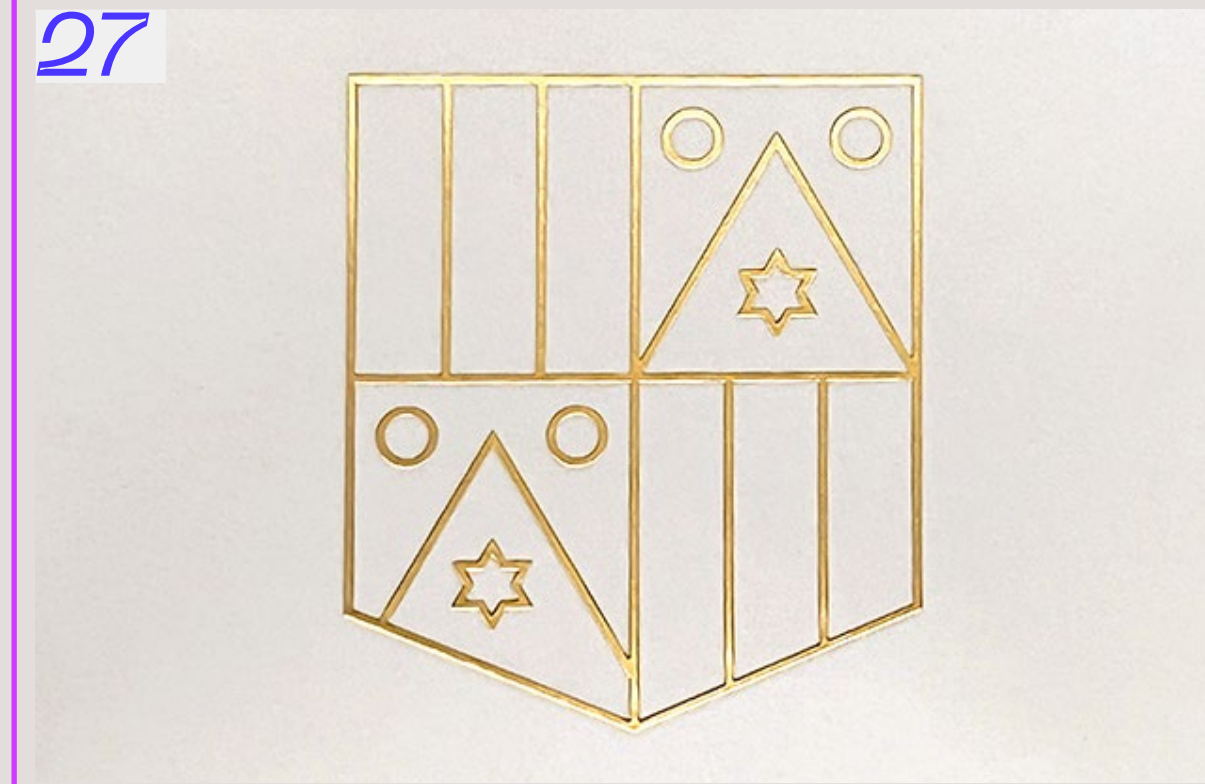
The book *Modern Heraldry* by Counter Print (2020) lists logos taken from or inspired by the heraldic tradition. There are many interesting logos but one I would like to discuss is London design agency Flat 33's logo for The Waldriche De Montremy family, a champagne producer. Rather than having the full arms – including supporters – they have simplified only the escutcheon (Fig. 27, 28) making it easier to recognize for a wider audience and keeping the family's history alive.

A minor criticism I have with the logo is the fact the colour has been removed. This is normal in logo design, however, colour is a very important element to arms and should be at least respected in some way. Perhaps a hatching could've been used to demonstrate different sections of colour without actually using full colour (Fig. 29).

Fig. 27
The redesigned arms.

Fig. 28
The arms in situ.

Fig. 29
A historical use of the hatching system for these arms.



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Heraldry can also be referenced in interior design. Artists David Hamilton and Robert Cooper drew upon the arms of the Fitzroy family – who owned the land the station is on – when they designed the panelling for Euston Station's Northern line platform. They reduced the arms into basic divisions and ordinaries to create a geometric pattern from the quartered arms with a bend sinister (Fig. 26, 27). While this is an interesting nod to the history of the area, the charges are completely absent, which removes a layer from the piece as the symbols are the element that gives context to the design.

Fig. 30
Design elements at Euston station.



Fig. 31
The Fitzroy family's arms.



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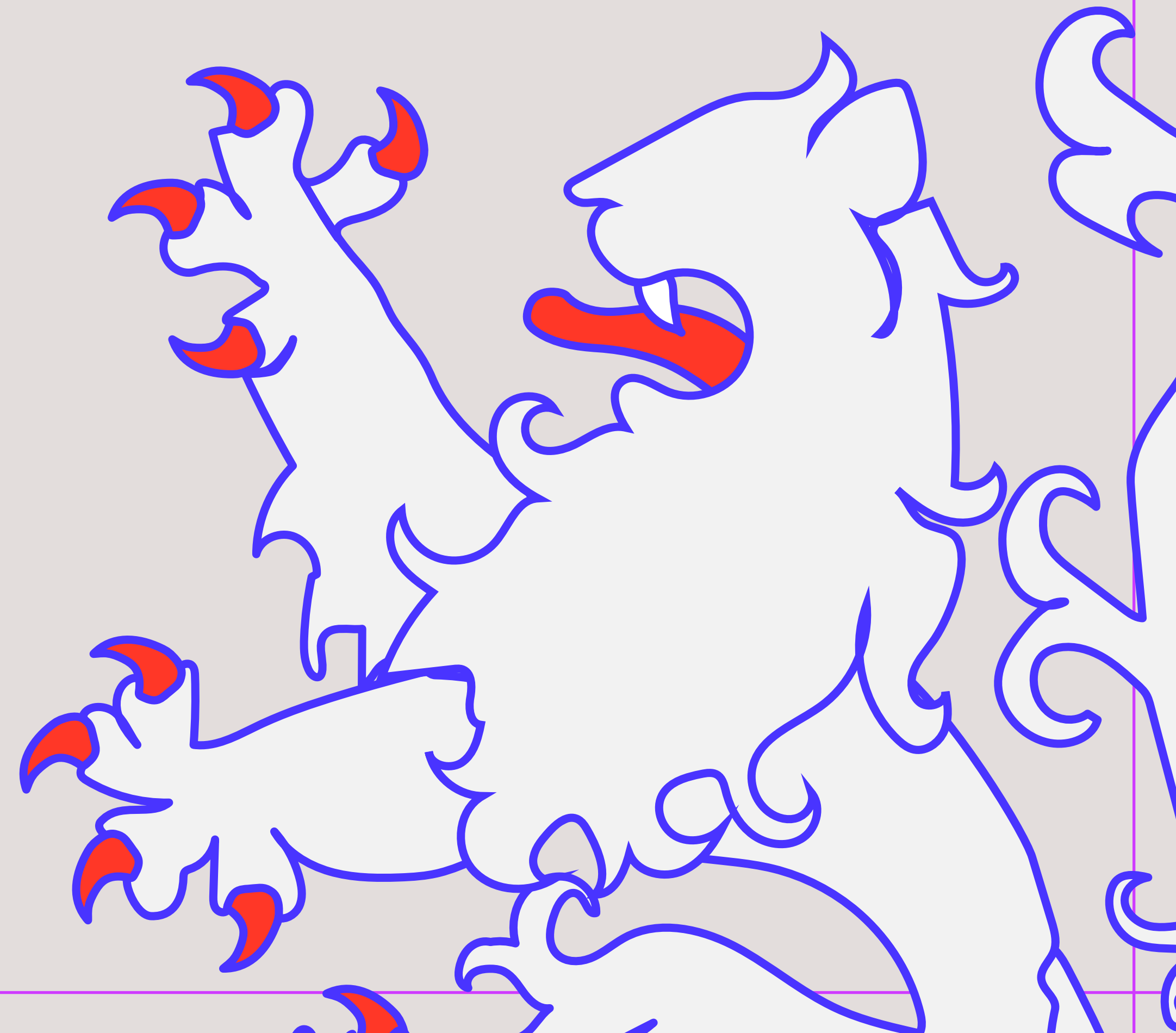
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Intro to Design work

To review, the symbolic devices in arms are very powerful tools to both bring a community together and to actualise an identity. However, there is a complication to the narrative that I have been discussing.

When interviewing people as part of my research, I've found there is a light interest in heraldry – but it rarely goes beyond a surface review of the literature available. Why is this? It would be easy to say that it is society's changing landscape that is to blame for heraldic knowledge's drop in relevance to the individual. I agree with that statement to some extent, although it is not a wholly satisfying answer.

It was during my design process I believe I uncovered an additional reason for the decline.

My response to the topic was to consider how design can help to educate about heraldry's past and present. I started the project with an idea for a public database of arms – similar to one used by the heraldic authority in Canada. This could also use machine learning and computer vision to visually search for arms that users found around London. My next step was to attempt to learn more from the heralds, artists and scribes that work at the college. I approached them to learn how they work and to find out more about aspects of the creation process I didn't know.

I created wireframes and a pitch which I brought into the college, included below (Fig. 32 to 35).

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College of Arms Website

The brief is to create a refreshed website to bring the college into the digital age. This will include a digital database of arms which will bring the public closer to armorial achievements. It will also help free up time for Heralds to work on creation of arms.

There will also be an app that will use machine learning (AI) to search the data base using photos people take from around the city and beyond.

In this document

In this document I have included wire frames to give an idea of what the website will look / feel like. This is a very early proof of concept and not a finished product.

I want to deliver designs for:

- An education/discovery app
- A public-facing website
- An internal search tool
- An admin tool to add heraldic claims

Why invest in digital design?

- Efficiency for staff
- Reaching a younger audience
- Being a digital resource for researchers

What would help me?

- Advice and opinions
- Shadowing staff
- Feedback on my designs

Home page

Referencing the structure of a coat of arms the main navigation page is divided into chief, fess and base.

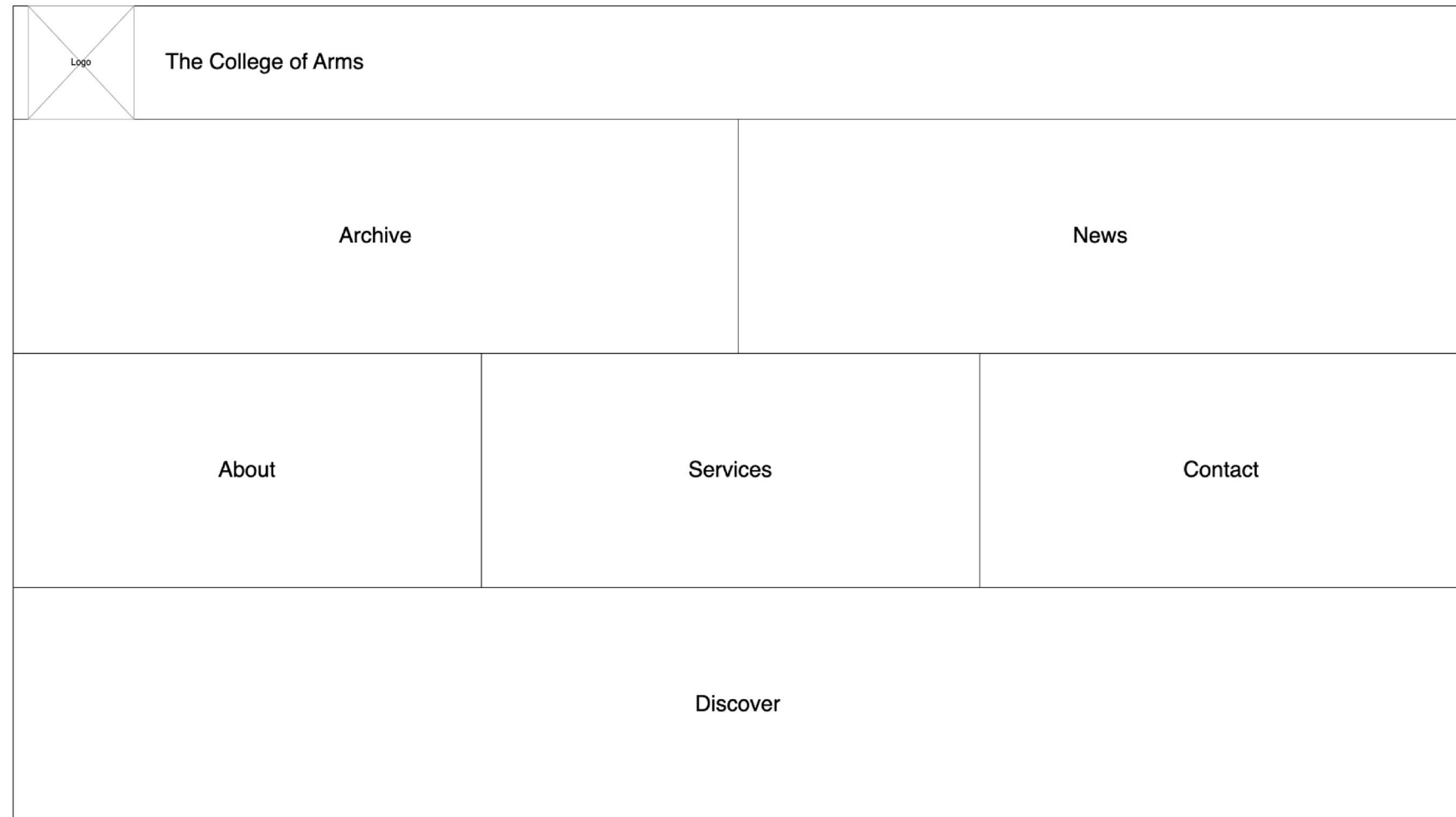


Fig. 32

Wireframe for home page, introduction to design and proposition.

Fig. 33

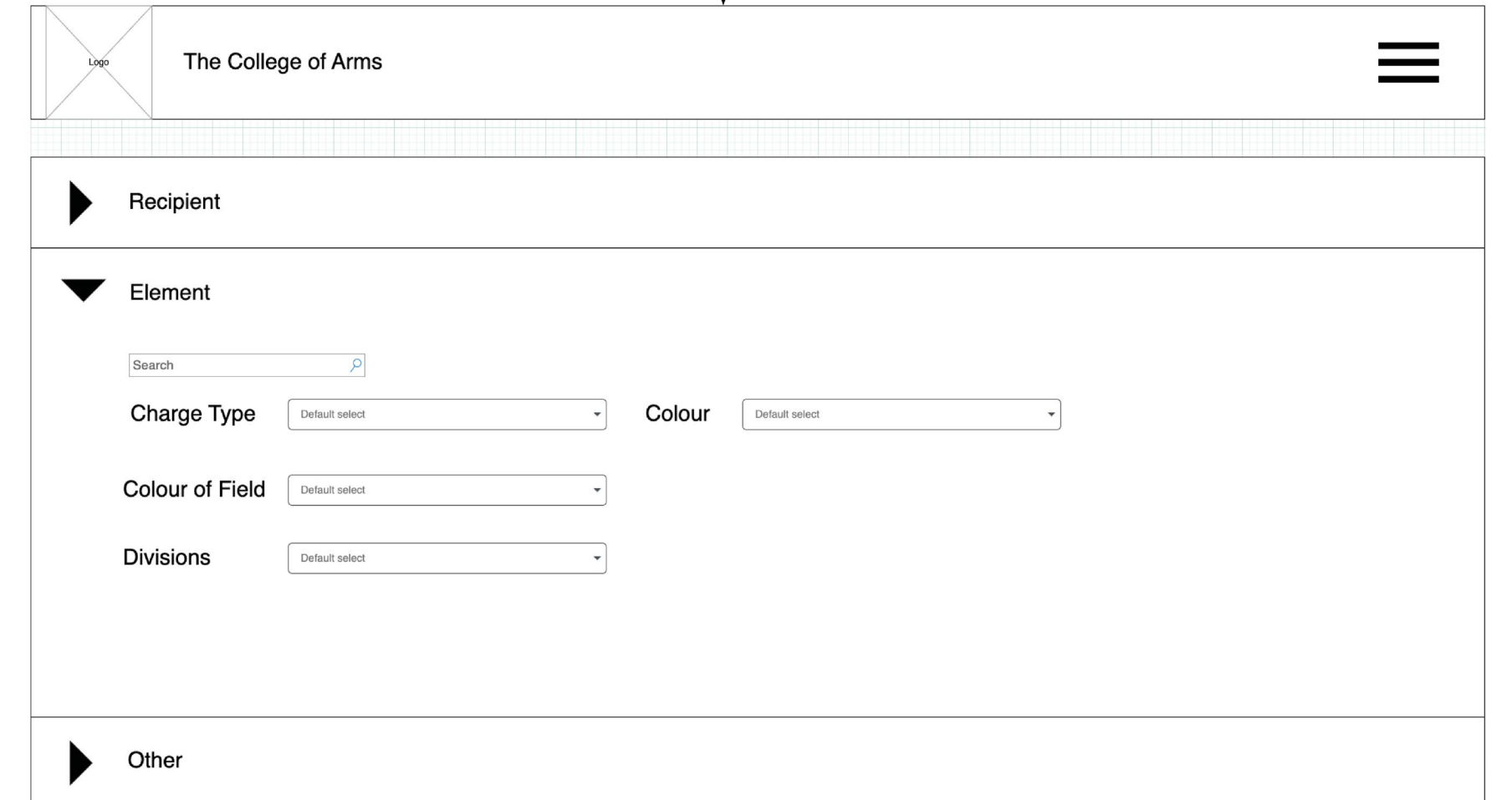
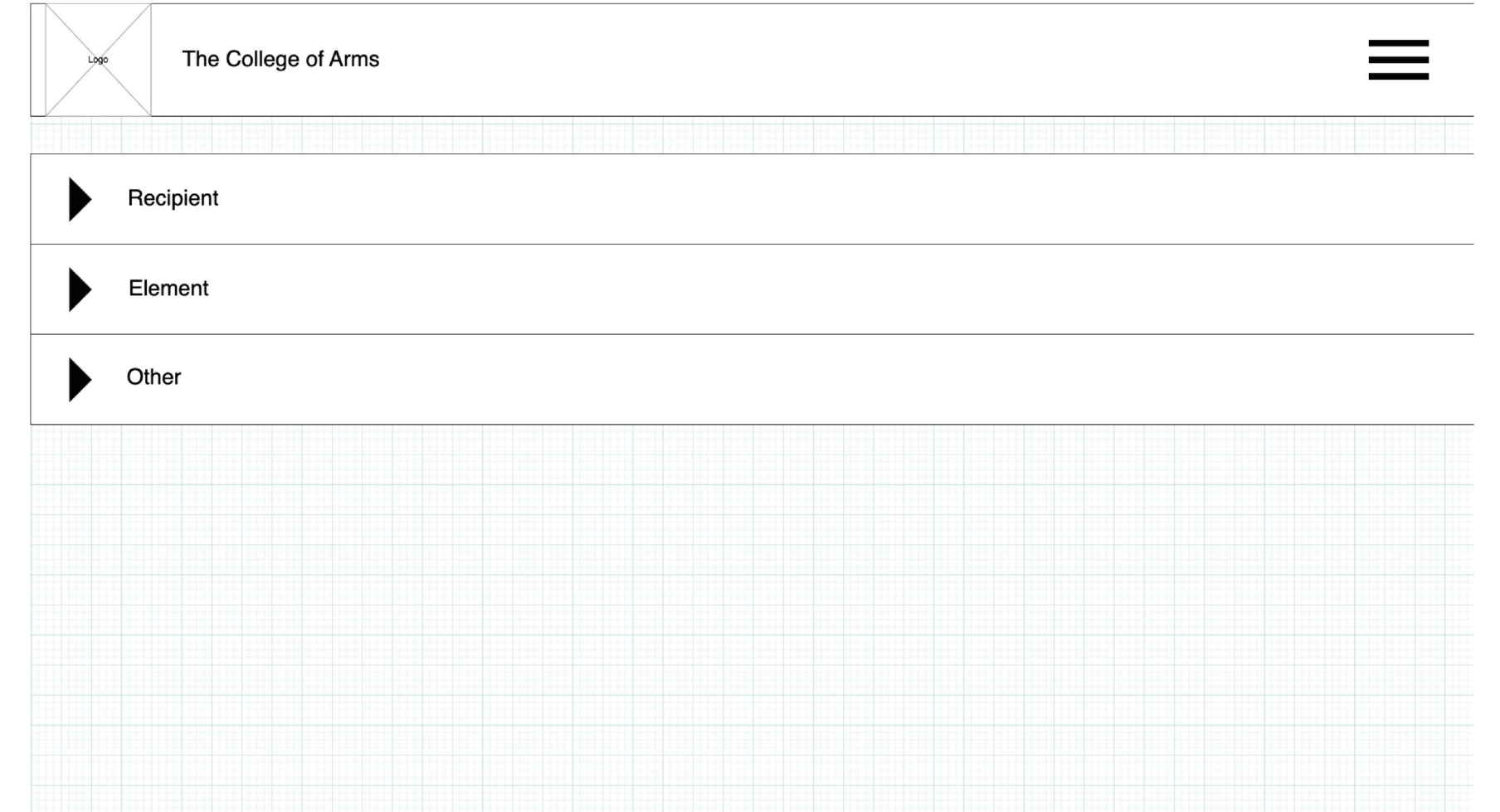
Wireframe for the search page.

33

Search page

To simplify the search I have separated the search criteria again into three sections.

- Recipient deals with the name and background information of the bearer of the arms.
- The element as we will come onto is the charges and field.
- Other is as it says on the tin patent date, herald and scrivener information ect. ect.



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Arms page

This is the page where a singular armorial achievement is discussed and all the elements that are included.

The blazon is described as well the symbolism is explained if available. When the arms are brought into isolation elements can be clicked on and explained as well used to search for other arms that use these charges / ordinaries.

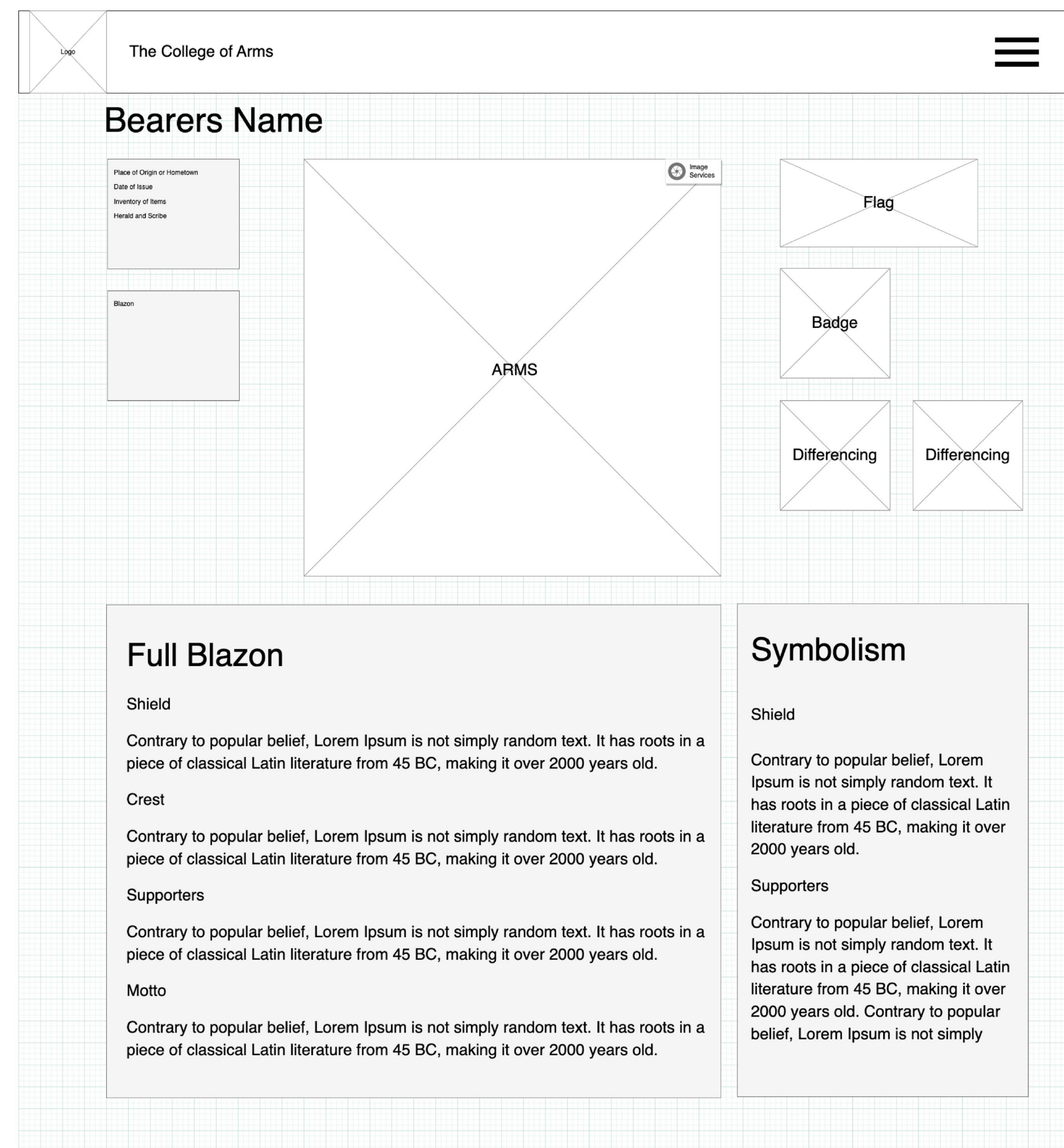


Fig. 34

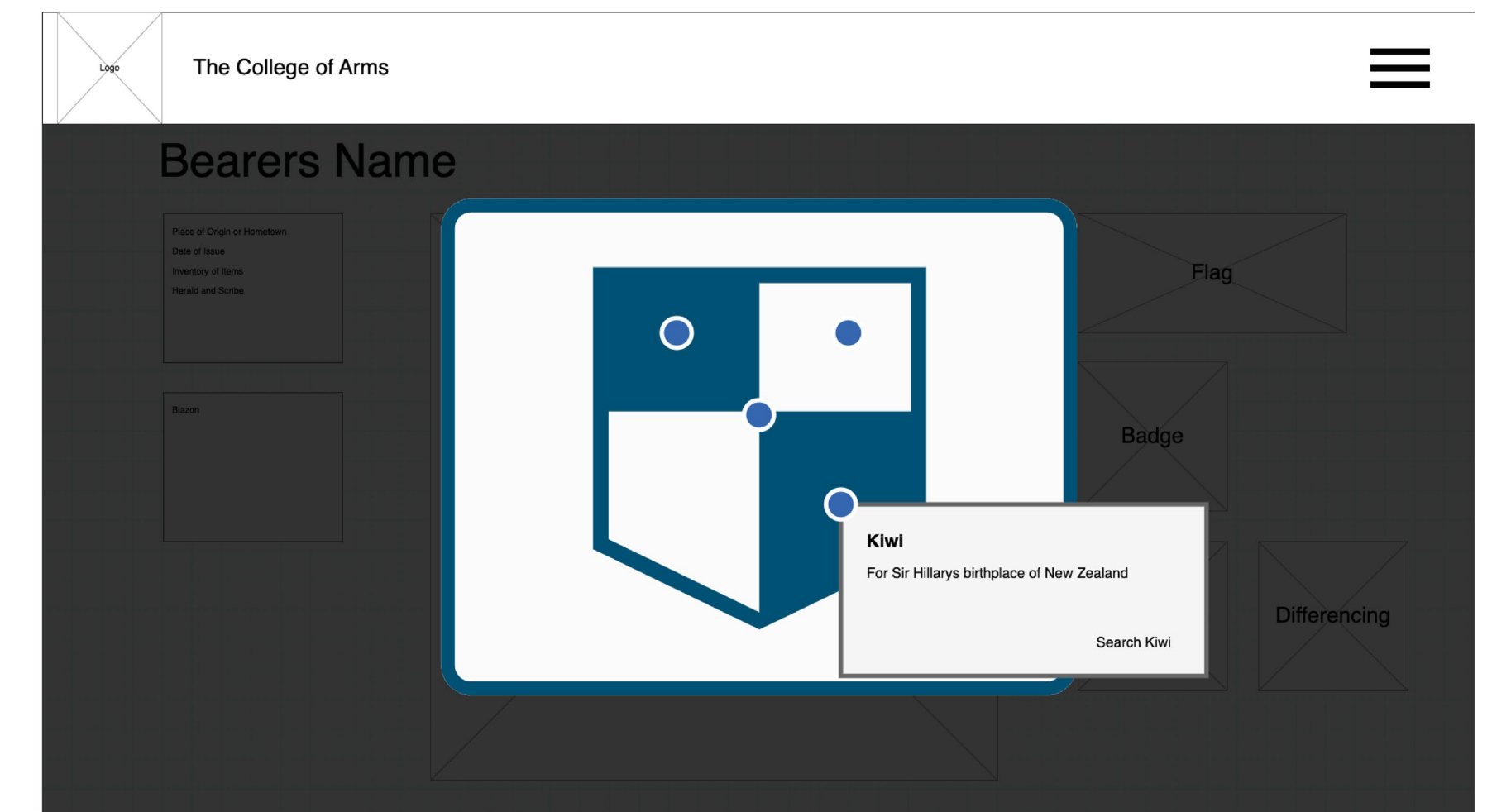
Wireframe for the arms page including blazon section.

Fig. 35

Wireframe for photo-search in app.

