

ON THE PRACTICAL CONDUCT OF COURT

by Ellis O'Boirne

(The following are notes on the mechanical details which must be attended to, rather than a philosophical treatise. I will speak primarily of Kingdom Courts, as these tend to be most complex, but the information herein will also apply to Principality and Baronial Courts, with appropriate changes.)

CONGRATULATIONS!!! You've been asked by Their Majesties, or appointed by Banner, to conduct a Court. The first step is to find out when the Court you are responsible for is scheduled to be held. The answer may be precise (10:00 a.m. Sunday) or it may be vague ("After the Peerage meetings"). Either way, it is now your responsibility to be ready for the Court whenever Their Majesties are.

Speak to Banner and arrange a Second, or "back-up" herald, for the Court. Depending on your experience, this will be either one of the more-skilled Court heralds or a trainee. The functions of this Second will be gone into later in detail. Arrange with your Second to meet with you approximately one hour before Court. If you are not familiar with the Kingdom ceremony book, ask one of the Senior Heralds to go over it with you, and read through any ceremonies you may be asked for.

One hour before Court is scheduled, put on a tabard and go (with a notebook or clipboard, and with your Second, also in regalia) to Their Majesties, and confirm that there has been no significant change in the time set for Court. At this time, you can ask Their Majesties if they have any business for Court, and obtain the promissories for any awards they will be granting. (If Their Majesties have not had the promissories done in advance, this might give the Scribes time to prepare them.) You should also ask whether various of the conventions used for Court (which are covered below) will apply. Write any Royal business in your notebook, and put the promissories in a safe place. Thank Their Majesties, and tell them that you will return to review the collected business with them later.

Arrange for it to be announced that you are taking Court business in a fixed location. The herald's pavilion is generally best, as it is usually very busy around the Royal pavilion. Go to your chosen location and stand or sit in a place where you are visible. When people come to you with business for Court, make sure that you get enough information that Their Majesties can decide whether they wish the item to be included in Court, and that you can make the announcement, if necessary. Write legibly enough that someone else can read the information if necessary. Inform the people who bring business about the Court conventions being used that day, and further inform them that any business scheduled for Court may be cut or altered at Their Majesties' whim. If there are to be Peerages given, with no scrolls available, consult the Armorial to determine the correct blazon of the Peer's arms.

One half hour before Court is to begin, have a final call for business. At this time, you should check with Banner or the senior Herald available as to whether there are scrolls which are to be distributed at this Court. You should make sure you have all the "props" you need: Kingdom tabard, a respectable tabard for your Second, the promissories, the Kingdom ceremony book, etc. Collect your Second, your "props", and a large glass of water, and go to Their Majesties.

Review the business you have collected with Their Majesties, cutting and altering it as They command. Add any further business as They may have, and ask whether They have any requests as to the ordering of Court or the grouping of business. Thank Them and go to a quiet place with your Second. You are going to do something that will make the difference between a smooth and impressive Court and a flop -- you are going to order the business for Court. (This paper will not address the question of what business should come when, as that is a question of philosophy.)

There are several mechanical ways to order business. Each has advantages and disadvantages, and you should choose the one which works best for you.

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- 1) You can write each piece of business on an index card, and shuffle them into a pleasing pattern. This system offers great flexibility, but if you drop the cards you are in trouble.
- 2) You can rewrite the business from the “collection notes” to a new sheet, arranging it in what you feel is the best order and writing in the wording you want to use. This is probably the best method for the inexperienced herald, but it tends to create a certain inflexibility and unwillingness to deal with changes.
- 3) You can rewrite, in fuller form, the business from the “collection notes”, grouped into categories: Announcements, Presentations, Competitions, Awards, etc. You can then select from these categories as appropriate, judging the mood of the Royalty and the populace. This may be the best method for moderately-experienced Court heralds, as it gives both organization and flexibility.
- 4) You can take the “collection notes” and write numbers and notes in the margin, ordering the Court in your head. This works only if you know what you are doing, but it offers maximum flexibility and can produce spectacular courts.

Whatever method you use, it is not a bad idea to draw a pencil line through each piece of business as it is completed. This provides a check that you have done everything, and stops you from inadvertently making the same announcement twice.

After the close of Court, ask Their Majesties if they have any comments on the conduct of Court, and thank them for allowing you to be of service.

SECONDS: If you are an experienced Court herald, your Second is there to be an extra pair of hands, and to learn how to conduct a Court suitable to the dignity of Their Majesties. If you are an inexperienced Court herald, your Second is there to give you the benefit of his experience, and to stiffen your jelly-like spine. In both cases, the Second is there to take over in emergencies, and to do all he can to make the Court flow smoothly.

The major duties of a Second are:

- 1) to receive gracefully anything handed to him (or flung at him) by the Court herald.
- 2) To shuffle books and papers in a non-obtrusive manner.
- 3) To be ready to step in and take over if the Court herald’s voice vanishes or the Court herald is suddenly called forward to receive an honor from the Crown. Other duties depend on the length of the Court, the business being conducted, and the identity of the Court herald and Their Majesties. Some Royalty do not like “rotating heralds”, so the Second can not be brought in to do some of the announcements and awards. Other Court heralds will ask their Seconds to be “Queen’s herald”, and to stand by Her Majesty with the ceremony book and herald any “Queen’s business”. “Active participation” by a Second is not a right, but a privilege.

Since a Second must be ready to step on and take over the conduct of Court on no notice, you must be aware of everything that has been planned for Court, and you should make sure you can read the Court herald’s writing and that you understand how the Court has been ordered. You must stay aware of everything that happens, including unexpected reorganizations which sometimes happen. If you must step in, the transition should be as smooth as possible.

CONVENTIONS: Check with the Royalty involved to see which of these are in effect at any given Court. For some Reigns, there are “blanket” conventions, and Banner should inform you of those, but it is always courteous to confirm these with Their Majesties. These are possible conventions:

On the Practical Conduct of Court, Cont.

- 1) There will be no announcements taking place for events in upcoming weeks, except for those where there has been some drastic change to published information. (or) Event announcements are acceptable, but they will all be made by the local herald. (or) It is acceptable for those who wish to make their own event announcements to do so. (A corollary to this is that, even if it is acceptable for people to make their own announcements, an announcement by the herald may be more audible.)
- 2) There will be no presentations in Court, except to the Regalia. (or) Personal presentations to Their Majesties will be acceptable, if they are suitable. (No funny T-shirts.)
- 3) The herald will make all the Officers' announcements. (or) Officers may make their own announcements.

The “harsher” forms of these conventions have come into use in an attempt to make Courts more audible and less boring. They also make the timing easier to control.

HELPFUL HINTS:

Wear comfortable shoes. Sounds really obvious, doesn't it? Try standing in one place for an hour without fidgeting. Now go put on the comfortable shoes.

Dress appropriately. The Kingdom tabard is vivid, and looks best over solid-colored, simple clothing. It is also very warm. Your best bet may be a simple undertunic -- as long as it isn't transparent.

Make sure you have water available. Your Second can be made responsible for keeping the glass filled from a jug you have secreted in the Royal pavilion, and for handing it to you when there is a break in the Court.

ON THE ART/SCIENCE OF COURT HERALDRY

Macsen Fidelis, OL (October 12, AS XX)

(The following are my personal feelings and opinions and do not represent any official policy of the S.C.A., Inc., the College of Arms of the SCA, the Kingdom of the West, or of the College of Heraldry of the Kingdom of the West. M.F.)

