

Heraldry 101

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Web Minister's Note: This article was written prior to 2004; please check with your local herald for current submission costs. The article has been slightly edited for publication on the web.

It is time once again for a semi-regular heraldic primer. For the newer folks this will hopefully provide an idea of what heraldry is and how it works in the SCA. For those of you that have been around a while it should be a refresher lesson and hopefully serve to spark some of you to get working on names and devices if you have not already done so.

Because heraldry in the SCA is such a large diverse topic and covers many areas it would require many hours to give even a brief overview of it all. Also unless you plan to become a Herald of some sort within the SCA you will only really need to know about those areas that will have a direct impact on you and your SCA life. For this reason that is the area I will concentrate on in this talk. The two areas I will try to cover here are your SCA name and Heraldic Device (Coat of Arms).

To start things off let me ask and then answer a question many new people in the SCA ask. Many of you will wonder why a herald would ask this question let alone the answer given but here goes.

Do you need or have to register an SCA name and or device with the College of Arms of the Society? In a nutshell the simple answer to this is NO. However there are many reasons why you should consider this and I will attempt to explain some of these as we go along.

Let's then take a look at our SCA names and what they are. Each of us that plays this game to one degree or another decides to play a certain persona or type of person within the society. From the Viking hordes to the Aristocracy of Tudor courtiers we all play at being something we are not. The amount of work each of us puts into developing this persona can vary from the simple, "I am a Viking from the year 980". To a complex and detailed life story including past generations of ancestors and details of our whole life to this point, "I am Blah blah of Sometown born in the year someteen hundred and 2. My father was So-and-So of anothertown and my mother was ...etc etc etc. However the one thing all of these people no matter how simple or involved the story will have in common is a name. Some means of identification and address people will know and call you by.

The name you choose can also be as simple or complex as you choose in terms of its historic accuracy and thus its ability to be registered within the SCA. Eric the Viking may work perfectly fine for you and your friends while the next person may choose a

totally accurate and historically documentable Middle Eastern name consisting of 10 or 15 name elements or more. Now however we come to the subject of submitting and being registered within the SCA by the College of Heraldry. Before we go into all the fine points of how we go about registering a name let's first look at why you should register it.

Let's take a look at a Hypothetical new SCA member. This person comes along and finds out about us and what we do, he (or she) hangs around a while and decides what sort of persona he will play in the SCA. Maybe he even goes to the length of researching a name he likes and would be perfectly period in style and make up. In fact this name is so spiffy that everyone loves it. Soon he is known by this name to all his close friends and across his own kingdom by all and sundry. However for whatever reason he never bothers to send this name off to the College of Arms for registration. Several years go by and our friend gathers several SCA awards and Honours about himself. Perhaps he even earns a peerage of some sort or maybe a crown to a kingdom or principality. Awards and Honours follow this person around wherever he goes. This person has earned a high and noble reputation in the SCA at least in his home kingdom and area and is well respected and thought of by all who know him and many who have only heard about his or her prowess and skills.

Now someplace else in the SCA another new member comes along. Looking around at things in the SCA our newcomer either by accident or possibly on purpose finds this real spiffy name they just love for themselves. A little historic research and a fast check with the local herald show that this name is historically acceptable and not already registered by someone else. So off go the forms and a while later the powers that be register this name and send word back to our new member giving him full rights to call this name his or her own within the society. Later that year our new guy still wet behind the ears is walking across the field at his first ever Pennsic war. His neon blue and electric orange nylon t-tunic barely covers his blue jeans and cowboy boots but hey he is here.

Now across that same field comes our old friend Duke Sir Master Honourable Lord Pelican Laurel mega award winner and they happen to bump into each other. Our new guy grovels, bows and primps then introduces himself. "Greetings your Most Omnipotent one, my name's Guy of Overyonder." As a look of shock and anger crosses the face of our super hero, he stares down this new interloper and informs him of the facts. "I am Guy of Overyonder and I have been in the SCA for 39 years, I'm a knight/laurel/pelican/duke/king and hold 39 separate awards of the golden garden slug." Mr. Wet behind the ears looks up and says in a sheepish voice, "well I'm sorry your most wonderfulness but I joined last March and I don't have a single award to my name but... I do have this here letter from the College of Arms that says I am the ONE and ONLY Guy of Overyonder."

Would something as elaborate as this ever happen? Could it happen? Well yes it sure could. Maybe not to as high profile a person as our above mentioned super hero but it is totally possible. While we can hope most of our members would be honest and

chivalrous enough not to intentionally steal another person's name how are they supposed to know. Unless it's registered someplace who can tell what some super Duke from across the world may have called himself? Either by accident or on purpose unless your name is registered anyone can come along and use it and even register it right out from under you.

The other thing to keep in mind is that the Society ties all of its record keeping into the database of the College of Arms. If you have a registered name all of your honours awards and titles are linked to this name. If your name is not registered these records will still be tied to your name but if someone comes along and registers this name then all of your hard-earned awards could end up listed to this newcomer who has never earned a thing in the society. Lastly the College of Arms will not register any other heraldic items like a device or badge to you unless your name is registered first. The bottom line of all this is that unless you register it you have no way to protect your SCA name from misuse by someone else.

Now of course the next logical step is How to go about registering a name? Well let's take this from the very beginning and follow along what our new wet behind the ears guy did from the above story. Step one is to come up with a name for yourself. You should touch base with your local herald to obtain some guidelines and information on what is acceptable as an SCA name. To meet the basics of the society's requirements your name must meet the following criteria.

- (A) It should consist of at least two name elements. Like our modern names consisting of at least a first or given name and a last or family name in our cases. What these elements are and how they are formed will vary from historic period to period and society to society.
- (B) Is documentable as having existed in an SCA culture and time period or consisting of name elements that were common in that time period. This means finding a reference either to the name or its style and construction type that is acceptable to the College of Arms. Names like John the Blacksmith or Ruffus of London for example.
- (C) Does not presume to make you something you are not within the society. All titles within the society are earned and can not be assumed. In other words you can not decide to be Baron such and such or Duke so and so unless you have earned that rank or titles. Likewise you can not carry over any real life titles or ranks to your SCA persona that may cause confusion within the society. Even Queen Elizabeth II would be just plain Elizabeth Windsor in the SCA until she created an SCA name and earned this title for herself. You should also keep in mind that the SCA bases all personas on being at the least petty nobility so names alluding to a career or occupation that would be demeaning to this image would not be acceptable in most cases. Sarah the Wench or Ray the Rat Catcher for instance.

- (D) Is not a name of someone famous that lived or is assumed to have lived in the time period covered. You may be able to use some elements of your own mundane name provided they are period in nature however. You could be Henry the Smith but not Henry Tudor for instance.
- (E) Is not deemed to be offensive, degrading or rude. Using real or slang terms for bodily parts, bodily functions or other derogatory or offensive words is not allowed.

Now for a minute let's talk about documentable and what exactly that means. Let's assume you plan to call your self John. Everyone knows John is a common name and has been around in some form or other in almost every western culture for many hundreds of years or more. So what's the deal if you want to be John? Well the SCA is supposed to be an Educational group and as a simple means to an end making each person submit documentable proof of the name they wish to use fulfills this goal. So what do you need to document John? A simple line on the name form saying John appears in the Bible as St. John, John the Baptist etc. is all that would be required. However as your name becomes more complex or the society or culture you choose to portray becomes more obscure the amount of documentation required goes up. You will need to find mention of the name or at least its basic construction elements and style based in historic documents and books. You may need quote a source or even to send photo copies or other hard copy evidence of this proof along with your submission to prove its historic accuracy and acceptability. You will have to talk this over with your local herald who can help point you in the right direction and even provide ideas or research sources to locate needed documentation.

Now if you will indulge me for a few moments, because the submission process for names and heraldic devices is nearly identical I would like to step aside and cover heraldic devices and badges etc. before moving on and covering submissions in one section.

First of all what exactly do we mean by the terms device, coat of arms or crest. All of these terms refer to a Pictorial depiction used to identify a person or group of persons or organization. Within the SCA we use these devices to identify our local branch groups, Baronies and Kingdoms, individual people holding certain offices within these groups and individual members in general. We create these devices using a selected series of colours, geometric shapes, pictures of real or imaginary animals and other items from day to day life. These are combined usually on a shield shaped back ground in various ways to make a picture that represents the person or group using it.

The question again comes up of do you need a device in the SCA and once more strictly speaking the answer is no. However like a name your device tells everyone who you are and at a glance people can tell who is who if they know your heraldry. Even people who are playing a persona from a culture or time period that may never have used heraldry can work out reasonably accurate looking devices that do not look like heraldry as we know it. Other than identifying ones self and property heraldry also

forms a sort of mystique and adds ambiance to any time periods gathering if done properly. Finally though not society-wide there are some Kingdoms that require a fighter wishing to take part in certain tournaments (particularly crown and coronet tourneys) to have either registered names and devices or at least to have these in the submissions process at some point prior to the tournament. Also for non fighters and fighters alike the use of augmentations to arms is often used to display the awards and various ranks or titles held by certain individuals.

To go into everything that can or could be used in the creation of a device would take many volumes and more time than anyone here has to spare. I will be more than happy to go into details of these areas for anyone who wants to talk about it but that is something best handled in individual sessions for the development of heraldic submissions. For now let's look at some of the basic guidelines used by the society to ensure our devices are somewhat historically accurate to our needs and time period.

- (A) It must use good period heraldic practices in terms of style to make a simple clear and easy to identify device.
- (B) Uses only recognized period tinctures (colours) metals and furs.
- (C) Contain only period style charge items or objects to formulate the device.
- (D) is not rude or offensive or contains charge items deemed to be rude or offensive. See the lists of restricted charges for assistance here.
- (E) is not presumptive or claims rank, title or award not held by the person or group in question. See the list of restricted and or required charges.
- (F) Does not duplicate or is too similar to any other device or arms already registered within the SCA or of certain protected arms and devices from real life colleges of heraldry or from historic persons.

As with names you can not use your heraldry to claim to be someone you are not or may cause someone to confuse you with someone else. Despite some popular beliefs that all the good simple heraldry is taken in the SCA there are still many good simple devices registered every month.

So now we come around to the biggie. You have selected and gathered the needed documentation for your name and have designed a bang up device that you just know is going to sail on through to registration. What now? How do you go about the registration process? Because the submission process is virtually identical to both names and devices we will cover them both at once and point out the minor differences as we go. It will be assumed at this point you have already spoken to your herald and gone through the process of choosing your SCA heraldry. The herald should have assisted you in getting references and other items or sources of documentation lined up or at least getting you in touch with these sources. They will also have done at least some basic conflict checking against existing SCA heraldry via the Laurels web site and databases.

You will now be ready to proceed with the process of submission.

The first step is getting and filling in the required forms. These can be had from your local herald or off one of the many SCA kingdom web sites. You will then need to fill out the following numbers of each form. This can be done one form at a time or by making one and photo copying the rest. For a name you will need one form to keep for your records, one for your local herald's records and three to be sent to the kingdom submissions herald. Copies of all documentation required to support your submission must accompany each of these. In other words you will require a total of five copies of these forms. For a device or badge submission it is slightly different as follows. One coloured copy for your own records, one coloured copy for the local heralds files and 3 coloured copies to be sent to the kingdom submission herald. Additionally you will need one Black and White line drawing of the device to be sent along with the three copies for the submission herald. You may require accompanying documents for any restricted or reserved charges or other oddities you may need to support your claim to the use of these items. So you will need 5 coloured and 1 black and white line drawings plus supporting documents if required for a device submission.

Now you have all the forms sorted out you will have to send them off accompanied by the correct submission fee. This is currently \$10/Ten dollars Canadian for each item submitted in Ealdormere. This means \$10 for a name and \$10 for a device or badge. There is currently some discussion and dispute over how local heralds are to handle these funds. The SCA demands that only recognized Exchequer officers can handle Society funds. How this affects cheques and how we have been doing this in the past is currently under discussion. So for the time being the following is how I will be handling heraldic submissions. Once all of the forms are in order and I have checked them for completion etc. I will return the required number of copies to the person doing the submission along with the address of the current kingdom submissions herald. It will then be up to the submitter to enclose the proper fee and mail this package off to the address needed.

Now comes the fun part. Sitting and waiting... and waiting... and waiting. But what exactly is it you have to wait for?? Well simply put in order to maintain an element of historical accuracy to our heraldry every item submitted gets put through a rigorous series of checks and counter checks to ensure it is acceptable according to society standards. The first step is already done by your local herald who based on their level of skill will already have checked for some of these areas and done a preliminary check against the SCA data base for conflicts with existing items. As your submission moves up the ladder of process these checks become more and more intense based on the skill level of the heralds at that point. The first step will be your Kingdom submission herald. They first check the forms and other documents for completion and accuracy and then fan out the submission itself to a group of heralds at the kingdom level who look over the submission and try to find any problems or errors. The comments of these heralds is then gathered and compiled and any submissions found to be in anyway problematic are sent back to the submitter for reworking and

resubmission. The submission herald will usually send along notes on the problem and suggestions for ideas to fix things up if possible. The items that are found to be in order are forwarded up the ladder to the society level.

At the society level another submission herald again checks the forms are all in order and all documentation is there. They then send the submissions out to another group of society wide heralds who are very skilled in the art of heraldry as practiced by the SCA. Once more these heralds make comment on the submission and any found lacking would be returned for rework and resubmission. Accepted submissions are then forwarded to the Laurel Sovereign of Arms for the Society for final approval and acceptance. Once accepted the name, device or badge submission is yours to use within the society for all time. No one can come along and say they are you or that you are not who you are and hold the ranks and titles you have earned and deserved.

There can after all only be one Guy of Overyonder, right? ...

Now just a few words on what happens if your submission does get returned for some reason. First of all the reason for return is usually mentioned in the letter of return. Often they also add some suggestions or ideas on what may help solve the problem. Once you have this return you have one calendar year to make a resubmission without further costs. You can rework and resubmit as many times as it takes to finally get an acceptable submission as long as you do it within one year of receiving a return. If a year expires from the date of return then you will be required to pay the \$10 fee again and your submission will be treated as a new submission.

As always I encourage anyone wishing to make submissions or start the process of developing names and devices to contact me.