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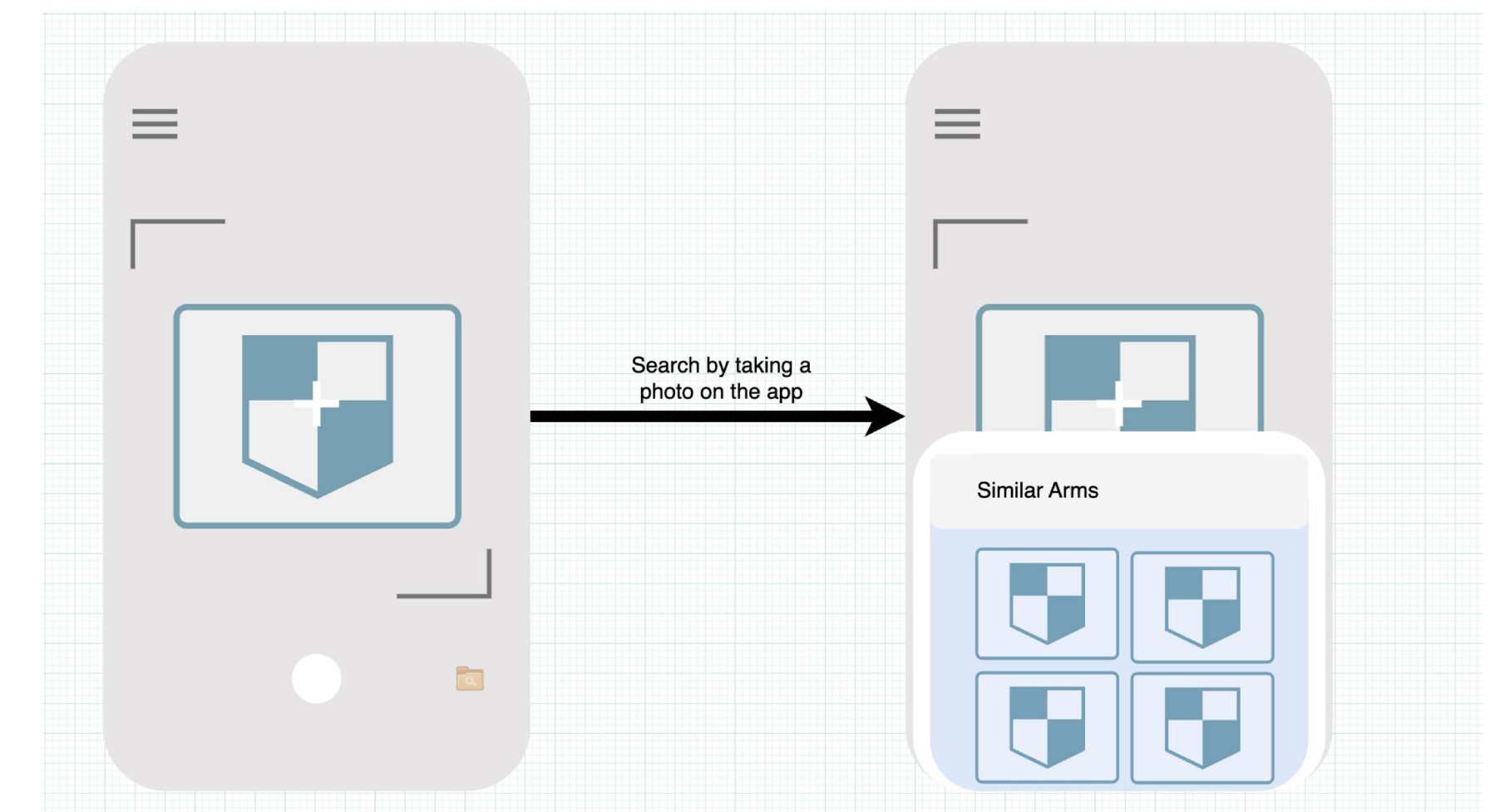
Arms in isolation page



A bit about the App

The main feature of the app is the ability to take a picture of a coat of arms and search right from that. It will use machine learning to figure out whose arms they are.

As arms have a distinct shape and pattern this should be achievable and could be an excellent tool.



Tradition, Sexism and The College

I was disappointed to hear the college's response that "Heraldry is not something that can be adequately reduced to a database". I find their position on this curious; Canada's heraldic authority has a database of arms.

Canada's heraldic processes differ from those in England in another way, too. As recently as 2021, in response to an audience question about the inability for women to pass down arms to their heirs, a representative of the English College of Arms stated that a change to this "would require an act of parliament." (American Ancestors, 2021) However, no such act of parliament was required in 2014 when the College of Arms began to permit same-sex married couples to impale their arms. Women in Canada have been able to pass down arms, bear crests, and obtain arms including a shield and have been able to for the lifetime of the Canadian Heraldic Authority. These privileges are not awarded to UK women (Mackie, C.S.T. 2008).

The college, in a Times article about the Equality in Arms campaign, dismissed the public action group by saying "They are run by a group of men of the rather creepy pub-bore type that give heraldry a bad reputation." (Doughty, E. 2023) This a rather rude remark, symptomatic of the pompous attitude that pervades the college, which can be boiled down to a dogmatic adherence to tradition

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Let us for a moment, however, take tradition into consideration when it comes to the arms of women. The very point of the shield was that it was derived from the shields of warriors. They then connote images of war and traditionally women were not soldiers (if we forget Boadicea). So if a shield represents the masculine spirit of battle what about women that are actual soldiers or have fought? Does that not devalue their sacrifice? As well what if a man should see himself as a pacifist? In today's modern societies re-contextualisation of gender norms this adherence to tradition strips away a semiotic layer that could give greater insight into the achievement.

What I find interesting is the College changing policy to reflect the acceptance of gay marriage in the UK, whereas women's equality is a step too far. I cannot confirm but speculate on the reason for the reticence. The arms of women go further back than those held by two gay men. Would Inheritance laws have to change retrospectively? If so then there could be people who could claim which might mean more work for the college. I think the reason is more societal. While women gained voting rights in the early 1900s misogyny is still rampant. In corporate structures, 79% of employers stated in 2021 that starting median wage for men was higher than for women (Francis-Devine, B. 2022). As well there are several clubs in London the Garrick being one of them that doesn't allow women members. These were at a time places for men to gather and "do business", they are now fading reliquaries with an average age of 69 in 2015 most members are retired (Gentleman, A. 2015)

What do heraldry, member clubs, and pay all have in common? They are symbols of status. I truly believe women are seen as a lower class to men in these circles, and to hide behind traditionalism is just another way of gatekeeping. Supporters are symbols of merit and yet crests are granted solely for men because that's just the way it's always been. A rather unsatisfying answer.

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ourselves. The most successful ones are quite personal. So what is wrong with The College's approach to women and arms? They are visually representing the fact they believe women are less than men. Men deserve to have a more developed personality. Not allowing most women to pass down or inherit arms means they do not have agency in their families.

The College not giving women full access to arms is not unique to them. It is symptomatic of a deeper issue in our culture one that is being challenged by the next generation. I feel those in a position of power, have a feeling that we who challenge them on their decisions are trying to usurp their position. Far from it, in regards to heraldry those who want heraldry to be more equitable care deeply about coats of arms. If they cannot adapt to the changing socio-political landscape they could fade into artefacts of the past. We just want them to be more inclusive and join us in the modern age.

I see this preference for tradition over modernising as an obstacle to creating the kind of interest in arms that the college should be enjoying right now. The unwavering devotion to outdated rules and modes of thought attracts those who wish to 'gatekeep' the art form in the name of tradition. In practice, this means the only ones who feel able to study heraldry are those with ancestral connections. For example, the Earl Marshal of the college is an inherited title; is it any wonder people not privileged to be upper class – be that caste or sex – don't feel connected to heraldry?

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Personal Reflection

This question made me step back to re-evaluate where my own love of Heraldry came from. (Fig. 36 to 39). I would frequently look at my 'arms' with a critical lens, rearranging the symbols I had laid out for myself as I changed and grew – and learned more about myself. It was a way for me to make my identity concrete. I also made coats of arms for people close to me. At the time I thought it was merely a bit of fun, but now I can see it was a way for me to communicate how I viewed the people I held the most dear.

NEXT 4 PAGES:
Fig. 36 to 39
Personal diary of my reflection
process surrounding heraldry.

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Reflection on my past:

I am delving right back to where my love of coats of arms comes from. It all started when I read the first Harry Potter. I had a Hogwarts backpack emblazoned with the arms of the fictional school. I remember so clearly, while in the lobby of my sister's dance school, recreating the logo in my pad of paper as the little mermaid 2 blared in the background. I then went on to make coats of arms for myself and my family members.

Most people see coats of arms as genealogical relics. Almost like attestations of heritage, however I am interested in my own roots. I can't say I am all that interested in finding out if the Plattens have a coat of arms. Coats of arms, I think, are much more personal than that. At least that is how they feel to me. I one day wish to have one but I don't believe I am settled enough in myself to know what that shape would take. It is almost like in Philip Pullman's Northern Lights trilogy, the daemons taking the form of an animal that represents the owner. Coats of arms have a magical quality.

The Heralds at the college of arms in the 18th – 19th century under the instruction of the King Herald Isaac Heard developed landscape heraldry which depicts/represents a scene of high drama or crisis where a person

becomes most themselves. While I am not a fan of landscape heraldry because it is far too complicated and distracts from the lovely simplicity of the symbols contained within, I do like the thought behind it.

I truly believe creating one's coat of arms is a heavily therapeutic process. As such the veracity of the arms are superfluous to the recognition of the deeper self. This is in, I feel, opposition to the modern college of arms which has become elitist even more so now as their art has become arcane. Where arms flourish is when they are opened to the lower classes. Like for instance during Heralds time at the college of arms the mercantile class began to be granted arms.

As well the symbolism in arms doesn't have to be high-brow one of the sheriffs of the city of London took the colours of his arms from his favourite football team. I do think symbolism is important. And the reasoning has to be more vulnerable than surface affinity. It is almost like getting a tattoo "willy nilly" if it done without thought one can come to resent the mark upon themselves.

I am thinking about my own past coats of arms I designed for myself. Note I didn't know the rule of tincture so I created incorrect arms but the symbolism is more important.

1st arms (age 9–10)

A black bat on a blue field.

I loved bats as a child which started with Batman who was and still is my favourite superhero. They were absolutely my favourite animal at the time.

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2nd arms (age 11)

Gold lion on a red background

This was because I liked gryffindor, a sad excuse for a coat of arms I know but here we are.

3rd arms (age 12–16)

On a field sky blue A rabbit white between two shepherds crooks

The sky blue was my favourite colour and the white rabbit at the time I felt an affinity for. There was something to the rabbit that I felt connected with. Possibly it was the mythological idea of change. Myth is as well a passion of mine. As it is how we tell stories. The rabbit represents transformation and I was fascinated by change and rebirth myths. The shepherd's crook is the most antiquated charge as it represents something that I have shed from my old life. It represented my Christianity which just goes to show how different I am.

4th arms (age 16)

On a blue field a semy of gold fleur-de-lis

This was a short lived yet passionate moment. I was infatuated by the fleur-de-lis. I do have to say I still love the design. But what is interesting is that I am from a part of Canada that is in direct opposition to the Quebecois. I was at this time also struggling with understanding my sexuality, and Alberta was not accepting of queerness. Maybe this was a rebellion against the cultural norm. To be fair I do find the Quebecois annoying, they are as French as I am English but even less so because I live here.

5th arms (age 17)

A sun and crescent moon intertwined or an eclipse on a black field

I am a gemini which was at one point in my life more important. It was when I was seriously considering esotericism more deeply. I do think the dichotomy of the twins accurately represents my personality well. I do struggle with conflicting thoughts. The symbol goes back to my childhood where it was something I associated with my mother. I think it was on the back of her bathrobe and when I saw her in her bathrobe it meant that she would be home instead of having to go into work. She would have time with us. I can't give enough respect to my parents because they worked so hard so I could have a comfortable life but It was nice when we could spend time together. That is a departure but it is something that I latched onto.

6th arms (age 17–19)

A white magpie on a blue field

Magpies are common where I'm from. I never felt close to them until I looked into them and their mythology. I was always known as a bottomless pit and the magpie traditionally was known as the bird that eats anything which I relate to. I was known for doing weird voices at the time in school, still kinda am, and magpies can mimic better than parrots. What I feel the most closeness to is the fact they are misunderstood. And always have been, they used to be killed because they were thought to be witches on their way to a coven meeting. They are maligned because they are thought to be dumb birds but they are incredibly intelligent and fiercely loyal. The magpie represents not only my past but also how I see myself. It also represents how I want to treat oth-

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ers, especially the maligned and misunderstood. I want to treat them with respect and kindness. In that same breath this is when I think I was in opposition to lions because they were too popular.

7th arms (age 20)

A magpie between seven Egyptian stars on a blue field. The seven stars are taken from the body of the goddess Nut or Nuit from Egyptian myth. She was the goddess of the sky and the style is important as it connects to my love of myth.

8th arms (age 20–27)

A magpie between seven Egyptian stars under a sun in dexter and moon in sinister on a blue field. The crest is a thyrsus.

I'm starting to bring in elements of previous arms into this new coat of arms. I am learning the power of curating symbols as a form of personal branding. The sun and moon represents comedy and tragedy masks and the thyrsus is the wand of Dionysus who is the god of theater. He would use his thyrsus (a pinecone tied to a reed of fennel) to induce madness in his revilers. This was the first time I thought about the crest. It must have been when I was researching heraldry in earnest.

9th arms (age 27–29)

In a black chief a sun in dexter and moon in sinister. A magpie on a blue field. The crest is a thyrsus. I removed the stars as they distracted and didn't add to the piece.

10th arms (current)

In a black chief nine four pointed stars. A magpie on a blue field. The crest is a thyrsus.

I removed the sun and moon because they represented just acting (Melpomene and Thalia). I have changed now though. I have moved past the fact I used to act. I haven't rejected the theater but I am more than just that. I am a man of the arts and sciences. I wanted to make reference to the muses as they have guided my careers and gotten me to where I am today.

Even now doing this retrospective of my life has been a joyously pensive exercise but has left me with a sense of saudade. I do however feel as though I am able to communicate with my past lives and see how I've changed.

This is also a way for me to relate to my friends and family. In order to figure out how I saw someone and also as a gift from me to them I would make a coat of arms based on how I saw them. As well these arms want to change. As relationships mature and change I relate to others differently therefore the semiotics of my vision of them changes.

What was an even deeper level of semiological impact upon me was coming to the UK and the amount of heraldry that is all around and yet no one pays attention to it. I have a basic knowledge of heraldry but I found immense joy in decoding arms I found on the street, or attempting to. And when I am able to decipher a coat of arms I always find a new way of looking at an area. The owners of the buildings and street furniture that placed these shields on their property obviously wanted to communicate something. As well I find there are symbols that change their meaning or meanings that change their symbols which reflect on the culture of the day.

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The Ironmongers have salamanders as their supporters. It is quite obvious why. Of course someone of the 17th century would understand salamanders of elementals of fire a key tool to mongering iron.

The problem now that I have to answer is how do I entice the general public into investing their time in my app.

