

Who, or what, is the Lord Lyon?

by
Gordon
Craigie

THERE'S an iconic photograph from 1977, showing Scottish football fans invading Wembley in celebration after a 2-1 victory over England. It was taken right after a crossbar had been broken, and while chunks of the pristine Wembley turf were being procured for eventual resettlement in back greens all over Scotland. Yet, despite those heinous crimes of vandalism and theft, to which could be added, probably, drunkenness, public disorder, and a wheen of other 'offences', amongst all of the tartan-bunneted Bay City Roller lookalikes, the lad right in the centre of the frame is guilty of the most serious crime of all, one which is punishable by death – he's carrying a Lion Rampant, and that carries a maximum penalty of decapitation! Yes, really...

The following year, in 1978 an entrepreneurial linen merchant produced a souvenir bedspread, adorned with the Lion Rampant,

Threatened with the death penalty, under a 1592 Act of the Scottish Parliament which has never been repealed

targeted at those very same Scottish football supporters. When the Lyon Court got wind of this, the linen merchant was apparently threatened with the death penalty, under a 1592 Act of the Scottish Parliament which has never been repealed. Charged with 'usurpation', his particular form of treason was eventually punished by imposing a fine of £100 per day for as long as his bedspread continued to be sold. At least he kept his heid!

So, why all the fuss? Well, the Lyon Court is a fully functioning court, funded by the Scottish Government through its Courts, Judiciary & Scottish Tribunals Service budget. Based in New Register House in Edinburgh, the Court of the Lord Lyon is the official heraldry office for Scotland and, according to its website, "deals with all matters relating to Scottish Heraldry and Coats of Arms and maintains the Scottish Public Registers of Arms and Genealogies. The Lord Lyon King of Arms is also responsible for State Ceremonial in Scotland."

The office of the Lord Lyon King of Arms dates back to the 14th century and the Court is the oldest heraldic court in the world that is still in daily operation. The name, Lyon, is thought to be derived from the lion in the Scottish Coat of Arms, nowadays more typically seen in the Lion Rampant flag. The use of the lion in Scottish heraldry is generally reckoned to date back to King William the Lion in the 12th century.



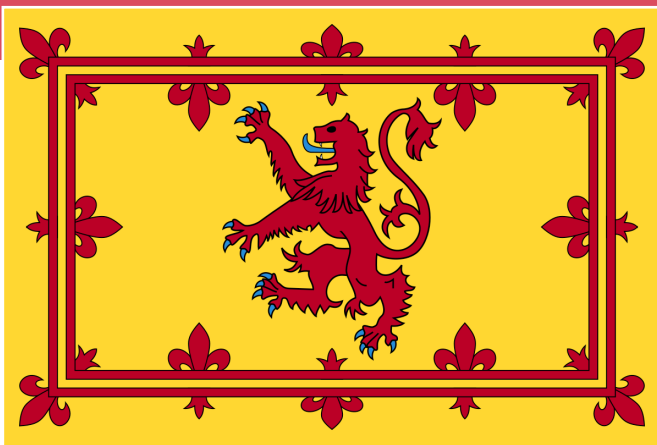
Coat of Arms of the Lord Lyon King of Arms.



Bay City Rollers gig turns nasty 1977



The Rev Canon
Dr Joseph Morrow -
CBE KStJ QC DL LLD Lord Lyon



Royal Banner of Scotland

The Lyon Court currently comprises the Lord Lyon King of Arms (the Rev Canon Dr Joseph John Morrow CBE KStJ QC DL LLD), the Lyon Clerk and Keeper of the Records (Elizabeth A. Roads, LVO), and the Procurator Fiscal to the Court of the Lord Lyon (Alexander M. S. Green, M.Theol (Hons), LL.B, LL.M, M.Litt. FSA Scot). In everyday language, the Court is responsible for monitoring the use of heraldic symbols like coats of arms and shields, clan crests and tartans, and flags. The Lord Lyon himself also takes part in official ceremonies, like the opening of the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the inauguration of the governors of Edinburgh Castle. He can be assisted in these duties by Her Majesty's Officers of Arms, whose current make-up is Rothesay Herald, Snawdoun Herald, Marchmont Herald, Ormond Pursuivant, Dingwall Pursuivant and Unicorn Pursuivant. While you may be thinking that's just a list of defunct newspapers, 'Herald' and 'Pursuivant' are actually ancient titles indicating a pecking order below the 'King of Arms'.

