

Banners, Standards, and Pennons

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<http://mktag.org/projects/banners/content.html>

One of the most impressive sights at events, whether indoors or out, is the banners, shields, flags, pennants, and other forms of heraldic display. It's how we know which of our monarchs is present at an event, who is camping at the site on the corner, and what fighter is currently winning his bout.

So you've just gotten your device passed, and you want to display it. What next? First, realize that the shield or "heater" shape that you drew it on for submission is not the only form it can take. In fact, the options are wide and varied. **Protocol Warning Number 1:** If you're likely to move around much, keep in mind that various Kingdoms sometimes have sumptuary laws regarding display that you might not expect.

Banners

Historical usage: A banner is a piece of fabric, square to oblong, that is displayed from a pole in such a way that the dexter side is always adjacent to the staff. Banners bore the complete arms of the bearer. In fact, knights who particularly distinguished themselves were often rewarded by having the tail of their pennon cut off, creating a banner ^[1]. Thus, the "knight banneret" was distinguished from the somewhat less prominent "knight bachelor."

SCA usage: Please, please, **PLEASE** don't cut your banner into a heater shape. There is no evidence that this was done, and it makes your banner more difficult to hem. This type of banner is very well suited to reverse applique construction, which we'll cover in a little while. In order to get your banner to stand out from its staff, it will need to be either stiffened fabric, or fitted with a small rod at the top to keep it displayed.

Pennons

Historical usage: A pennon was an oblong piece of fabric that was often displayed from the end of a lance. The earliest pennons were rectangular, with streamers on the edge opposite the staff. Later they became pointed, swallow-tailed, or shaped like a scalene triangle. A pennon most often bore a charge from the bearer's device, but not the device in full. This charge was placed on the pennon in such a way that it could be identified "at charge" - when the lance was held horizontally. The Normans used them as the identifying mark of the knight ^[2].

SCA usage: Pennons are gorgeous, flapping in the wind. They make great pavillion-toppers and are also very spiffy floating from a spear. A few words of warning: if you intend to affix a pennon to your center tent-pole, you probably want it to be silk. That way, it will float on even light breezes, dry quickly, and not bend the pole with its weight if it gets soaked. Second, if you put a pennon on your spear and intend to use it in melee - affix it in some type of break-away arrangement. Or be prepared for the opposing side to grab the pennon and yank your spear out of your hands.

Gonfannons

Historical usage: Gonfannons were primarily used for ecclesiastical processions. They consisted of a square or rectangular piece of fabric, often fringed or tongued along the bottom edge. The gonfannon might bear a heraldic device or another elaborate design. It had a crossbar along its upper edge and hung suspended from a pole ^[2].

SCA usage: This is another banner type that translated nicely to Society use. Gonfannons look very nice standing in a portable hole outside your encampment. This type of flag is really meant to be viewed only from the front, so you don't have to worry about the back.

Standard

Historical usage: The largest type of "flag" in use, the standard varied in size according to the eminence of the bearer. Toward the later part of period, a solid standard was borne only by a prince of the blood - all others were swallow-tailed. The "hoist" or segment closest to the staff, contained the badge of the kingdom to which the bearer owed allegiance. English standards would have St. George's cross, Scottish standards, St. Andrew's cross. The remained is often divided in fess, or in segments separated by bendlets. Charges from the bearer's device or other badges often appear, and a motto is sometimes written in the bendlets ^[3].

SCA usage: OK, so who REALLY needs an 8 yard standard? But they're just so darn cool! Again, silk is your friend, due to its weight. The hoist can bear your kingdom's populace badge, or baronial badge, or whatever - but don't use the actual device with laurel wreath. That would mark it as the property of the King, or Baron, or whomever. He might like your spiffy new standard, too!! Consider this **Protocol Warning Number 2**.

Methods of Construction

Banners in period were often painted silk, embroidered, or appliqued. Any of these methods are acceptable modernly. Some of them lend themselves to specific types of banners ^[4].

Applique

Applique is the technique of fastening down a shape of one fabric onto a background of another. There is a nice period example [A]. This works best for gonfannons and other banners that will be hung against a wall, or otherwise situated so that the back is not visible. The modern technique is really, really easy.

If your device has an ordinary (chevron, pile, pale, or other charge that extends to the edges of the banner), sew that on first. Otherwise, hem your banner and create a pocket at the top for a pole. Next, draw your charge onto a piece of Wonder Under fusible web. Remember to draw it backwards from the way you want the charge facing when you're done. Fuse the webbing to some fabric the color of your charge (you did prewash and dry all your fabric, right?). Cut out the charge, then peel off the paper backing. Position your charge where you want it on your banner and fuse it down. Then sew all the way around the edges with a satin stitch. This technique doesn't work very well with charges on charges, or with strewn charges. It's awfully tedious. But you can certainly combine it with painting to get your device perfect. The advantage to it is that it's bold, doesn't crack, and won't fade as quickly. If you have large charges, it can make for a heavy banner.

Reverse Applique

Reverse applique has all the benefits of applique with one more - you have a spiffy device from the back as well as the front. And it creates a nice period banner with charges to dexter facing the staff when viewed from either side. The disadvantage - it's difficult to do with complex charges - even more so than regular applique.

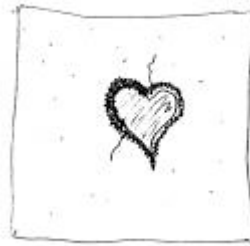
Begin as you would for applique, by tracing, cutting out, and fusing on your charge. Just use a narrow satin stitch or even a small zigzag to affix the charge to your banner.