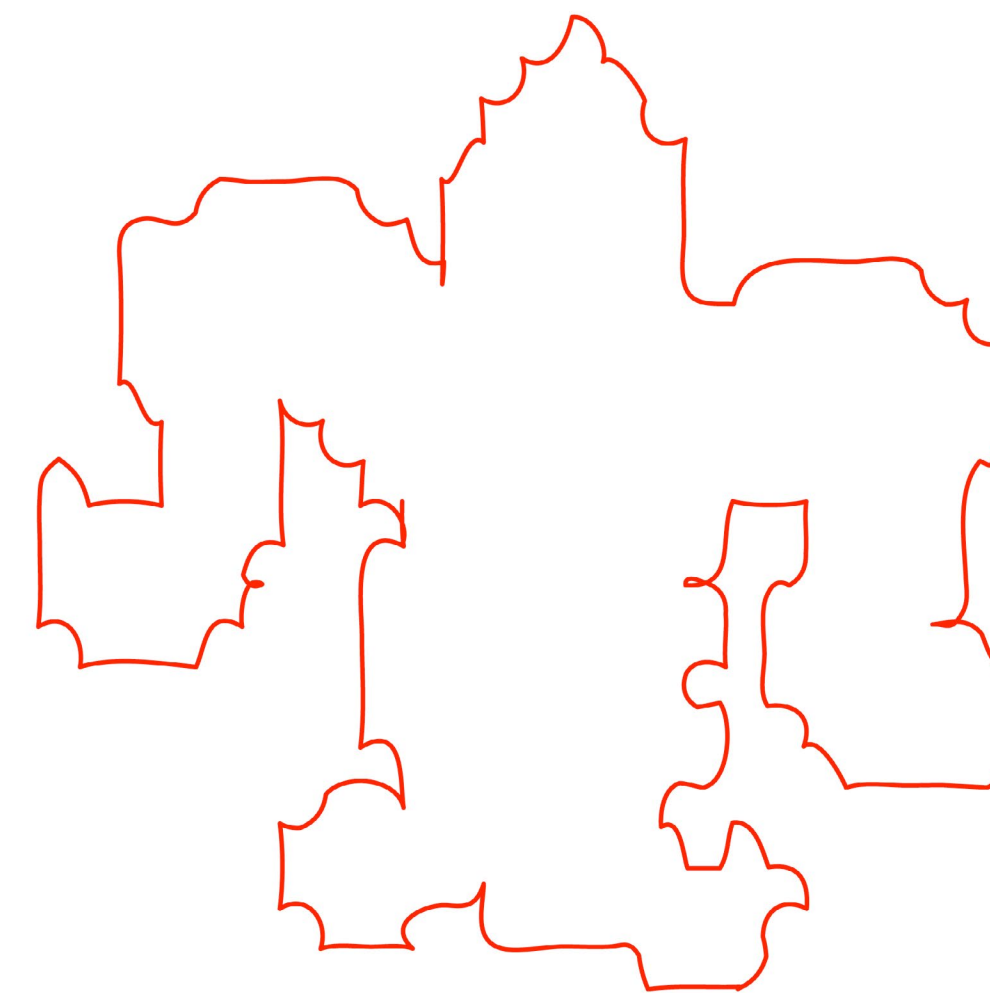
Problems I have:

Heraldry is elitist

It feels like a fantasy thing

It is dusty and stuffy

There are pedants and shibboleths around every corner.



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I did not view heraldry through a class lens. Canadian Arms are granted based on a merit system for service to the community – closer to the British honours system. In Europe and the UK, however, the social elite co-opted the grant of arms from the marshal class as a way to demonstrate authority and status. This is a practice the royal family and others still perform to this day – using military titles, awards or dress to show their power (fig. 40 & 41) . (Peck, T. 2022. Ellison, J. 2022)

The fact the Canadian Heraldic Authority is fairly young, makes them less precious about the tradition of arms. This is a conducive environment for inclusivity For instance, instead of a shield some indigenous individuals opt for a roundel as an escutcheon this represents the drum-head – a sacred symbol that represents the heartbeat of the people(Hampton, M. 2021) This can be seen in the arms of Nunavut (fig. 42) There have to be rules for consistency, but like most things in English, rules can be broken. Allowing the round shield the CHA is opening the gate for a group of people who have a non-European ancestry.

Fig. 40
Macron in displaying French military insignia on hoodie.



Fig. 41
Ramzan Kadyrov, in military dress and Prada boots.



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Fig. 42
The Arms of Nunavut

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Gatekeeping

The evolution in the class structures in the UK has not helped obtain a wider interest in arms. As heraldry is associated with the upper class, even possessing an interest in it seems unattainable for those in lower social strata (Bithymitris, G. 2023), not to mention the hefty (~£9,000) price tag levied on an individual to be granted one. With one-third of UK adults experiencing classism in the workplace (Haththotuwa, S. 2022), it's hard to imagine many feeling comfortable with a subject so historically associated with the aristocracy. I have been teased for not being taught Latin in school.

The literature on heraldry reflects this classist sentiment. Most books on the subject are rather dusty, arcane, use outdated vocabulary and quotations in other languages. My experience during the research process left me feeling stuck between two worlds, and I struggled to create an inclusive project from such a discriminative subject matter.

When the bible was translated into German by Martin Luther, a class struggle erupted as it gave the people control over their own salvation, instead of the church. Prior to this translation written forms of the bible were exclusively available in Greek and Latin. Being able to interpret the word of God without the interpretation of a priest gave the average person agency.

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Blazon itself is written in Norman English – a curious mix of Middle English and French. Very few people understand it directly, and there is a point of pride among those that do. A young student of heraldry could find themselves bombarded by more experienced practitioners, berating them because they included a reference to "Red" instead of "Gules". I argue this is a form of gatekeeping, and it discourages newcomers to the art form. It preserves an air of mystery around the subject and encourages the spread of some heraldic myths.

For example, websites like houseofnames.com sell merchandise emblazoned with coats of arms. However, they fail to do genealogical research beyond a surname search as to whether the customer has the right to bear those arms. This is known as bucket shop heraldry (Noble and Bestley, 2016), and it's a predatory practice that weaponises the public's lack of knowledge around heraldry – to sell tat (fig. 43). It would be more rewarding to help someone create their own arms and to teach them about heraldry in the process.

I have to look at my own biases. When researching "Visual Research: an introduction to research methods in graphic design" by Ian Noble and Russell Bestley I read the section on modern heraldry. Designer Dan McCabe uses the form of heraldry to create escutcheons for his friends (fig. 44) – and my first thought was 'Wow, those are not real'.

What did I mean? Well for one, the rule of tincture was not observed, the grid was not respected, there were 'violations of attitude' – the pose of animals had been used haphazardly. I wasn't wrong. I had spent enough time studying the conventions around English heraldry to know the lack of authenticity just by looking at them. And yet, here I was perpetrating the same mentality that I am trying to distance myself from. Reading further into the project, it would transpire that

Fig. 43
Mug featuring fake bucket arms from house of names.



Fig. 44
Dan McCabe's created arms.



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McCabe was actually attempting to discredit 'bucket shop' heralds.

How do we solve the problem of misinformation that stems from this insular attitude? When most people create, they rely on what they have seen and the knowledge they have access to. There are few texts that actually explain blazon and the ones that do are lengthy and full of archaic language (fig. 45 & 46). This is fundamentally inaccessible to new enthusiasts.

There is a sentiment of "I suffered, so you should too" which makes for a very toxic environment. This is also sometimes seen in higher-pressure environments, surgeons and teaching.

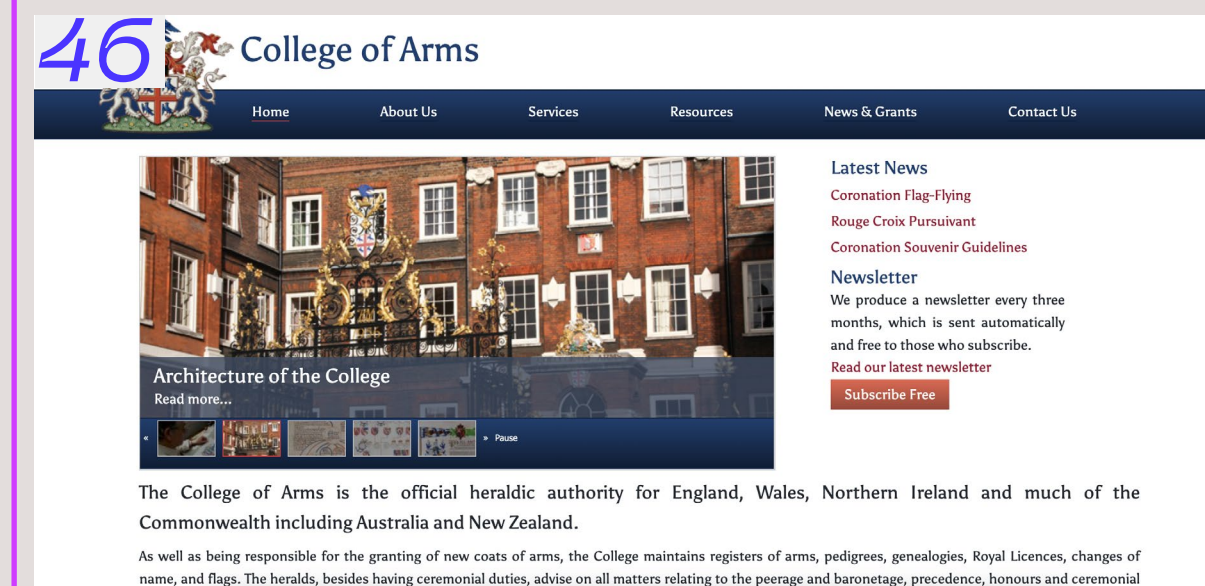
Not only do the shibboleths help fraudsters but they also allow the college to make changes and also stymie descent from outside the organisation. If a challenge were to be raised, the college uses the average person's lack of knowledge against them. Patronisingly informing them that they don't know what they are invoking by referencing an arbitrary rule. Obfuscating their legitimate grievance in technical jargon without actually giving a legitimate reason.

I believe this is a form of institutional gaslighting, an overused term but from what I have seen it is all too clear. Gaslighting is a process in which an individual or institution uses distraction tactics to mislead and confuse a person or group to keep them subservient to them (Saripalli, V. 2022. Luskin B.J. 2022)

This is interesting because when one investigates even slightly it becomes clear that the Kings of arms have unilateral power over the process of arms. In 2019 a court ruling by Lady Wolffe stated "The breadth of the discretion the Lord Lyon (the king of arms in Scotland) has in such matters, which is almost unique in a modern

Fig. 45
Drawshield.net screenshot of homepage.

Fig. 46
College of arms homepage.



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context"(Margaret Hamilton V. Lord Lyon King of Arms, 2019). The King of arms in London has the same power deriving directly from the King.

My guess however would be that even if a herald read this paper my points would be dismissed as the feeble ramblings of a "colonial". This is what my project is trying to counteract, one could be dismissed on their background, class, age, or gender even though they have a keen fascination with heraldry.

The equality of women in heraldry isn't the only issue with the treatment of arms. It is, however, the most glaring example of gatekeeping in order to assert dominance over those who wish to practice or petition for arms. It is having real consequences for instance the nurse's livery company is considering not petitioning for arms, which is a big investment that the college is missing out on. Several masters of various companies are refusing to be granted arms based on the obstinate attitude of the college.

We need a space where we can erode that classist sexist boundary. The College of Arms should be at the forefront of that change. If they reprioritise to make arms more inclusive, then others will surely follow.

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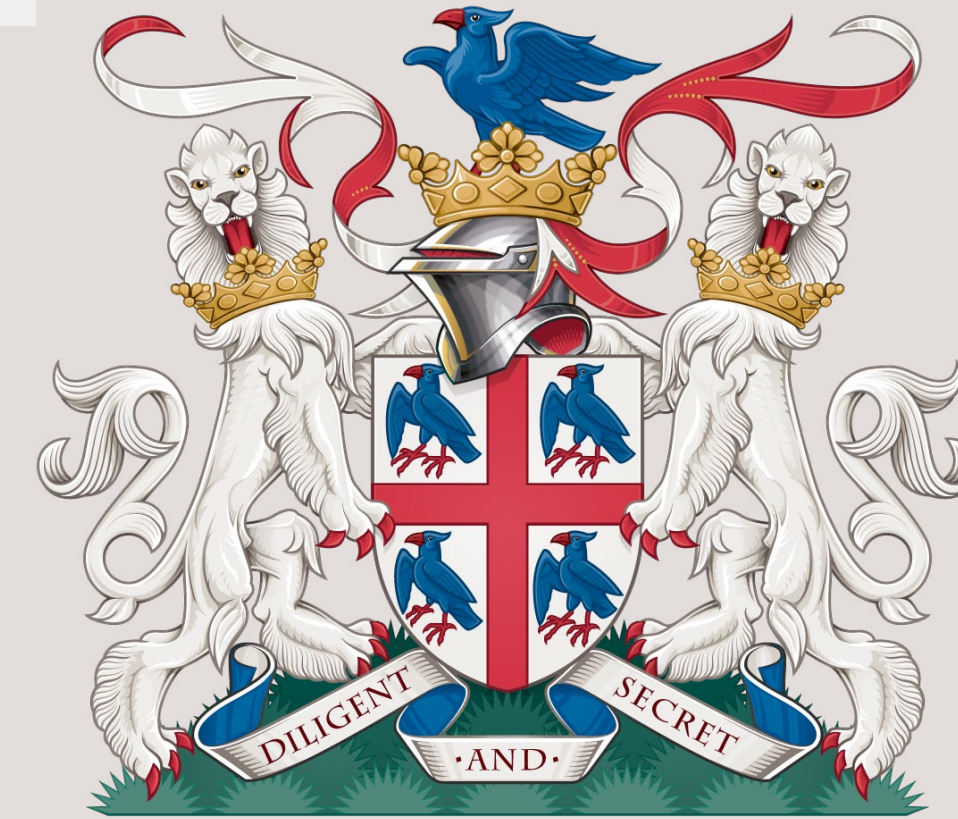
Accessibility – not just in terms of disability, but in terms of knowledge, reading age, and familiarity with the subject matter – became very important to my design. The language should be clear and easy to understand. Concise. It should relate directly to the imagery. It should be on the internet. It should be targeted towards a younger demographic, it should differentiate itself from the current landscape of heraldic websites by using a bold colour scheme (fig. 47 & 48).

It should avoid an anachronistic character, choosing not to ape the style of faux-mediaeval manuscripts.

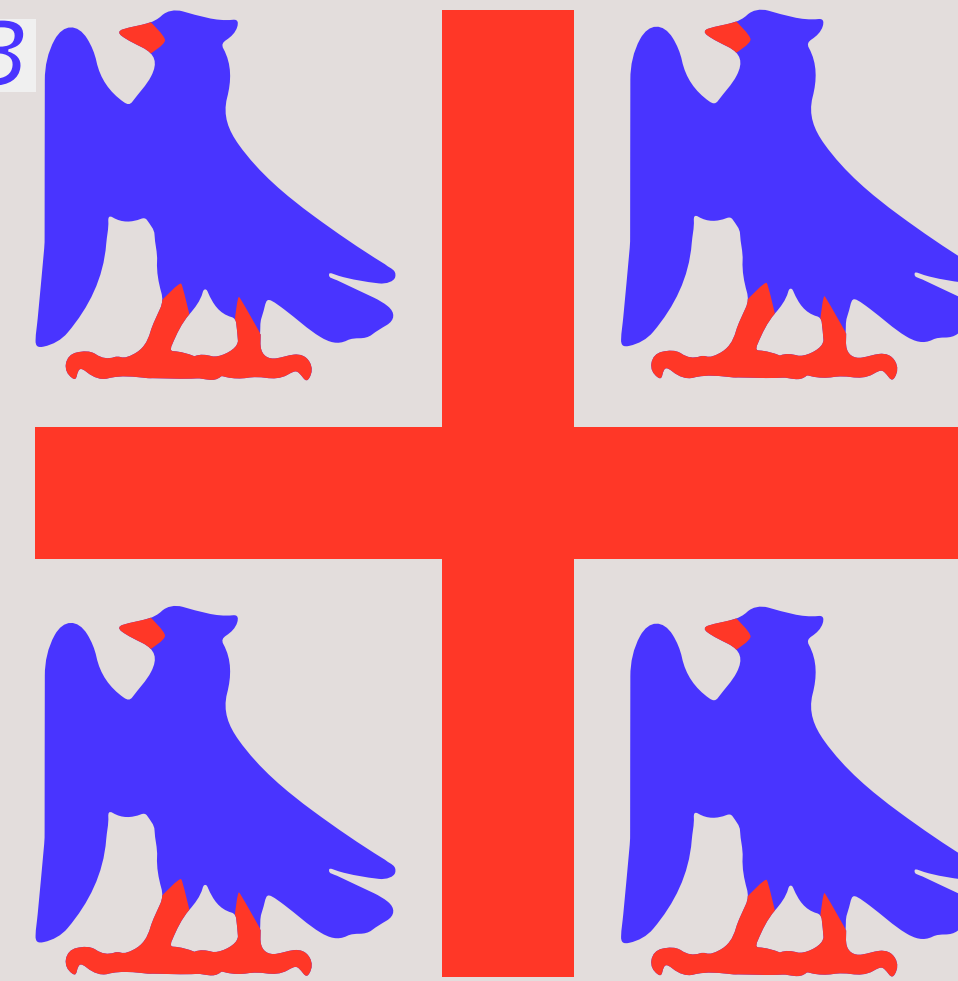
Fig. 47
College of Arms coat of arms.

Fig. 48
New College of arms Logo created by the author.

47



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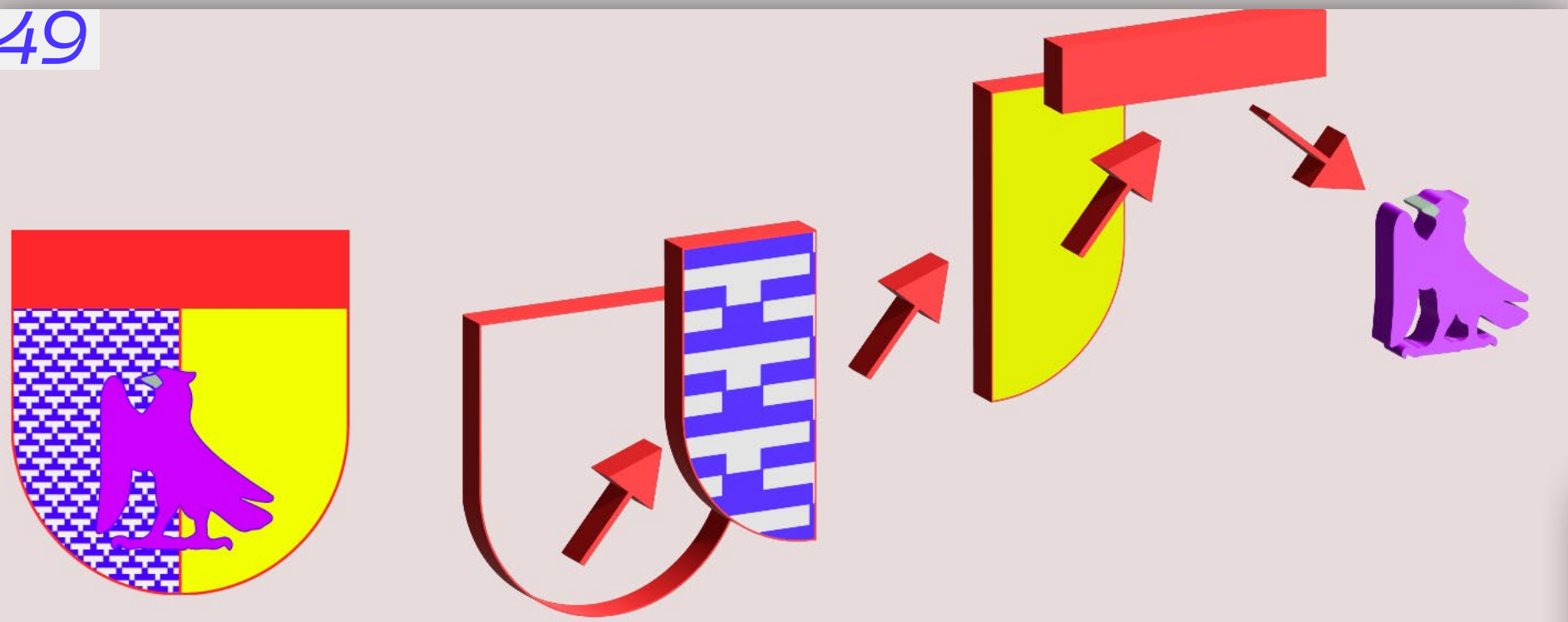
Intro to Design work
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Per Pale, Potent and Or, a chief Gules, a dove purpure beaked cendré.

50

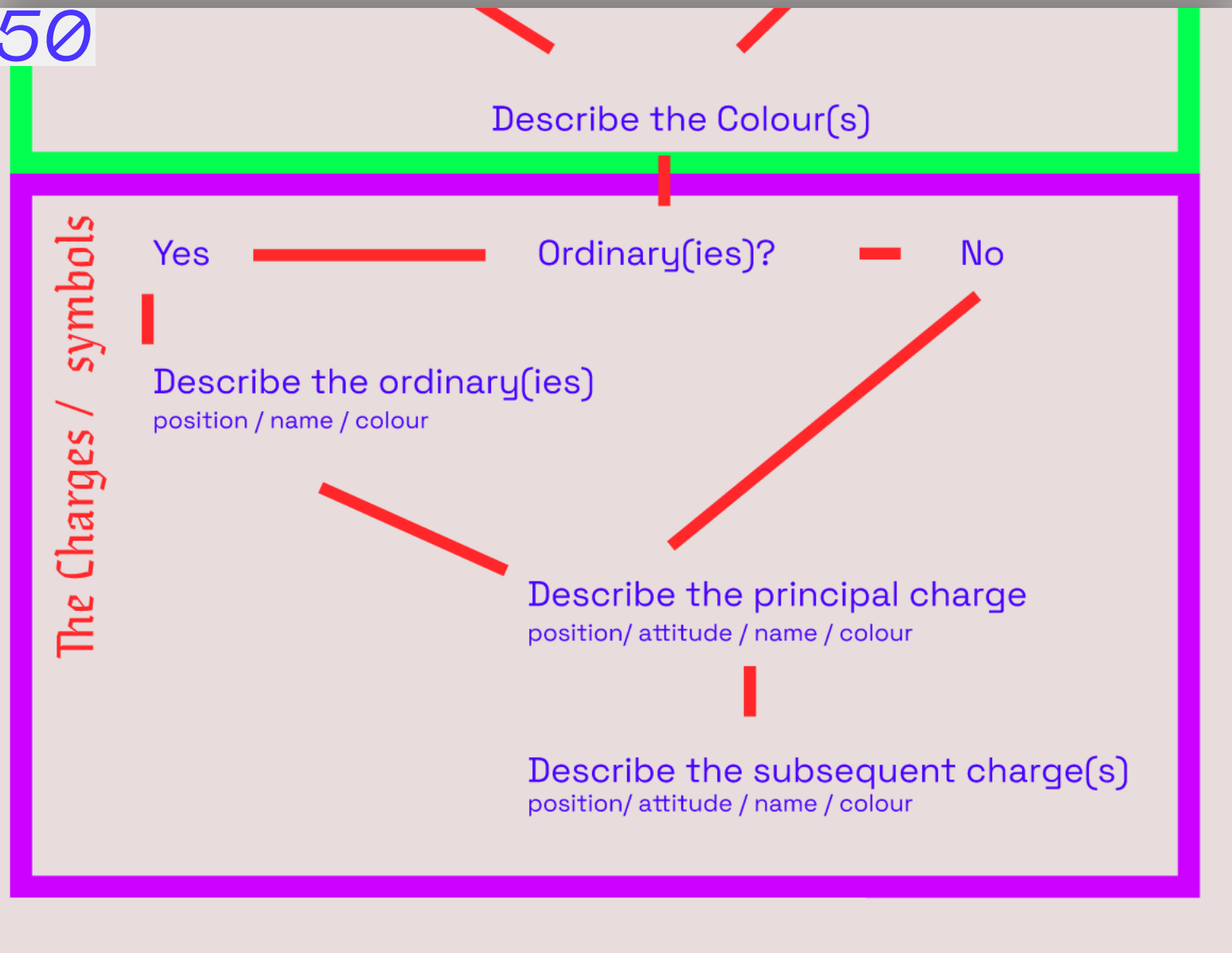


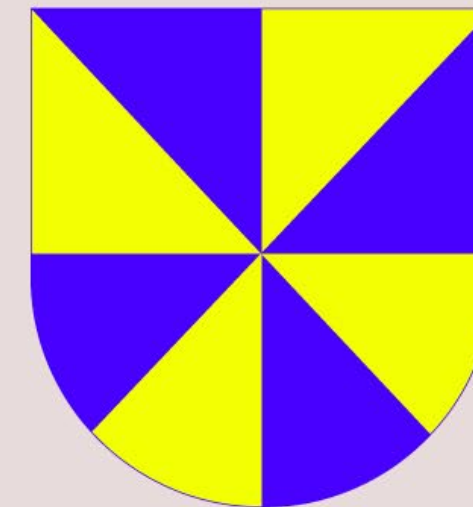
Fig. 49 Breakdown of Blazon.

Fig. 50 A different type of Blazon breakdown.

51

Blazon

When blazoning a coat of arms you start with the background or field with the first letter capitalised and then a comma. Usually this is a lone colour but if the field is complex you'll put the variation and then the colours used.



So "Gyronny, azure and or".

If the field is divided say the style of division "Party per..." and the colours starting in the viewers top left then moving in a z shape. You can also omit the word "party" and just say "per pale" and "gules".

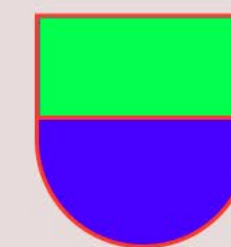


After the Field you'll go on to describing the principal ordinary(s) and charge(s) followed by their colour(s).

Fig. 51 Blazon section of the website.

Blazon
Colour
The Shield
Symbols
About Us

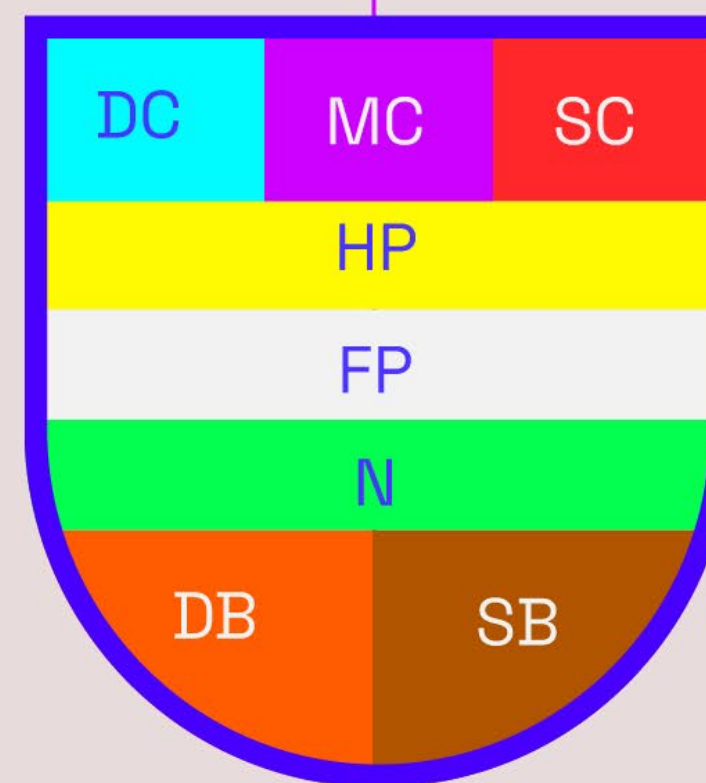
The Shield



DC	<i>Dexter Chief</i>
MC	<i>Middle Chief</i>
SC	<i>Sinister Chief</i>
HP	<i>Honour Point</i>
FP	<i>Fess Point</i>
N	<i>Nombri1</i>
DB	<i>Dexter Base</i>
SB	<i>Sinister Base</i>

Dexter

Sinister



Blazon

Colour

The Shield

Charge

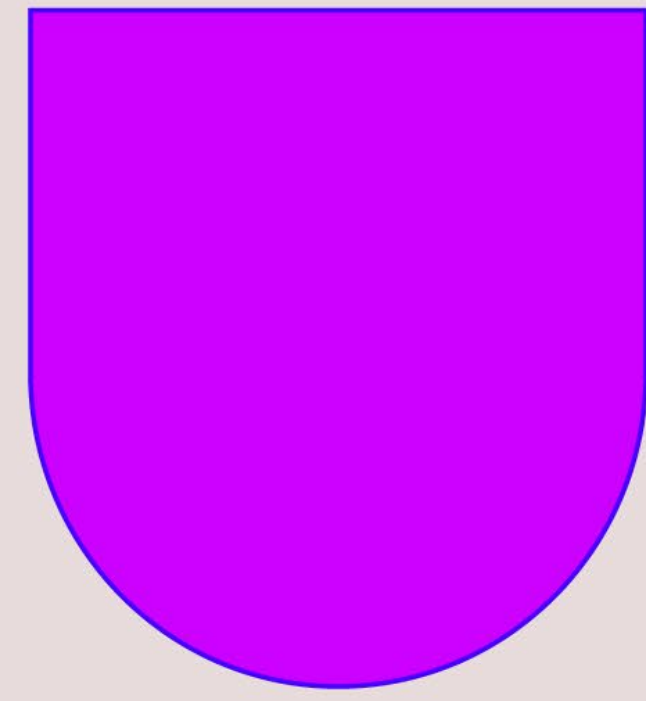
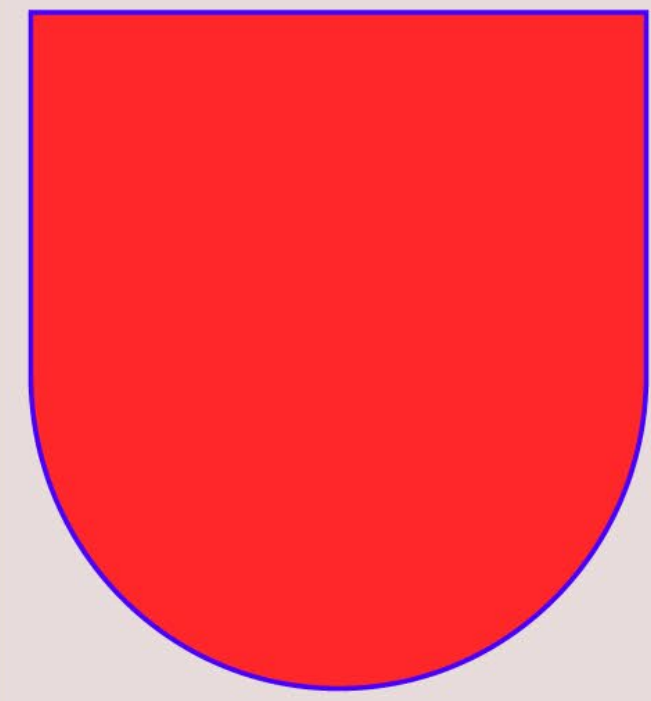
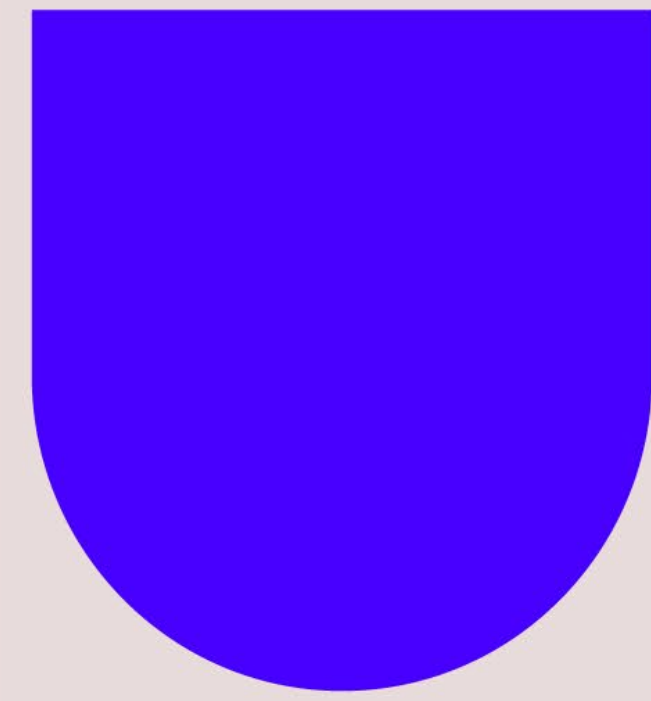
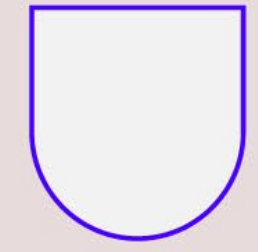
About Us


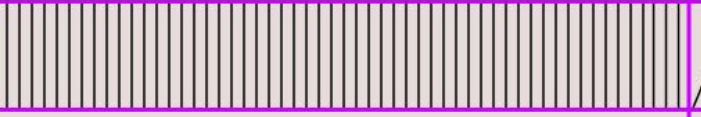

Divisions

Divisions are ways to cut up a shield. Often to put two coats of arms together like in the case of a marriage or two communities joining. If you see a division on a shield question why there is one

Fig. 52
Division of the Shield on the webpage.