PART I - DEFINITIONS

A competent Court herald can be heard and understood across the entire area occupied by the Court. Obviously, outdoor Kingdom Courts will require more projective ability than smaller Courts held indoors. Almost anyone can be trained to be heard over the average outdoor Court area, and absolutely everyone can be trained to be understood for as far as they can be heard. To be a competent Court herald, then, is within the reach of almost everyone sufficiently interested to apply themselves by study and practice. The competent Court herald is familiar with all of the ceremonies encountered at Court and can perform them without stumbling over the words. The competent Court herald is sure of the pronunciation of all names to be used at Court, and if unfamiliar with any names, has written them phonetically on the Court notes. Once again, then, virtually anyone willing to apply themselves to work, study and practice may become a competent Court herald.

The good Court herald has a sense of theatre. He or she understands that presence, pace, theme and variation all play a part in elevating business into ceremony and transforming the ordinary into inspirational. The good Court herald is prepared with the business for Court well in advance of the time for Court, and arranges business so that announcements, presentations, awards, peerage elevations, and other items are mingled so as to present an interesting variety throughout the Court. The good Court herald has a number of vocal expressions, shifting from the smooth, to the formal, from the prepared ceremony to the impromptu announcement and back, always audible and comprehensible.

The great Court herald has the ability to be humorous without crassness, to be dignified without pomposity, to be gracious without fawning, to be entertaining without becoming the center of attention. He or she is aware of the personalities and moods of royalty, and becomes the foil of the humorous King, the flowery tongue of the retiring King, and the serious face of the angry King. The great Court herald has coached new subjects for their appearances at Court. He or she always has material prepared to cover eventualities such as changes or delays ordered in the middle of Court by royalty, or the arrival in mid-Court of foreign royalty. The great Court herald knows the likes and dislikes of royalty and courteously prevents the Queen from being presented with flowers to which she is violently allergic and always clears questionable presentations with Their Majesties before Court begins. The great Court herald errs on the side of caution and limits himself to one (well, maybe two) bad puns per Court.

PART II - COURT CHECKLIST

1. Start at least 1 hour before Court to get business. (At Twelfth Night, start a week early - call Their Majesties, Their Royal Highnesses, Their Highnesses and the Great Officers on the telephone and inquire of their plans).
 - a. Start with Their Majesties - this will give you an idea of how long the Court will be - and will start the process of Their preparing for Court.
 - b. Be sure to get the proper pronunciations of people's names - devise and use your own system of phonetic notation.
 - c. Find out what is being presented - you are NOT being presumptuous - it is your JOB to know what is going to happen at Court, including exactly what is in those baskets and boxes.
 - d. Check with anyone wishing to perform or entertain at Court to see if they have Their Majesties' approval. Most past royalty has severely restricted performing at Court. Check with Their Majesties.
 - e. Be sure that the person(s) understand what is expected of them in terms of behavior. Newcomers may ask for guidance. New groups, especially, may want hints on their first "public" appearance.
2. Organize the Court. Try taking down items on 3x5 cards that are punched to fit in a small notebook, and then arrange them into the order desired.
 - a. Make a mixture - distribute announcements throughout the Court, separate the awards and presentations from each other.
 - b. Be careful of logistics - a group presentation will require more time to clear the central area than one or two persons - have two or three announcements in a row to cover their withdrawal.
 - c. Build to a conclusion. Elevations to the peerage belong towards the end of the Court - and should not be immediately followed by announcements about garbage disposal.
3. Review the Court with Their Majesties - the bigger/longer the Court, the harder this will be - and the more important it will be.
 - a. Be sure that all of Their Majesties business is on the Court notes.
 - b. Be sure that Their Majesties are aware of any special occurrences, such as Court time requested by a Principality, or the appearance of an ambassador.
 - c. Go over any questionable items - such as entertainment or any presentations of "humorous" items.
 - d. Give Their Majesties an opportunity to review Their parts in any ceremonies scheduled for the Court.
4. Make sure all necessary items are on hand at the thrones:
Scrolls and promissories (work with the Scribes)
Regalia and tokens for ceremonies (work with members of the Court)
Ceremony book
Water (not booze - that comes after a job well done)
Herald's cloak or tabard
Court notes
5. Review the Court notes with your second, who, ideally, was involved with all of the preceding activities.
 - a. Now is the time to be sure that you can quickly find all the ceremonies in the book (large paper clips are real handy at this point).
 - b. Be sure that your second knows when you will be trading the ceremony book for a scroll, etc.
 - c. Be sure that necessary notes are tucked into the ceremonies (such as blazons for new peers).

PART III - GENERAL PREPARATION

Some thoughts on ways to enhance your abilities as a Court herald. Heralds are made, not born. Personal style and taste are developed, not inherited. Anything that stretches your mind, challenges your imagination and contributes to your sense of style, of bravura, of art, of savoir faire will contribute to your abilities as a Court Herald.

Read a book. The herald who knows something about anything is one up on the uninformed. Try a history book, especially from our period, especially one that addresses the workings of the Courts and great houses. Try Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*, for example.

Take a speech class. Learn how to improve and control your diction, volume, pronunciation, projection and articulation. Or join a local Toastmaster's International club. Or join your local theatre group (caution!!! this is a major commitment of time for most people).

Watch the good ones, people like Baron Gerhard Kendall of Westmoreland, if you are fortunate enough to be around on one of his rare visits - a man who can successfully combine the aspects of warrior, courtier, noble and jester is rare indeed.

Sandpaper the end of your nose. Not really, but do try to stay sensitive to what others are doing and saying to you.

Read a book. Try a book of poetry, especially one from the period or shortly thereafter. Read it **OUT LOUD!**

Watch movies, especially period costume dramas. Keep a close eye on how the really good actors move and wear their costumes. Learn how to **REALLY** wear a cape. Listen to Burton's and Hepburn's and O'Toole's and Connery's and York's and Heston's and whoever's **DELIVERY**.

Steal shamelessly - not material, but **STYLE**. Find a herald who does things you like, and try to do things in his or her style.

Gargle with pebbles. Not really, but Demosthenes had the right idea: find your vocal weaknesses and work hard to get rid of them.

Read a book. Try a book of plays. Try Shakespeare. Read it **OUT LOUD**.

When you think you're about ready, volunteer to second at Court. If possible, try to work with a herald you have chosen as a model. In all events, pay careful attention to the preparation and presentation of Court, and be very sensitive to the byplay around the thrones, as well as the quiet interchange between King and herald. Next time, it may be you up there.

Go to church. Or synagogue. Or mosque. As a believer or not. Look at the **CEREMONY**.

Study a foreign language. Be especially aware of old phrases, such as "Vuestra Merced", which became the modern "Usted" in Spanish. Use honorifics and greetings to persons whose persona uses the language.

Offer your services to royalty outside of Court. If the Queen is to make a Royal Progress, offer your services as Herald. This is for the advanced student, by the way, as you may find yourself introducing 200 strangers to Her Majesty. Along the same lines, but for the intermediate student, volunteer to help with the introductions at Grand March (see the Senior Herald on duty).

On The Art/Science of Court Heraldry, Cont.

Read a book. Try mythology. You can be loaded with analogies, similes and comparisons the next time you need one. Which will play better at Court, “a veritable Hercules!”, or “a really strong dude”?

Go to the theatre. Try a good one. Watch the projection of voice (and emotion). Go home and practice.

Be very careful with humour. Better than 80% of the populace, and 100% of the royalty had better think you're funny, or you could be in trouble. While a well-placed theatrical aside or response to a proffered straight line is beneficial, the herald is NOT a stand-up comedian or jester. Humour must not be intrusive.

Practice all the time. Try being flowery without being saccharine, formal without being stodgy. A superb practice piece that will also benefit everyone you practice on is a proper, formal introduction of someone you know to someone you don't know.

Read a book. Please.