

SECTION IV -- WHAT THE COLLEGE OF HERALDS DOES

2) Getting Advice on Heraldry (or
How to Help the College of Heraldry Help You)
(April, XXV; Summer, AS XXXVII)

Author: Iulstan Sigewealding

Number of Pages: 3

Policy Level: Informational

Intended Audience: The populace, especially newcomers.

Abstract: This article explains heraldic consultation and suggests things that a member of the populace should do before, and during a consultation.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

GETTING ADVICE ON HERALDRY

or

How to Help the College of Herald's Help You
Iulstan Sigewealding (April XXV)

Heraldry in the SCA

Our re-creation of the Middle Ages owes much of its ambiance to the work of heralds. The strange names, colorful banners, and solemn ceremonies of our events are due, in part, to the work of these dedicated volunteers. You can contribute to this effort by choosing an SCA name and personal heraldic device that reflect both your own personality and the SCA's historical theme.

There could be serious confusion if, for instance, a hundred different people all wanted to be Arthur Pendragon or display the flag of Switzerland on their shield in battle. For this reason, the SCA College of Arms was created to provide a registration service for names and devices. In order to be registered, a name or device must meet certain standards for uniqueness and authenticity or style. If your name or device is registered by the College of Arms, it is protected from infringement throughout the SCA; no person or group may use that name or device without your permission.

Because medieval heraldry and naming practices are somewhat esoteric subjects and are outside the day-to-day interests of most people, many find that they need assistance in choosing a name or heraldic design. Therefore, a College of Herald's was created in each Kingdom with diverse responsibilities, including providing expert help with heraldic submissions. Just as you might seek an attorney for help with a legal question or problem, you should seek a heraldic consultant when you have a question or problem concerning names and heraldic devices.

Who Can I Talk To About Heraldry?

The College of Herald's makes personalized heraldic consultation available to the populace free of charge. (A small fee is charged when and if you decide to submit something for registration.)

On the local level, every branch is required to have a local herald. Ideally, a local herald should be a person interested in heraldry who provides consultation and other heraldic services to his or her group. If this is the case, you can consult your local herald on an informal basis. However, since local heralds vary greatly in their expertise, from "place-holder" to expert, yours may or may not be able to answer your questions about heraldry.

If you need further help, your branch herald should be able to direct you to other heralds in the area or to his or

her superior. All heralds in the West Kingdom report directly or indirectly to the Vesper Principal Herald, whose address is in your Kingdom newsletter, [The Page](#). The Vesper Herald (through a deputy) provides a heraldic Consultation Table at major events, where expert advice on heraldic questions is available. If you cannot make it to a Consultation Table and can find no local expertise to draw upon, you are encouraged to write to the Vesper Principal Herald, or your Principality Herald (see your local Principality newsletter for this information) for help.

Where Can I Find a Consultation Table?

In the mainland part of the West Kingdom (Northern California and Nevada) there is a Table at every Coronet, and Crown Tournament, and at every Principality Investiture. The Table also may travel to the annual Beltane and Purgatorio Coronations. If none of these events are convenient for you, your local group can invite the Consultation Table to a local event by simply writing to the Vesper Principal Herald.

The Principality Herald of Oertha (Alaska) may also provide consultation at major events. Contact them for further information.

How Soon Do I Need To Consult a Herald?

That depends on what you are consulting about.

You are encouraged to consult a herald as soon as possible after your first event for help in choosing one part of your SCA name -- usually your first (or given) name. You may also wish to get advice on the rest of your name, but the first name is the most critical for two reasons:

- 1) It is the name that you will use most in the SCA and is the hardest to change once you begin using it. You will want to start using it as soon as possible so people will learn it.
- 2) If you decide later to register your name, it **MUST** include at least one given name, so choosing an acceptable given name is the first step toward documenting your name.

Note that there is no need to REGISTER your name immediately. You simply want to make sure that there is no obvious problem with it that will cause trouble later on.

You are encouraged to consult a herald again about a personal heraldic device (and the rest of your name) if you have been active in the SCA for at least six months or have received an Award of Arms. You are also ready for device consultation if you are planning to sew a personal banner or have been authorized to fight. You should consult a herald about your full name and device so that you can submit them for registration. The registration process takes AT LEAST five months, so it pays to get good advice and get it right the first time.

What Should I Do Before Consulting a Herald About My Name?

You will get more out of your name consultation if you know something about names before you talk to your local heralds or visit the Consultation Table. Also, to help you choose a name that's right for YOU, your consulting herald will need to learn about your personal likes and dislikes.