Colour



Blazon Name	<i>Azure</i>	<i>Gules</i>	<i>Purpure</i>
Common Name	Blue	Red	Purple
Gemstone	Sapphire	Ruby	Amethyst
Hatching			

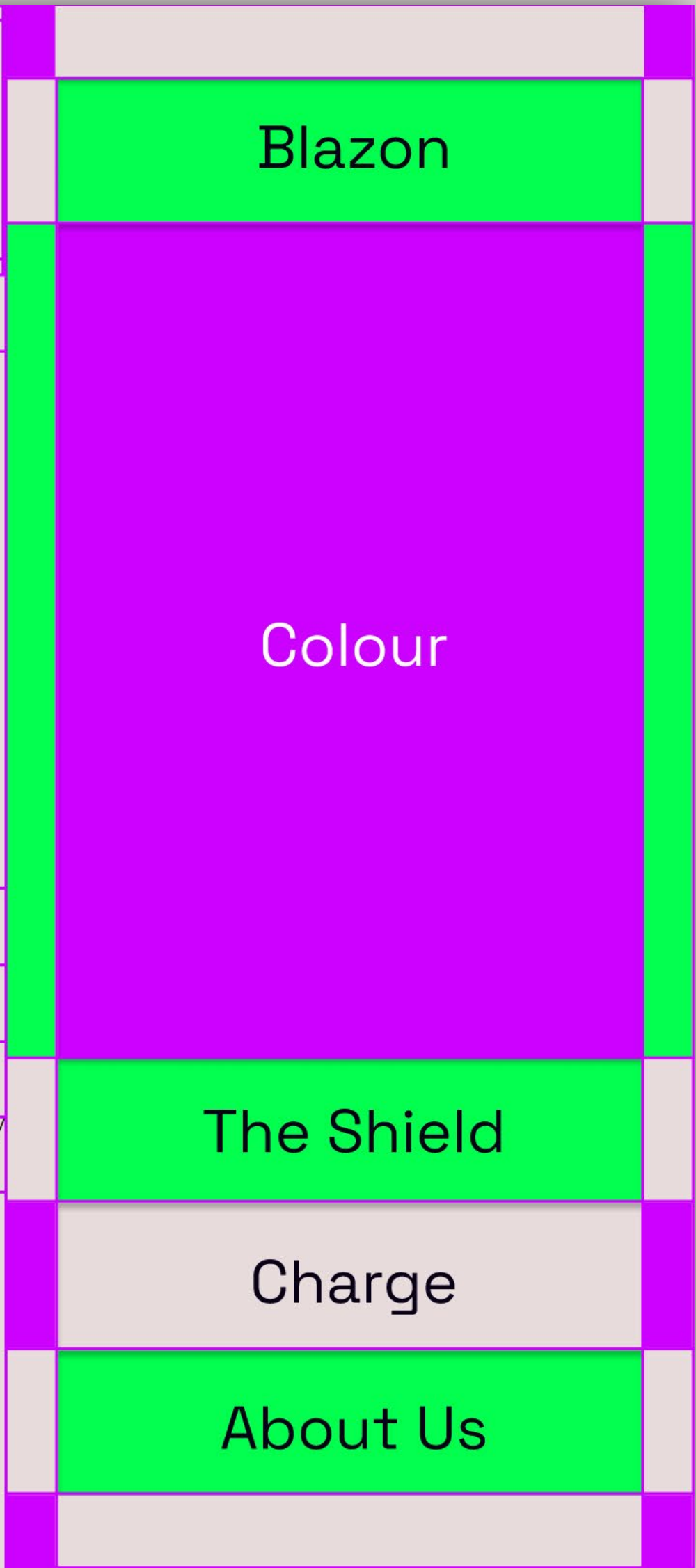
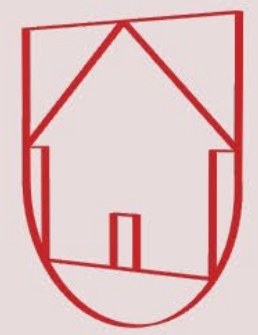


Fig. 53
Describing colour on the webpage.

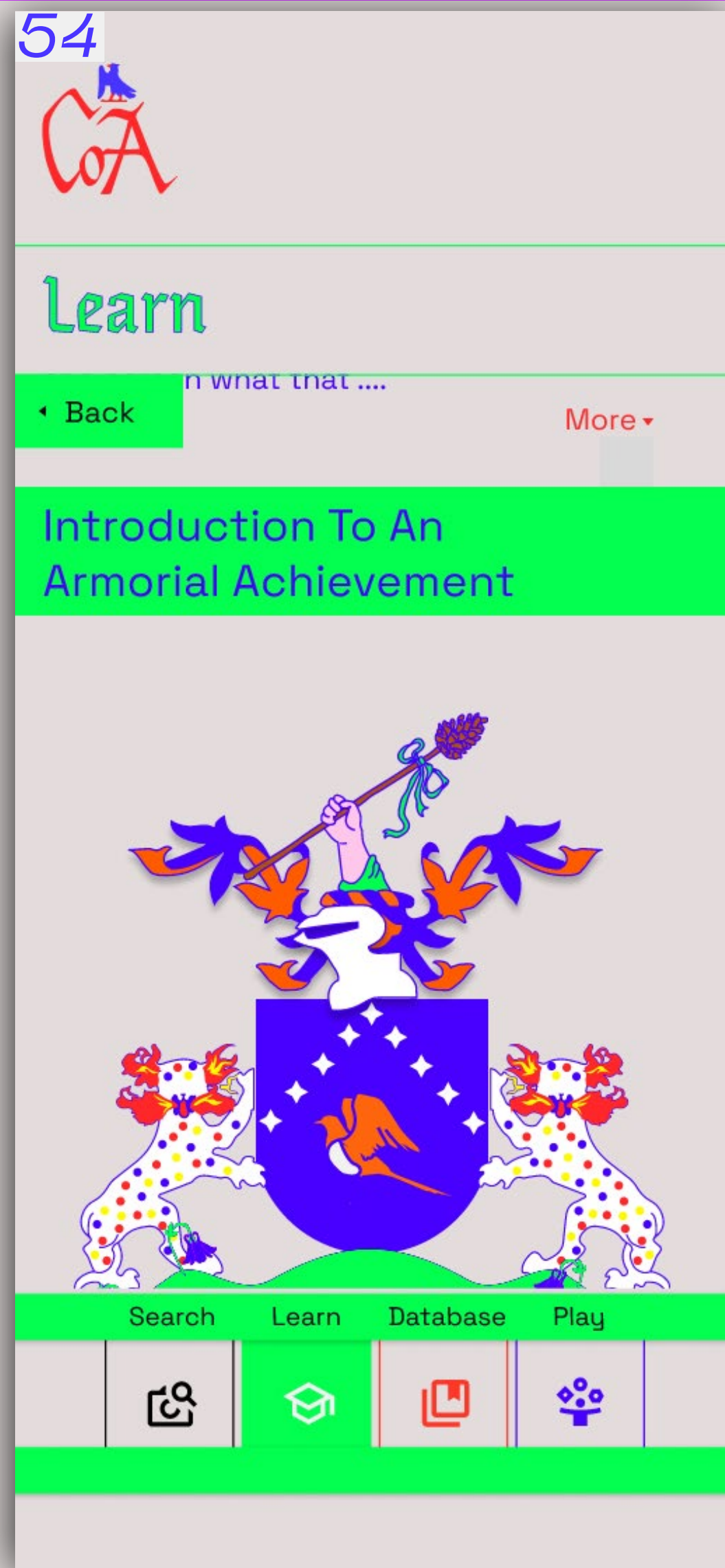


Fig. 54
App Version of the parts of an armorial achievement.

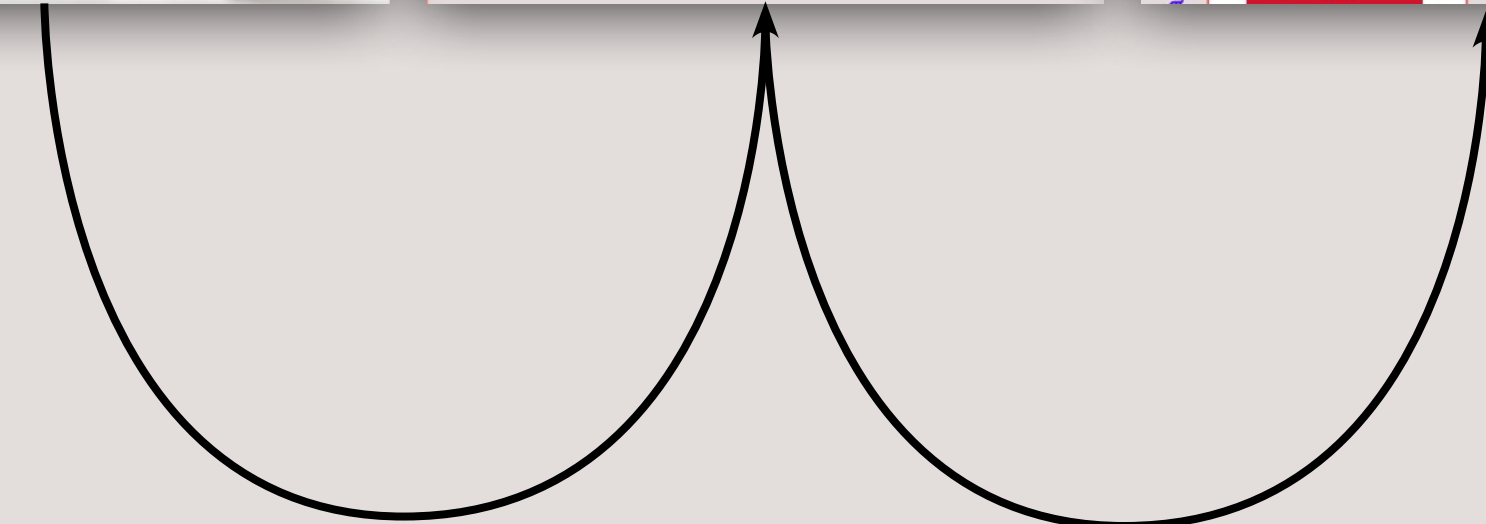
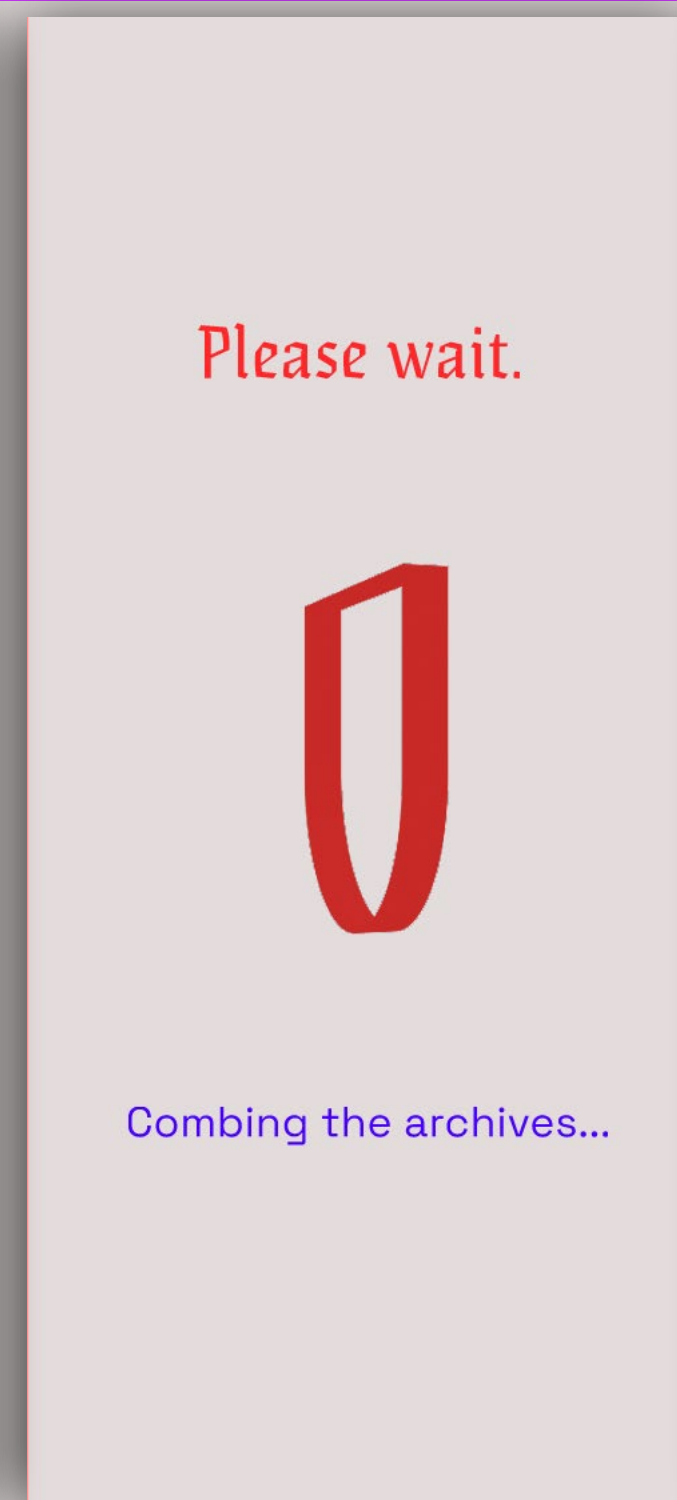


Fig. 56
Screenshot of the blazon to image generator.

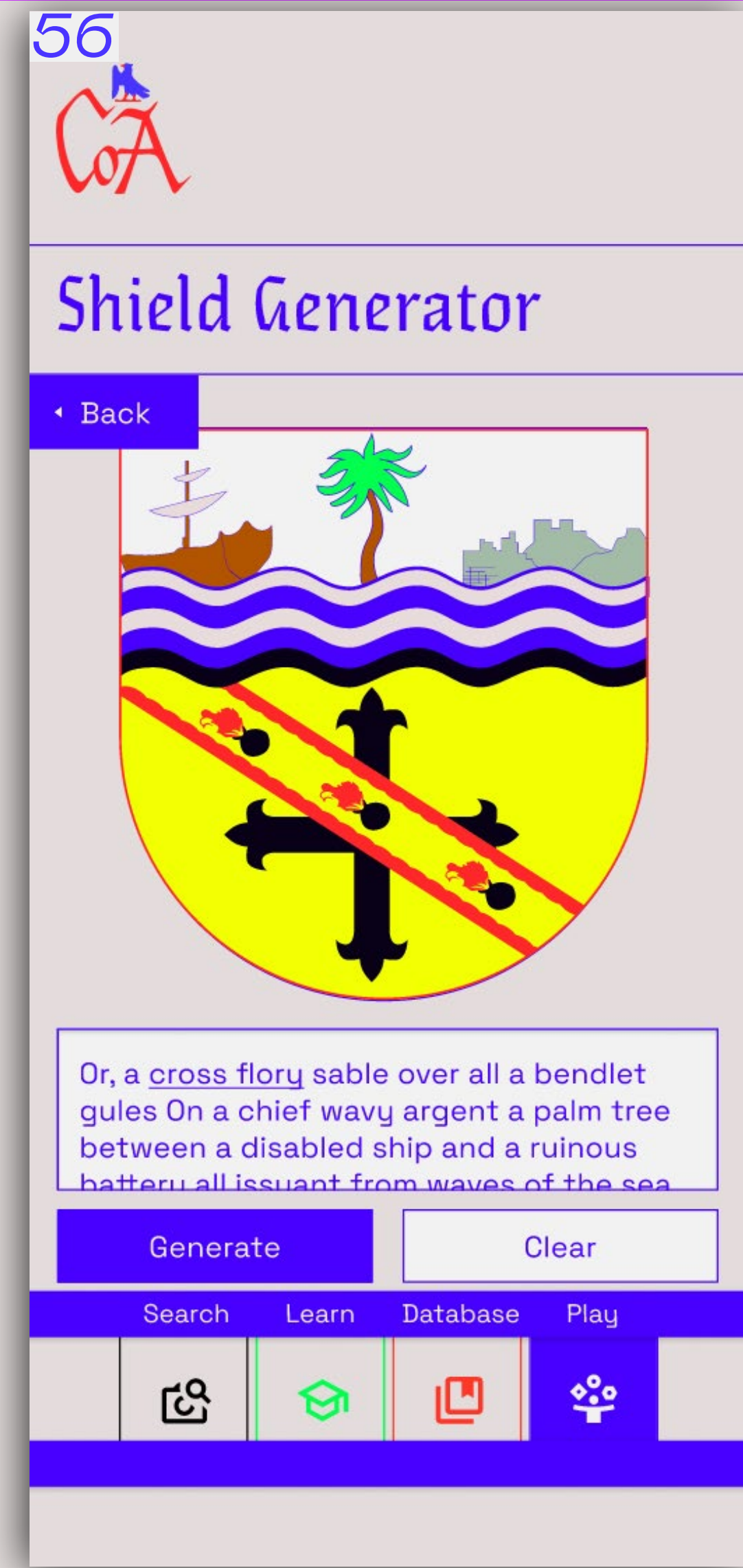
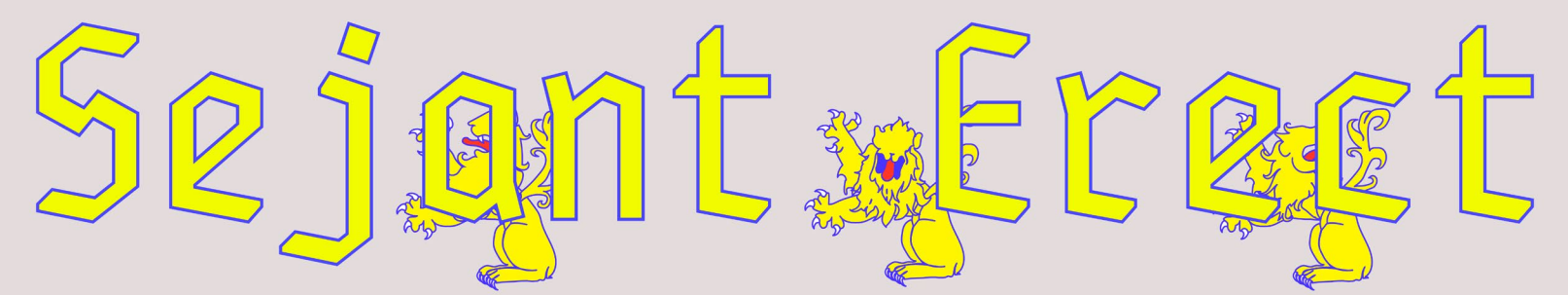
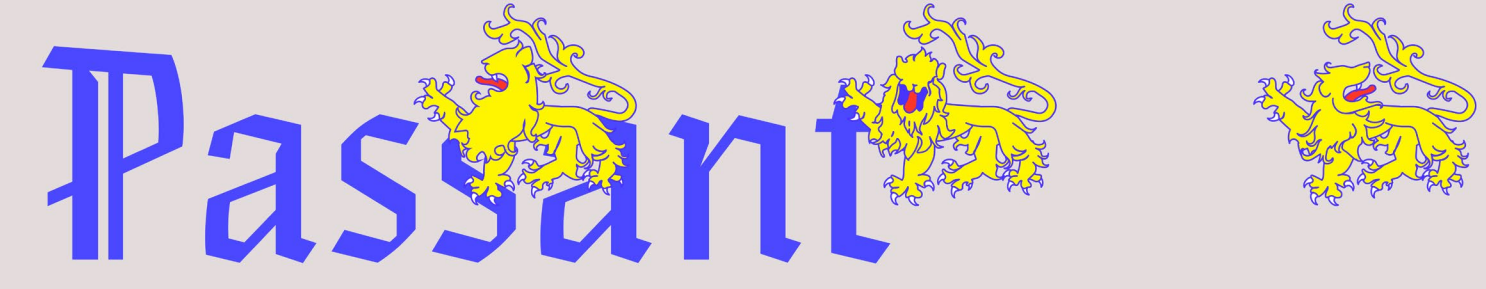


Fig. 55
Diagram of the process of the photo search feature.

Fig. 58
Poster set on Beast Attitude and
Explanation.

— *Guardant Regardant*



Show Some *Attitude*



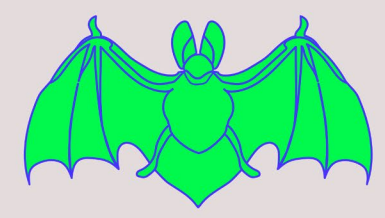
Confused?



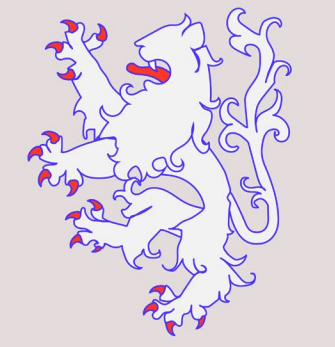
We'll explain

This is:

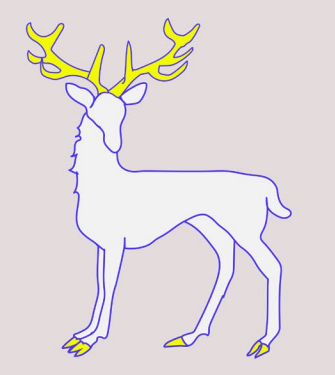
Attitude



Attitude is the pose beasts*, birds and fish take on coats of arms. It helps differentiate between people.



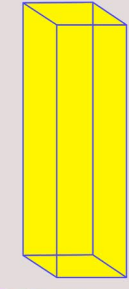

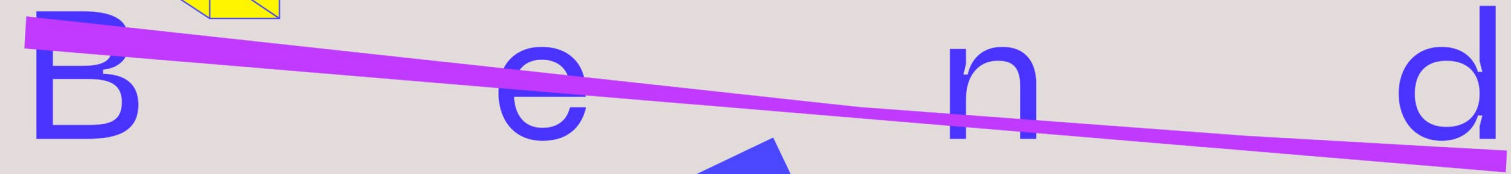
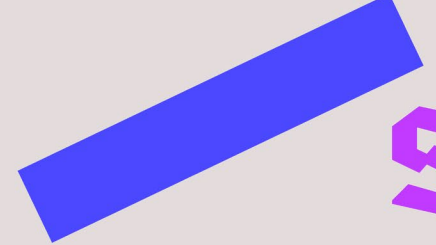


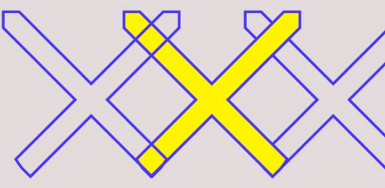
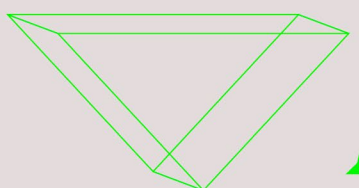


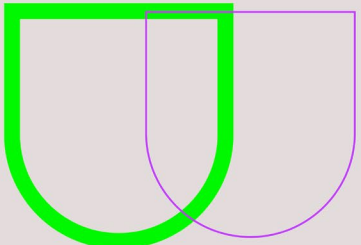

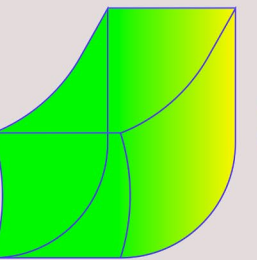
What the attitude is called changes depending on the position of the head and the arms. The way the tail looks can change it all as well.



Learn more at
College-of-arms.co.uk

*A beast is any creature that isn't a bird or a fish. This includes mythical creatures.

Fig. 59
Poster set on Ordinaries and
Explanation.

 Pale  fess
 B  e n d
 Bend  sinister
 Chevron  Pall
 Cross  Saltire
 Pile  Chief
 flaunches  fret
 orle  Tressure
 Gyron   Gorie
 E s c u t c h e o n

Anything But Ordinary



Confused?

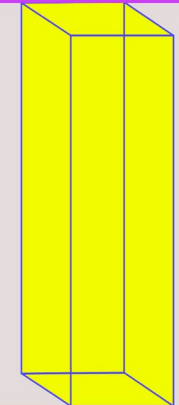
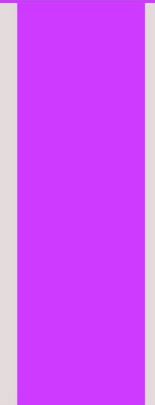
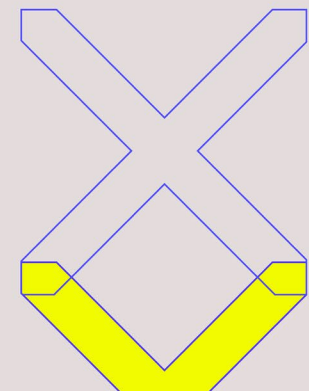
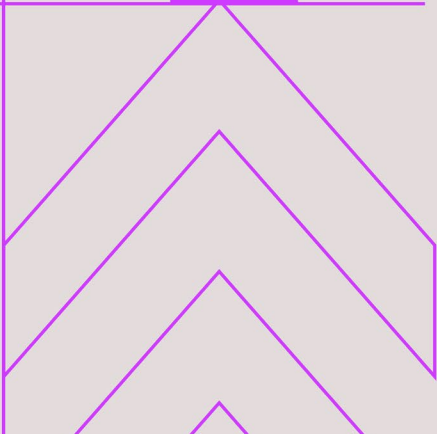
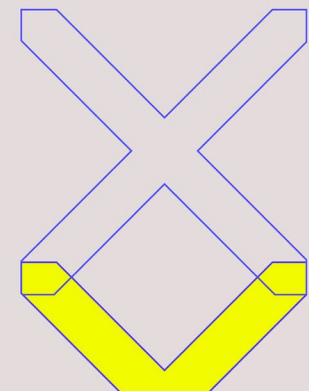
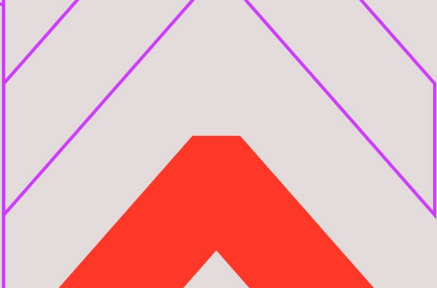
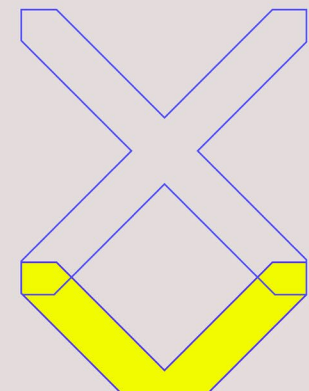
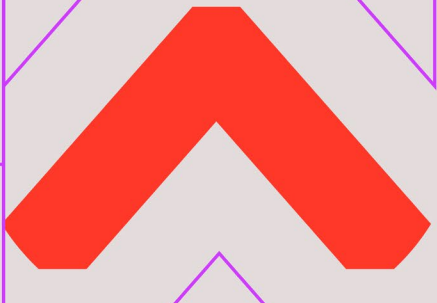
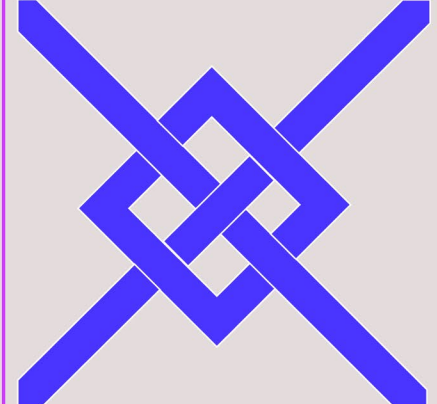
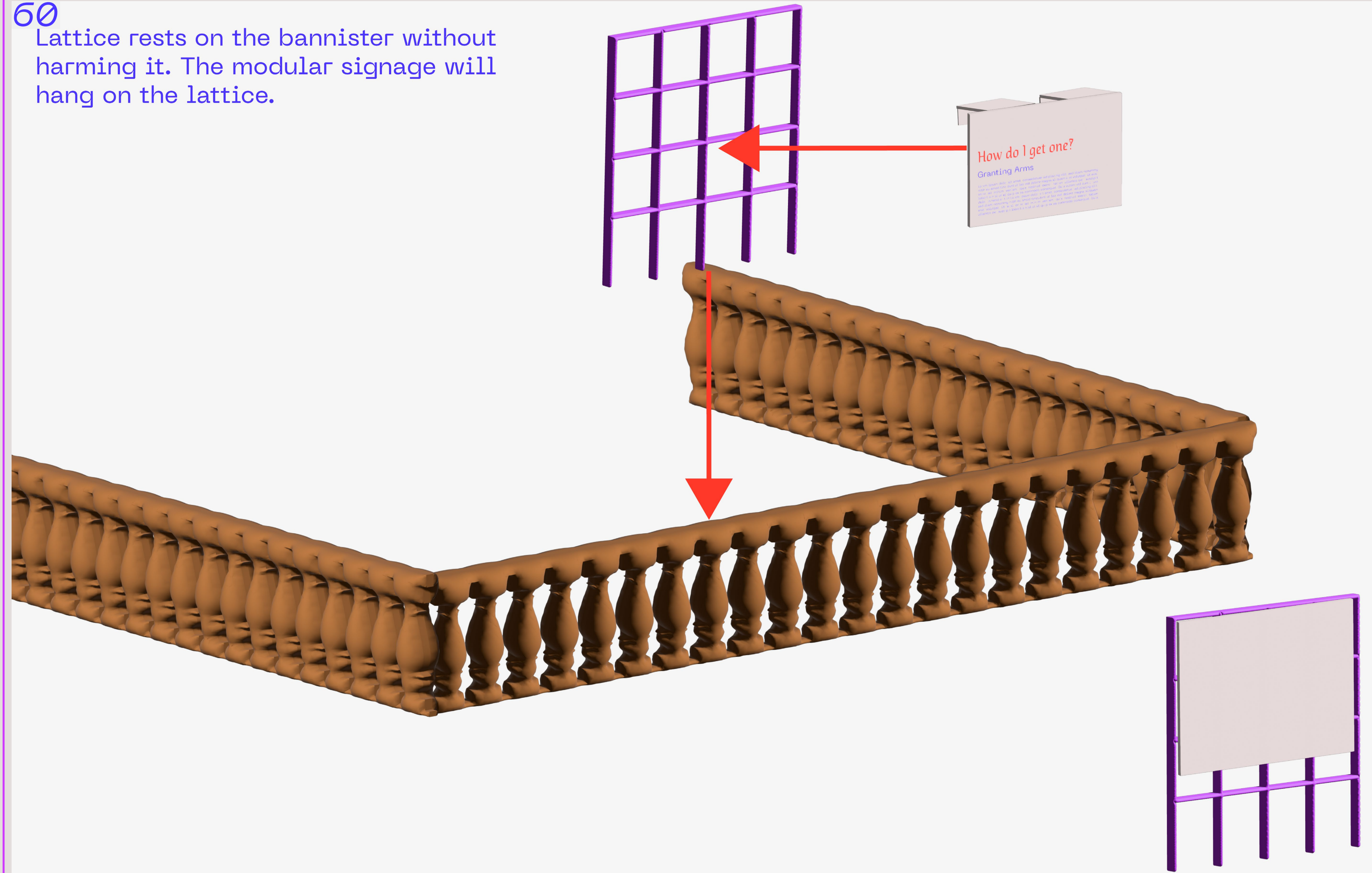
	<p>We'll explain</p>	
	<p>These are:</p>	
	<p>Ordinaries</p> <p>Ordinaries are simple shapes used to represent whatever the owner of the <i>Coat of Arms</i> wants it to. They can be used to divide the shield.</p>	
	<p>Ordinaries, along with other objects used on the shield, are known as charges. Charges are the most important part of the design.</p>	 

Fig. 60
Instruction on exhibition lattice
construction.

60
Lattice rests on the bannister without
harming it. The modular signage
will hang on the lattice.



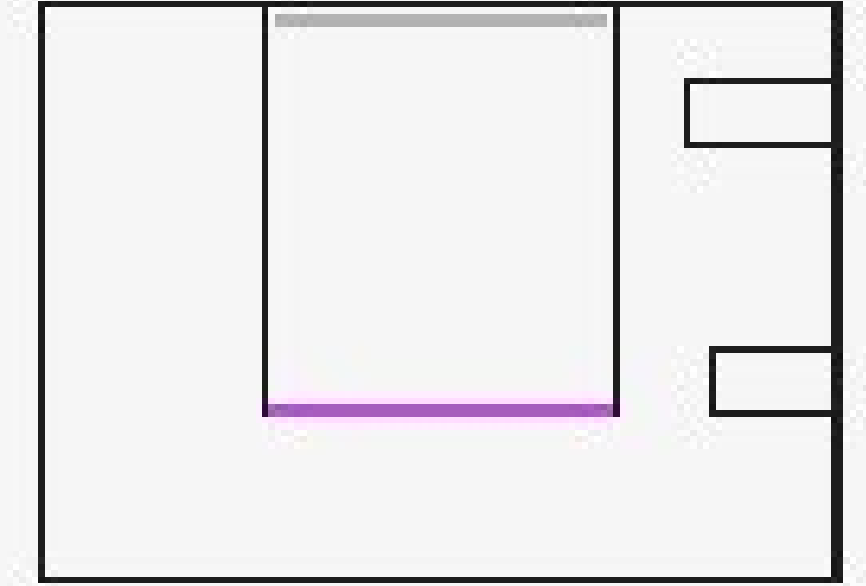
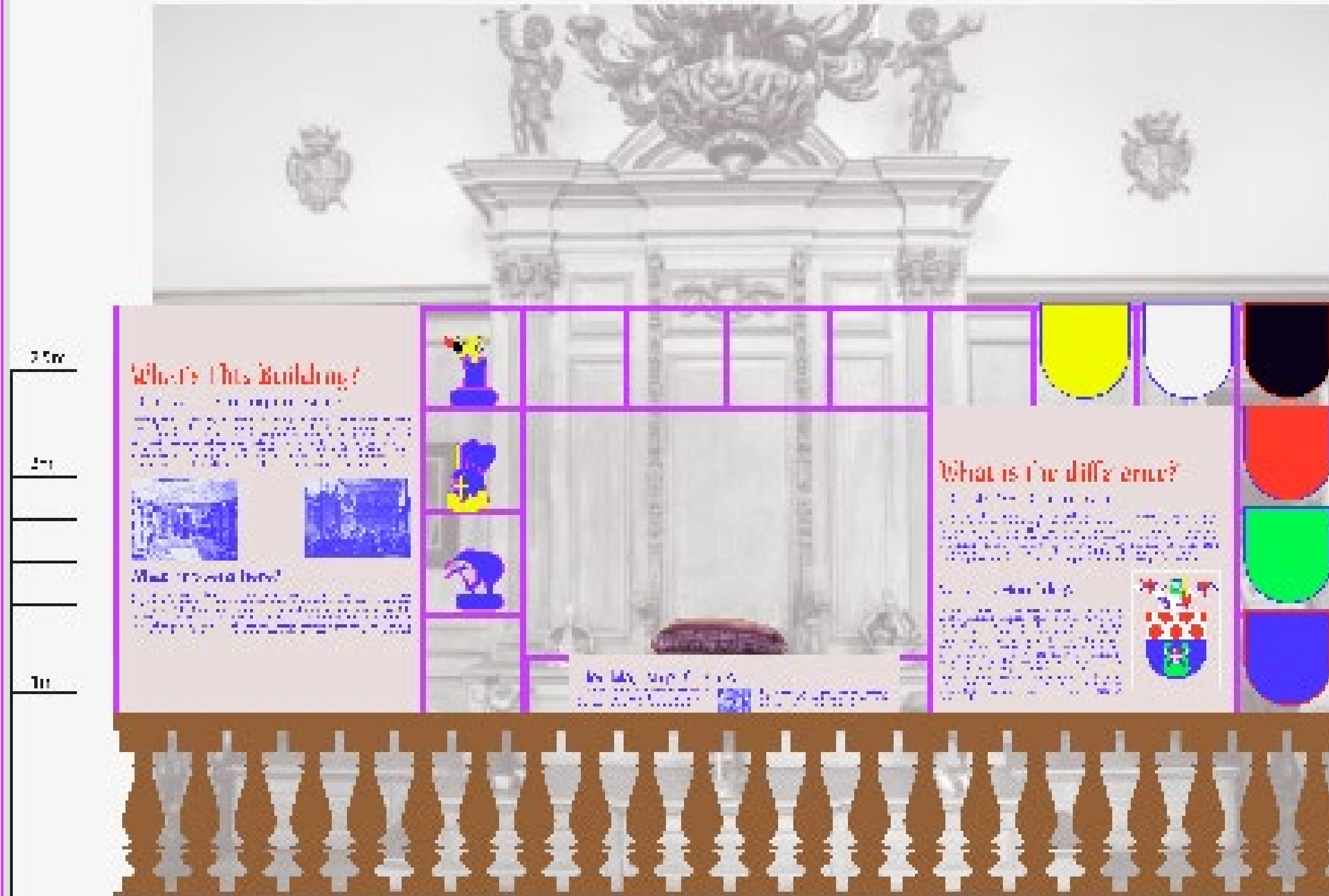
Set up of lattice

Ben Platten

College of Arms

Fig. 61
Exhibition intro to the building and
coat of arms.

61



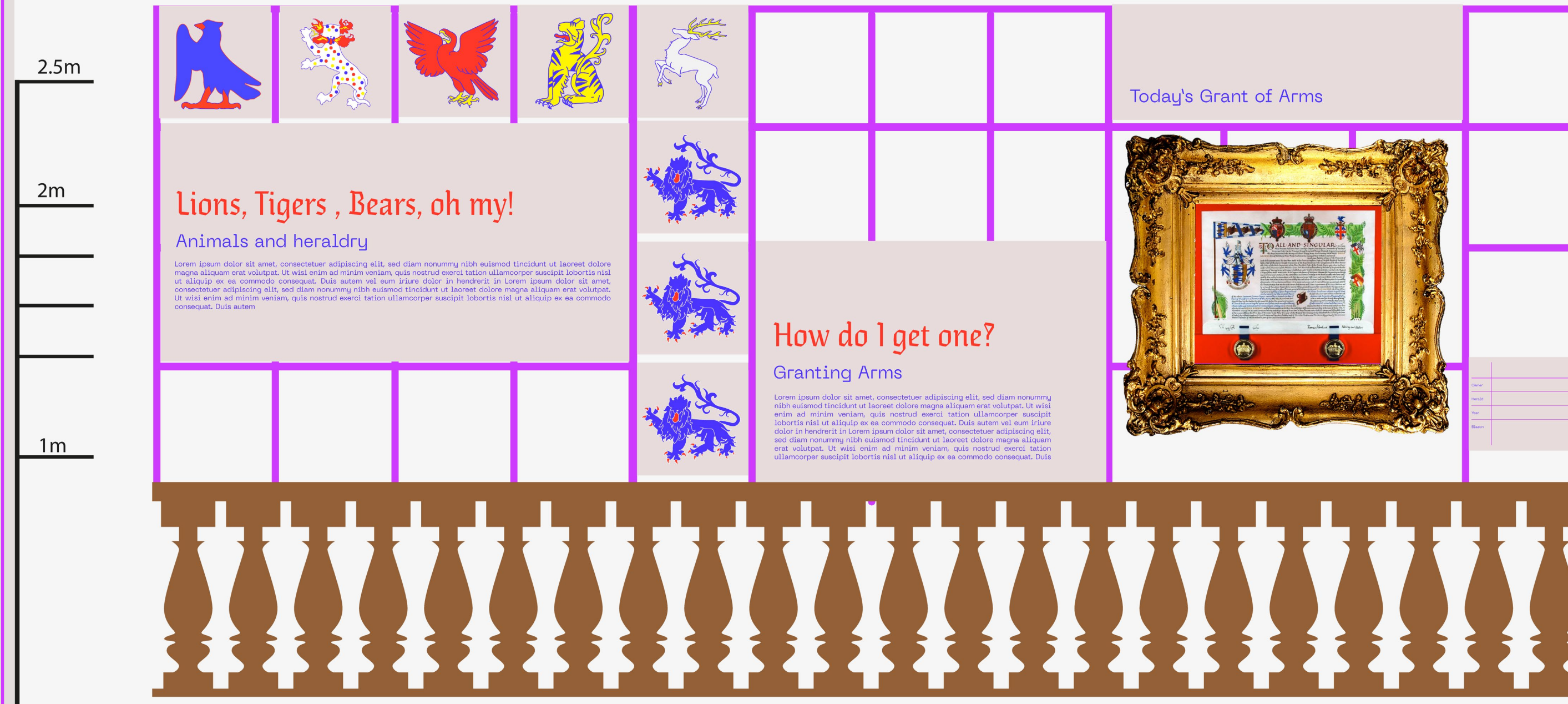
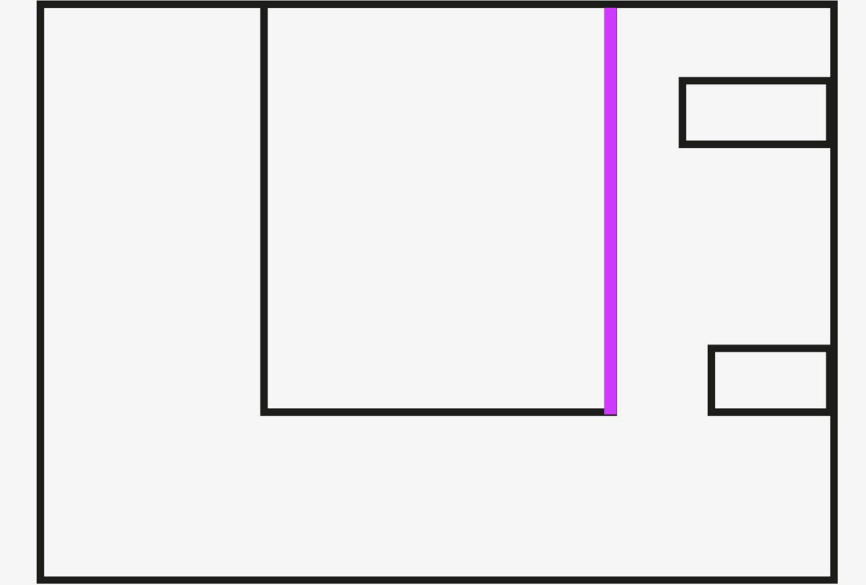
Introduction Section

Ben Plattan

College of Arms

Fig. 62
Exhibition section on the design
and contraction of arms.

62



Design Section

Ben Platten

College of Arms

Conclusion

The focus of the project changed from celebrating existing heraldry, to showing the structure of heraldry. It was also important to give the tools of heraldic creation to the people, democratising this art form. I want people to use heraldry to explore their own identity. It's important to explore how you see yourself as an autonomous being, and also how that fits into the collective.

Autonomy is a very important aspect of the deeper meaning behind the project. The root of "identity" comes from the Latin idem meaning the same. In Political Identity, JWM Makenzie suggests identitas simply means sameness and lacks any aura of selfhood." This possibly comes from Aristotle's inelegant translation from the Greek autos which can mean the self or the same. The crucial context to autos is it refers to a being with a soul.

Exploring coats of arms can be a rewarding way of learning about history – our shared identity. Equally, I've argued that creating your own heraldic device can help you reflect on your self-identity by creating 'symbols of self'. Perhaps, what we as humans are trying to do by creating visual identities is an attempt to glimpse our souls.

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I began by asking the question 'Are coats of arms relevant in the modern day'? One year of research (and a design project) later, I'm not sure I have a clear-cut answer. It's complex. It can be said they have lost their practical meaning, with few of us sporting shields in everyday life. For practical purposes, they seem mostly used to conjure up an image of shared historical experiences, or in a corporate sense to signify longevity, used as reliquaries of dynasties long past. Coats of arms can teach us where we have been, and how a community has come together to create a symbol of their nationhood.

Just as you are part of the make-up of your nation; your nation is part of the make-up of you – but only a part. A person who designs a coat of arms for themselves has acquired a more nuanced display of their identity, than a person raising a union flag on their garden flagpole or a St. George's cross in their Twitter bio. Viewing and interpreting arms is imprecise at times because the context they reference can be both collective and singular, and we often only view them as collective, when both are just as valid. That nuance is what makes heraldry different from other forms of visual identification past and present are geared to all and singular.

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