

Making a 15th Century Crest

Being a description of the process used to make a tournament crest for Guillaume de Garrigues, as made by Guillaume and Annisa Gabrielli

The concept is based on the images shown in the Livre des Tournois by King Rene d'Anjou, showing a helmet, crest base, and the complete package with crest, mantling and coronet. The base is held to the helmet with points, though it is not clear how the other layers are attached.



I made Guillaume's crest as two separate pieces.

There is a shaped leather cap which fits on top of the helmet, with linen torse and mantling attached to it. This attaches to the helmet with magnets, and can be added easily after the wearer is mounted. Mounting a horse while wearing a heavy, vision-obstructing helmet is difficult. Guillaume usually mounts and warms up his horse wearing an (attractively covered) modern safety helmet, then changes into the jousting helmet while still in the saddle. It is convenient and safe, if not quite period-appropriate, to add the crest assembly after the helmet is secured.

There is a second shaped leather cap which fits on top of the mantling, which has the carved wooden arm and leather horns attached to it. This cap attaches to the first with points tied through corresponding holes.



I used heavy paper, 'draped' on the helmet to make a pattern for the cap. The leather caps are each stitched into a slightly-too-small shape, and then soaked and bound to the (plastic-covered) helmet with linen strips to form them exactly to the helmet. The mantling layer has three small linen envelopes sewn to the underside, and a $\frac{3}{4}$ " rare-earth magnet is sewn into each of these envelopes.



The torse is made from two long strips of linen in the main colors of Guillaume's arms. Each one is stitched into a tube and turned, with a layer of cotton batting to add a bit of structure. The mantling is a flat, roughly oval shape with a scalloped edge, except cut straight across the front to prevent flapping and further vision obstruction. The mantling is lined, turned, and top-stitched around the edge to keep it crisp. The torse and mantling are sewn to the lower leather cap at the edge. This cap with torse and mantling can be worn without the crest for less formal occasions. After making the crest cap and marking for placement, I stitched eyelets in the fabric layer, for the points. The points are made from an old fingerloop-braided cotton pourpoint cord, cut into three lengths, with brass aiglets added. The upper cap is made the same way, and trimmed to fit inside the torse after being stretched. Then both layers of leather were punched for the points. After the horns were trimmed to fit the curve of the cap, I pierced holes for them. Then the cap was painted with several coats of brownish-red tinted gesso in preparation for painting, followed by two coats of red oil paint.



The horns were cut from thin leather as two matching halves, and stitched together from the point, with linen strips stuffed in as I went. I used an awl to pack the linen in snugly, keeping the end of each strip accessible at the opening so I could remove them later. When the horns were sewn, I wetted the leather to mold it into shape. I tied off the threads, but left the extra length attached for later attachment to the cap. This extra thread also made convenient loops to hang the horns up while drying. Once the horns had fully dried, I pulled the linen strips out. The leather held its shape, but since the crest is intended to be used on the jousting field, it needed a bit more resilience than this. Using advice from a couple of experienced leather mask-makers, I diluted some white glue with water (about 1 part glue to 4 parts water) for a stiffener. I painted a coat of this mixture on the outside, and also poured some into the horns, tipped it around to coat the inside, then poured out the excess before hanging the horns up to dry again. After 2 or 3 coats of glue, I painted 2 coats of gesso onto the outside, again hanging the horns up near a box fan to dry each time. Then three coats of yellow oil paint. I like the durable, if a bit too shiny, finish of Rustoleum paint for items to be used on the horse field. Lastly, the horns were trimmed to match the cap, and holes punched, as mentioned above. When both pieces were complete, I stitched the horns to the cap.



The armored arm is made from a block of basswood. I drew the outline on the wood, and Guillaume cut out the rough shape using a bandsaw. I finished the shaping using chisels, gouges and files, then drilled a hole through the hand for the branch. Then 3 coats of gesso, with a bit more filing between coats to smooth out remaining saw-marks. Perhaps the most difficult step of making the arm was carving out the underside of the base to match the profile of the cap. I believe Guillaume used a Dremel tool for this step. Then he drilled small holes around the lower edge, and stitched on a narrow strip of leather. The arm was sewn to the leather cap using

this strip. Next, I painted the arm with two coats of grey oil paint, followed by blue shadows and white highlights to give it a bit more depth and accent the contours.



The oak branch is made from the same lightweight leather as the horns. The shape was cut out flat. At this stage, it did not look very convincing, and had no strength—held at the mid-point, it would curl and flop downwards. I put a length of heavy thread through the stump end and tied it off, leaving a long harness needle attached. This was useful at several stages in the process. Using this thread as a leash, I submerged the branch in a pot of simmering water and swished it around until bubbles stopped forming on the surface, and the leather had a floppy, clay-like feeling to it. I pulled it out and drained it for a short while, then twisted and formed it into a more organic, branch-like shape. When it dried, it held its shape with a springy rigidity, and I gave it a coat of glue and two coats of the brownish-red gesso, hanging it up by the thread to dry. Next, I cut out three oak leaves from the same leather, and painted them with green oil paint. Interestingly, these are the only leather element which I did not gesso before painting, and the leaves have retained a slightly sticky quality. I pierced holes in both leaves and branches and stitched the leaves on. The boiled leather of the branch was a bit brittle and prone to tearing.



Finally, I threaded the branch through the hand, using the needle and pulling it through by the loop of thread, and then cut off the excess length of leather. The hole in the hand is sized so that the branch fits very tightly. The crest cap is tied to the mantling cap with the points, and the whole assembly is settled onto the helmet.

This crest was used during the joust at the Emprise of the Black Lion XIII. The crest is very light, and the weight of the leather, wood and fabric were not perceptible, perhaps due to the much greater weight of the helmet. It was knocked off the helmet on the fourth pass, and did not sustain any perceivable damage.



I hope you'll consider making a crest! Some great sources for ideas are period manuscripts and rolls of arms, from the 14th century Zurich roll and Codex Manesse, to the many 15th century rolls of various Orders, such as the Toison d'Or and the Order of the Garter. Images of tournaments and tourneyers are also a great source. The array of objects which medieval people used to decorate their helmets is truly astonishing.