

Current Style is Rich - [Switch to Plain Style](#)

# THE COURT OF THE LORD LYON

- [Home](#)
- [About the Court](#)
- [About Coats of Arms](#)
- [Scottish Clans / Tartans](#)
- [Flags](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Thistle Chapel Book](#)

## Guidance as regards the holding of a *Derbhfine* or Family Convention

*Derbhfine* was the name given in Old Irish Law to a four generation agnatic kingroup of importance in determining succession and the ownership of property. More recently the term has been used to describe what might be termed a Family Convention, held when the identity of the Chief or Head of a historic Family or Name is in doubt, the object of which is to recognise a new Chief or Head of the Family or Name; or to indicate a suitable Commander for a term of years.

A Family Convention should be composed of the leading members of the Family or Name in question. It has not proved easy to define who exactly qualify as leading members, but the term certainly includes the heads or representatives of leading branches of the family. In the past the term has been defined in terms of armigers and substantial landowners. Although being an armiger does suggest a certain status and a degree of commitment to the Name, this definition has not proved entirely satisfactory, being on the one hand too exclusive and on the other open to abuse. For example, such a definition might exclude non-armigerous heads of leading branches; also, in theory at least, definition in terms of a given number of armigers may make a Family Convention open to “packing”. There is also the possibility that someone unconnected to the Name in question, might adopt that name as his or her surname and become an armiger. It is not appropriate that someone in this position should then be regarded as a leading member of the family. It does seem appropriate, however, to consult with a well established clan or family association where such exists.

There are a number of circumstances in which it would seem appropriate to hold a Family Convention:

- (1) Where a blood link to a past Chief or Head of Name is likely but is not conclusively proven and it is wished to propose a particular person in that situation to be recognised as Chief.
- (2) Where the main line of descent from a past Chief has died out and it is wished to recognise the Representer of a cadet line as Chief.
- (3) Where neither blood link to a past Chief nor Representer of a cadet line can be identified but it is wished to propose a particular person of the surname as Commander. It is generally desirable that such a Commander should live in Scotland.

It should be noted that the Lord Lyon is unlikely to recognise a person recommended by a Family Convention as Chief or Head of a Family or Name, unless that recommendation is unopposed or, at the very least, has been approved by a substantial majority of the Family Convention.

The Family Convention should take place in Scotland although members outwith the jurisdiction may participate by video link or similar.

It is anticipated that the number of those participating in a Family Convention will be relatively small, of the order of ten to twenty-five people.

### **The Conduct of a Family Convention**

It is desirable that one of HM Officers of Arms, or some other person approved by the Lord Lyon King of Arms, be appointed to supervise the Family Convention. The supervising officer's role is to act as an impartial Chairman and to make an objective report to Lyon.

In case of dispute, the supervising officer will determine which individuals shall comprise the Family Convention and, in reporting back to Lyon, shall also take into account the views of any well established clan or family association.

At least six month's notice of the intention to hold a Family Convention should be given to the Lord Lyon to be posted, at a minimum, on the Lyon Court website. The Supervising Officer should give at least two month's notice of the date of the Family Convention to interested parties, setting out the procedure to be followed.

[home](#) | [printer friendly](#) | [top](#) | [back](#)