Then, turn the banner over and cut out the background fabric behind your charge:



This step may require a very fine pair of scissors, and is what makes this technique difficult with complex charges. It's also a challenge with long, narrow charges, like swords or arrows. Next, go around your charge again with a wider satin stitch, trying to encompass the raw edges of both the charge and background fabric. Need I say to make sure your bobbin thread matches your topstitching thread? Repeat for each charge.



Fabric Painting

Painting a device on fabric is quick, easy, and allows great detail. The major drawback is the tendency of fabric paint to peel off, fade, or otherwise disintegrate with time. I suggest cotton fabric, as paints tend to stick to it more firmly. Also, skip the fancy fabric paint. Buy the craft acrylics in the little 2 oz bottles and water it down to the consistency of light cream - which is all fabric paint really is, anyway. Transfer your design by whatever method suits you and your equipment. White graphite paper works well on dark backgrounds. Air-erasable markers work great on lighter grounds. Paint in your device!

The variant on this is silk painting. **DO NOT USE ACRYLICS ON SILK.** I guarantee they will crack and fall off. Or at the least, inhibit the wonderful floating quality that made you want to use silk in the first place! Use silk paints. These are easily available - [see the materials list](#). Your other best friend in this venture is a silk resist, especially with more intricate designs or lettering. Silk resist is a waxy substance that you paint or draw onto the silk, coating it to protect it from paint. You can outline your whole design with resist, then paint it. Or just use it in the complex areas. Match your resist to

your paint and your desires. Many clear resists are water soluble - allowing you to wash it out even after you have heat set the paint with an iron. Black resists are also available. However, it doesn't make a lot of sense to use a black resist, then wash it out. Rather, look for a black resist that can itself be heat-set. This will allow you to add details that won't run.

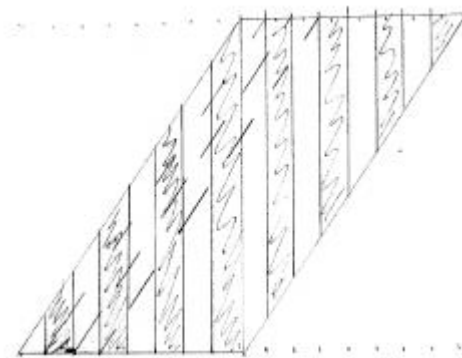
It's easiest to paint silk if you tack it down to a board. You might also want to pad the board with newspaper or some similar material. Remember not to glop on the paint. If you use too much it WILL run along the board, under the resist, and stain your back ground.

Once the device is painted, heat set it according to the directions, wash out any resists, and you have your finished masterpiece!

Binding

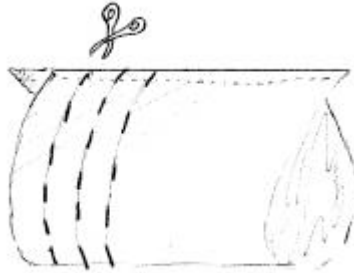
Many banners have a binding. Most striking are the striped edges on standards. While you could paint all those little stripes on, there is a more efficient method. (Note: efficient, not easier). While I don't have any direct evidence that bias bindings were used in period, this method does produce a nice binding that is very secure, neat, and impressive.

Begin with silk in two colors. Cut them each into 2 ½ inch strips lengthwise. Sew the strips together in alternating stripes (think: American Flag). I usually go with 11 stripes of each color, since this makes a nice long binding strip, and makes it easier on me to draw out. Draw a diagonal line across your new block of fabric from corner to corner (I'm assuming here that your fabric is ~44" wide). Cut the fabric on this line, then sew the last strip to the first:



Now draw diagonal lines parallel to the edge of the fabric at 2" intervals.

The next part is the most difficult both to explain and to visualize. Sew the short edges of your parallelogram together, matching the first stripe on one end to the second stripe on the other, making sure to keep right sides together:



You now have a tube of fabric with a corner hanging off each end. At this point, you can take your scissors and cut the tube along the lines that were drawn on into one continuous strip. After cutting, fold your binding in half lengthwise, and press.

To use this binding, pin to the front of your banner or standard, matching the raw edges of the binding to the raw edges of the banner. Stitch down. Fold the binding over, encasing the raw edges. If you're talented, you can machine stitch along the seam on the front of the binding and catch the fold of the binding in the back. I'm not that talented. I hand tack it.

References:

^[1] Coss, Peter, and Maureen Keen, eds., "Heraldry, Pageantry, and Social Display in Medieval England," (Boydell Press: 2003).

^[2] Master Heinrich von Henford, OL, "Armorial Display: Suggestions for SCA Usage, Based on Period Forms." (Self-published: 2000).

^[3] Bedingfeld, Henry, Rouge Croix Herald, and Peter Gwynn-Jones, Lancaster Herald, Heraldry, (Seacaucus: NJ 1993).

^[4] Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, The Craftsman's Handbook: "Il Libro dell'Arte", translated by Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., (New York: 1960) p. 106.

Sources: USA Dharma Trading Co. - Silk, silk paints, resists, silk thread.
<http://www.dharmatrading.com/>

Thai Silks – silk : <http://www.thaisilks.com/>

Michaels craft stores - silk paint, acrylic paint, stencil blanks, marking pencils, and lots more

Fields Fabric - Cotton twill fabric, silk, silk thread

Grand Quilt Company - Silk thread

Banner Stands - <http://www.medievalwood.org/charles/banner.html>