



Scottish Culture and History



Heraldic Banners and Gonfannons

Banner: The personal flag of the armiger. This shows the arms and nothing else. The purpose is to locate and identify the owner.

Pipe Banner: For the armiger's personal piper. It is attached to the base drone of the pipes.

Trumpet Banner: Rarely used now. It is a square banner hanging from a heraldic trumpet.

Gonfannon: or gonfalon. This is a flag hanging from a horizontal bar, supported by a carrying staff. Often has long tassels in the livery colours.

Gonfannons (Hanging Banners)

Gonfannons are one of the more common forms of banner that are found in period heraldry. Gonfannons (or Gonfallons) are usually rectangular, and hung from a cross-pole at the top (see Figure at right).

Stephen Friar says: "Gonfannon or Gonfallon A personal flag, emblazoned with the arms, and supported by means of a horizontal pole suspended by cords from the top of a staff. Probably (in shape) a descendant of the Roman vexillum, and usually with 'tails' at the lower edge. Popular in Europe, especially in Italy, but less so in Britain where it has always been associated with the church or guilds and mysteries, and is now to be found in the vernacular form of ecclesiastical or trade-union 'banner', probably because of its suitability for use in processions and parades.

Gunn-fane = war flag (Norse)." 15 A Gonfannon style banner can display the armoury in several ways. The simplest is to use the background as the background (field) of your device, and place the charges directly on the field. It is also possible, particular for later period persona, to place a full achievement of arms on the banner. This would assume, perhaps, a background for the banner that might be household colours, or something of that nature, and then placing the achievement (the device, maybe with supporters, helm/crest, compartment, and/or motto) on top of the background.

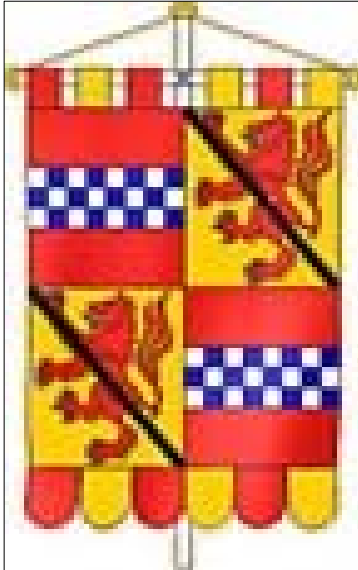


In this royal contest, William had won over one very important person whose support gave great weight to his claim, the Pope. His Holiness decreed that anyone supporting Harold and not William would be excommunicated from the Christian church. The soldiers in the Saxon army faced not only the threat of capture, injury and violent death, but more importantly, their immortal souls were at risk. To clearly demonstrate his support for William's cause, the Pope had allowed him to campaign under his papal Gonfannon, or banner.

After landing on shore, William's army marched inland to meet Harold and his army, who were rushing back from having just fought off invading Vikings in northern England. The two armies clashed near Hastings, at a place then called Senlac, and known today as Battle. As the two armies prepared for battle, William asked one and then another of his leading knights to carry the Gonfannon and stay by him, so his subordinates could locate him in battle. But knowing that both the flag and William would be a visible target for the enemy and a magnet for danger, they both declined.

Turstin the Fleming apparently had no such fears, and gladly accepted both the honour and peril of carrying the flag. It is reported that he played a vital role, bearing the banner "boldly, high aloft in the breeze, and rode beside the Duke, going wherever he went." Seeing the holy banner waving in their faces must have further emphasized to the Saxons that they fought not only against the upstart Duke from Normandy, but the Holy Mother Church as well.

At a critical moment, rumours swept the Norman lines that William was killed, causing them to waver. To counteract this, William took off his helmet and rode along the lines to show he still lived. Turstin no doubt rode along with him.



Gonfannon of Robert Lindsay Earl of Crawford & Balcarres

Gonfannon — This is a roughly square or rectangular flag designed to be hung from a horizontal pole. It quite often has long dags at the bottom. What most SCA folk think of as being a "banner" is actually a gonfannon. In years gone by, gonfannons bore either the arms of their owners, a picture of a saint, or some badge or other symbol of significance to the owner.

Banner — On the other hand, a banner is a rectangular flag that is designed to be hung from a vertical pole. Early banners were wider than they were long. That is, the long side of the banner was attached to the staff. Later banners reversed this, so that they looked more like modern flags. In some areas, a long piece of fabric in the shape of a right triangle or rectangle hung from the upper corner of the fly-side of the banner.



Glenfannon of Roman Catholic Diocese of Argyll and the Isles