A Coat of Arms was originally worn over a knight's armour to identify himself. Over time that definition has changed – you don't see many suits of armour these days – to mean some combination of a shield, supporters, crest and motto. The design and use is strictly controlled and registered with the Lyon Court and unauthorised or inappropriate use of Arms is a criminal offence. Such offences are prosecuted by the Procurator Fiscal of the Lyon Court. Indeed, the Lyon Court has had a go at a number of Scottish football clubs over the past few years for their use of shields, rampant lions and saltires. Threatened with substantial fines or fees most of those clubs have opted to redesign their traditional badges but have still incurred significant costs in the process, along with their loss of history and heritage.

With clan crests and tartans the Court of the Lord Lyon appears to take mainly an advisory role in supporting the Scottish Register of Tartans. It does,



£1
Scottish
Lion

The Lyon Court has had a go at a number of Scottish football clubs over the past few years for their use of shields, rampant lions and saltires



Officers 2009

however, get more involved in controlling the use of flags, as mentioned earlier in relation to the Lion Rampant. This includes guidance as to the size, ratio, colour and usage of the Union flag, the Saltire and, particularly, the Lion Rampant.

The Lion Rampant is, historically, the Royal Standard of the Kingdom of Scotland and can be traced back to the 13th century and the reign of Alexander II, King of Scots, son of William the Lion. Its official use nowadays is reserved for the Scottish royal residences, at Holyrood and Balmoral, to indicate that the Queen is not in residence. When she is present, the flag is replaced by The Royal Standard of the United Kingdom, which is quartered, featuring the Lion Rampant in two of the quarters with the Irish harp and English lions in the remaining quarters. Apart from the monarch, only the 'Great Officers of State' may use the Lion Rampant. These include the First Minister of Scotland (as Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland), Lord Lieutenants in their Lieutenancies, the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Lord Lyon King of Arms, and other lieutenants as may be specially appointed.

The design of the Lion Rampant is carefully stipulated in heraldic terms which translate to *gold, with a left-facing red rampant lion with azure claws and tongue surrounded by a double banding of red, alternately facing, 'fleurs-de-lis'*. On the use of the Lion Rampant the Court of the Lord Lyon is particularly clear, stating unequivocally, "this is not a national flag and its use by citizens and corporate bodies is entirely wrong" and "its use by other, non-authorized persons is an offence under the Act of Parliament 1672 cap. 47 and 30 & 31 Vict. cap. 17". In 1934 the then King, George V, issued a Royal Warrant to allow the Lion Rampant to be used by citizens in celebration of his Silver Jubilee the following year, but only in a hand-held fashion.

Hand-held or not, we Scots are indeed blessed to have not one but two bonnie flags at our disposal. You can read all sorts of claims and counter-claims about whether the oldest flag in the world is actually the Saltire or the Dannebrog, the national flag of Denmark. *The Guinness Book of World Records* gives the award to the Danes on the basis that theirs is the "oldest continually used flag", arguing that, although the Scots adopted the Saltire earlier, there was "no evidence" it had always been a white cross on a blue background. Still, being *arguably* the oldest is a pretty good claim! Either way, the Court of the Lord Lyon specifies that the Saltire "is the correct flag for all Scots or Scottish corporate bodies to fly to demonstrate their loyalty and their Scottish nationality".

So, there we have it. The Lord Lyon, looking after Scotland's flags and heraldry since way back when, longer than anyone else, and still going strong.