You can prepare for consultation on your name by thinking about the kind of name that you want. Is there some particular time and place that interests you, or which you like to be from? If so, read up on the culture of that time in a history book or encyclopedia. Find out what languages people spoke and where they came from.

There are relatively few good books on medieval names; try reading the article on names in an encyclopedia or borrow a copy of Withycombe's "History of Christian Names" and read the introduction. Look for articles in old SCA newsletters that discuss names.

What do you want your name to say about YOU? Do you want a name that relates to your occupation, place of origin, or personal characteristics?

Do you care how the name sounds? Can you handle a name that is hard to spell or pronounce? Do you want an exotic-sounding name? Do you want a name that is close to your everyday name?

If you have a particular name that you want, make a note of where you found it. That will make it easier to document it when you register it later. Unfortunately, not all the names you find in history books, baby name books and such are registerable. Try to stay flexible and not to get firmly attached to a name until it is registered or at least until you've consulted a herald.

What Should I Do Before Consulting a Herald About My Device?

The design of personal heraldic insignia is an ancient and arcane art. Like your name, your device is very personal and should reflect your personal taste. You will get more out of your device consultation if you know something about heraldry and have considered what you want in advance.

If you wish to get a head start learning about heraldry, there are many excellent books available in public libraries. Most encyclopedias also have articles about heraldry. But heraldry in the SCA is slightly different from real-world heraldry. First of all, much heraldry in use today was created after 1600 and does not reflect the practices of medieval times. Also, many period practices are restricted in the SCA because they imply a claim to rank or inheritance. For instance, laurel wreaths are reserved for geographic branches of the SCA. Watch for classes on heraldry at Collegia, which are held twice a year.

Consider your personal likes and dislikes. Are there particular colors that you like best? What colors do you look good in? (You may want to make clothing in your heraldic colors later on.)

How well can you draw? Are you good at drawing geometric shapes or are you best at natural objects? Are there particular animals or symbols that are particularly meaningful to you?

It's best not to pick out the exact design you want until you have consulted a herald. Keep in mind that heraldry is an extremely stylized form of art. Not all good art makes good heraldry. The set of heraldic colors is limited, and certain arrangements and styles are much more "heraldic" than others. Even if your proposed device obeys all the principles of heraldic design, there is always a possibility it is too similar to a device already in use in the SCA or the Outside World.

It's best to go into your consultation with a general idea of what you want. Let the consulting herald show you how to turn it into good heraldry.

What Will the Herald Do?

The herald will probably do a lot of talking, supplemented by an occasional rough sketch. He or she should begin by trying to learn about you and your reasons for seeking advice.

Be prepared to explain what it is that you want and what changes you are willing to accept. Be as open and frank as possible. The herald wants to help you, and the more

he or she knows about what you want and why, the more likely you are to get it.

If the herald says something that you do not understand or which does not make sense to you, ask a question. Heraldry has its own jargon and buzz-words. Don't let the herald leave you in the dark!

When the herald comes up with a name or design that is acceptable to you and meets the SCA's criteria for proper style, the next step is for him or her to RESEARCH it. For a name, this means finding evidence that the individual elements in the name were used in period. For a device, this means checking to make sure that no too-similar devices are already in existence.

There is a limit to the quantity of research that can be done at one sitting, because of the limited time and resources available. A responsible herald will never guarantee that a name or device will pass. However, if an experienced herald says that your name or device seems acceptable, the chances of successful registration are fairly good.

Ask lots of questions. If the herald has doubts about whether something is acceptable or not, ask what sort of changes would make it ok. If you are still in doubt about anything at the end of your session, ask for a referral to other heralds who can help you.

What Should I Get Out Of It?

The main product of an heraldic consultation is INFORMATION. You can expect to learn a great deal about heraldry in a short time. If you take written notes, you can refer back to them later, even if you heard and saw too much for you to absorb all at once. Be sure to take any drawings or notes that the herald makes for you; they may be helpful when you decide to submit.

If you don't know the herald, make a note of his or her name. (If you can't understand the name, ask the herald to write it down.) That way you can give him or her credit for the consultation on your submission forms. And if you run into a problem with the herald, the College of Herald's can only investigate the problem if they know WHO you talked to.

Summary:

Consult with an experienced local herald or with the Consultation Table: (1) Immediately about your first name, and (2) after six months or more, about your device. Prepare for your consultation by thinking about what you want and, if possible, learning something about heraldry. Be flexible about what you want, ask lots of questions, take notes, and make a note of the consulting herald's name.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank