

Create your own

Family

Coat of Arms

If you are able to explore any historic family home within the UK, either a great house or a castle, you will likely come upon the family's coat of arms. This may be above the door or the fireplace, or in the great hall. It's fun to spot them. The history of these dates back to the twelfth century, a time of knights and jousting. As knights' faces were covered by their helmets when they went into battle, they often wore their family "coat of arms" on their shield in order to identify themselves.



This is a Saxon shield, hence without heraldry, but illustrates how the identity of the soldier is hidden behind his helmet.

This unique set of symbols, or heraldry, was handed down through the generations. There was a heraldic code which included "charges" (emblems), ordinaries (shapes/layout) and colours.

Many had mottos, too, often in Latin.

Emblems

Some examples:

- anchor = salvation and hope. Often used by seafaring families so features on many British coats of arms.
- bee = industry or creativity
- heart = kindness, charity, loyalty
- lion = courage and majesty
- oak leaves = faith, endurance, age, strength.
- sphinx = omniscience
- swan = perfection, beauty

Ordinaries

These included vertical, horizontal and diagonal stripes, crosses and borders. Each had a meaning.

Colours

The main colours used were:

- blue = truth, loyalty,
- green = hope, joy
- red = military connections, fortitude
- black = constancy
- purple = royalty
- gold = power, splendour
- silver = peace, sincerity

When you begin to look for it there are numerous examples of heraldry around the UK.
Here are some examples we have found.



In 1596 William Shakespeare's father was granted a coat of arms. It features a diagonal spear and a falcon on top shaking it (not shown here). Both are puns on the family name.



Coughton Court (National Trust) is a heraldic treasure trove.



Can you spot the same blue and gold heraldry in all three pictures from the Bishop's Palace, Wells?

Several years ago I came up with the concept of creating our own family coat of arms. I'm sure this was inspired by the many historic houses and castles we've visited over the years as part of our home education. However, it also arose as a light hearted solution to some bigger issues.



- It is so easy to compare ourselves unfavourably with others. But, we are all created differently, and with a unique combination of gifts and abilities, and a journey of our own. So rather than looking at other families and feeling inadequate in some way, I think it's more positive to start to define our own family culture and grow into the purposes God has for us with confidence. Creating a coat of arms is a fun way to help us think about this.

- We all know that strong families don't just happen. They take intentional investment and sacrifice, hour by hour over many years. Sometimes the process of verbalising some of what is important to us can be helpful in uniting us as a family. There will be many areas in which we are different from each other, and we see this ever more as our children grow up and develop their own interests, skills, values and callings. But while our families are all at home it can be good to begin to define our vision.

- We all have a deep need to belong, and knowing our "team" or "tribe" brings security. This is especially so if your family includes a colourful mix of adopted, fostered or step children. The process of making a coat of arms can help a child to feel part of the "team".

It took us about two years to come up with our coat of arms, as the initial sketches got lost under a pile of "to do" papers! I think it's important to remember that our families will change over time as our children develop their own abilities and areas interest. This will increase the kaleidoscope of colour that we form together! Our coat of arms would have looked slightly different if we had done it ten years ago. Maybe it's a concept that can be re visited and tweaked every few years. We want each of us to grow into our full potential and it's fun to reflect on how this is happening.

I'd always intended to share this idea and finally have put metaphorical pen to paper. So, below are some areas to think about as you create your own coat of arms.

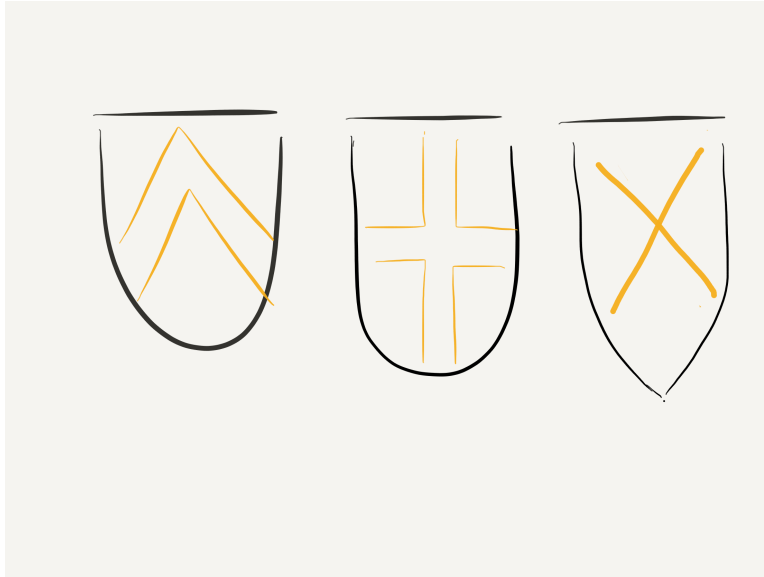


- What do we base our decisions upon? Where does our value system stem from? These are big questions and ones we may not have consciously thought through. They formulate what's called a world view. For those with a specific faith this may be more straightforward to answer, but I'd encourage us all to spend some time thinking about this as it will be the foundation of everything we do in our lives, including within our family.
- Who is in our family, immediate and extended, including pets!
- Are there any big decisions we've taken as a family E.g work/ministry related, education of our children, adoption/fostering, travel, move towards self sufficiency?
- Are there unique challenges which we face as a family E.g chronic illness?
- What is our cultural inheritance? Shields were also used in other parts of the world (in Africa they were often made of cow hide and could be soaked in water to protect the warrior from oncoming fiery arrows). Many countries have their own coat of arms (France's Fleur-de-Lys is well known) or a national seal or emblem.
- What are some of our family values eg kindness, honesty, respect
- What are some of the things our family loves doing?

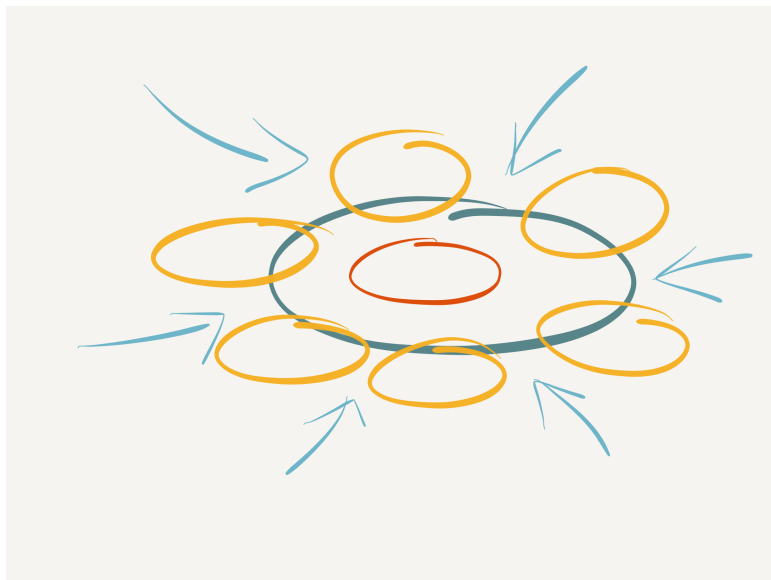
These are only suggestions; some may flow easily for you, and some may not; adapt and create! The most important thing is that it's an enjoyable project!

You could give each family member a large piece of paper and some crayons/pens and they can start creating...

These are some designs, or “ordinaries” you might like to use.



Or if you think better in words than pictures, some kind of flow chart or diagram might work best.



Most of all, make some memories, build relationships and have fun!

Our family coat of arms

a team effort

