

# Samuron's Guide to Court Heraldry

*Samuron's First Law: Royalty exists to allow Heralds to have courts.*

Court Heraldry is one of the most rewarding of all SCA pursuits. While other members of the populace have to stare at the backs of those receiving awards, the Herald gets to see the shock and joy on their faces. It is a job to feed the ego; all eyes, all ears are upon YOU.

This guide is for all those who, through defect of genetics or upbringing, desire to become Court Heralds. It is a compilation of wisdom gained through observation and direct experience, glorious success and embarrassing failure. It's style is that of the author; while this is of course the best, other Heralds will have different methods. Use what you will, discard what you cannot use; always, though, HAVE FUN.

## Planning the Court

*First Principle of Organization: No court plan remains intact after the opening.*

*Corollary: It may not even open as expected.*

From the instant that you, as the Herald, arrive at a site, people will believe that you know when court will be held, how long it will last, and who is getting what. How much control you have is decided at this point; how you respond can determine how much you

will be involved in the planning. For instance:

NEW HERALD: "I don't know; I just got here."

After receiving this response, the person seeking information is likely to go elsewhere for information; it is possible that they will influence the flow of events beyond your control. Now, consider this:

EXPERIENCED HERALD: "Their Excellencies have not, as yet, decided on the exact nature of the business, they wish to conduct in this court. If I could get your name, I will try to find out as soon as they are available."

This response not only makes it look as though you know what you are doing, it will impress upon the questioner your importance and the futility of going elsewhere.

When the Royalty arrives, they will be set upon by hordes of special interest lobbyists. As a new Herald, you will find yourself reluctant to interrupt; remember, you MUST know what is happening for court to proceed smoothly. The Royalty know this, but they are not going to come to you; it is your job to be available to them. The most effective method of approach is to move to a discreet distance (20' to 30' away) and stay in their field of vision. Be patient; they will call you forth, but it may take some time.

Find out if the Royalty is open to accepting business during court. Some do, some don't, and some vary. Specifically ask if they will accept

presentations; these have a way of turning a short opening court into an all-day event.

As soon as you have initially consulted with Royalty of the day, **MAKE SURE** that you provide previous inquiries with some type of response; otherwise, they'll think that you don't know any more than they do. It is **VITALLY** important to the Herald's well-being that the populace thinks that the Herald knows more than they do.

When someone gives you their name or proposed business, **WRITE IT DOWN!** This is not to say that you will use it, or even read it again; most people simply will not go away until you write it down.

After several trips back and forth, you will have compiled a general list of the business of the court. Begin going over the flow of events in your mind; make sure that you have the written ceremonies for any awards, find out if the scrolls are readable, etc. If there are any names you don't know how to pronounce, **NOW** is the time to learn them.

Try to organize the list of court business into a smooth flow; alternate business with awards, and try to separate awards of the same type. Your plan may be overridden, but this way you will always have a response to the question, "What's next?"

You should have a good idea at this point of when court will happen and what will occur; it is time to nail down where it will be.

## **Setting Up Court**

*First Principle of Spatial Dynamics: The number of thrones quickly multiplies to fill all available court space.*

*First Corollary: If the hall is small, at least one fifth of the thrones will be in the audience.*

*Second Corollary: If the hall is big, there will be a stage, and at least one fifth of the thrones will be on the floor.*

*Third Corollary: If the court is outside, at least one fifth of the thrones will be in the sun.*

*Second Principle of Spatial Dynamics: Additional thrones will arrive just prior to the start of court.*

*Inverse Entourage Law: The number and rank of those wanting to stand behind the thrones increases as the available space decreases.*

Where everyone sits is the responsibility of the herald. Chances are, the person who booked the site used ordinary chairs to plan the available space. Since thrones are usually much larger, it will be immediately apparent that there is not enough space.

Get as many thrones in place as soon as possible; this will give you some idea what you are up against. From the start, be conscious of where you are going to stand. It won't help to squeeze everyone in if you have no way to perform your responsibilities.

The first question of court set-up is: Whose court is it? Even if the Crown is present at a Baronial event, they may wish to allow the Baron/ess to have the central spot. **FIND OUT!** The general layout usually starts with Primary Royalty of the day in the center; starting to their right, alternate sides in the following order:

The Honored Guests - *Always the Crown if the Crown is not Central*

The Royal Heirs

The Principalities

The Principal Heirs

The Baronies

Make sure that there is some way to get out from behind the thrones during court; someone back there may be called into the Presence.

If there is too little room to work behind the thrones, consider heralding from in front. This can be a little awkward, but it ensures that you will be able to move and be heard.

Make sure that all of your stuff is in place well before the start of court; it's embarrassing to get caught without the proper materials.

### **Opening the Court**

*Angela's Law of Volume: Court is the most boring thing in the world if you can't hear the Herald.*

*Samuron's Emphasis Corollary to Angela's Law: They should hear you in DeMoines.*

It's time to start things off; if the Royalty is processing, try to make sure that you get in place before they do. Have your list of business ready; when the Royalty signals, open the court.

Those who are singers, thespians, or wind musicians probably have the skills already for proper projection. For those who are not: take a deep breath, and let fly. Don't think of it as shouting; instead try to talk normally while forcing more air out than usual. A good indicator is how your

throat feels afterward; you will probably be hoarse in any case, but if you throat is actually sore, you're probably choking the words off. Just relax and use lots of air, and you'll hear your words returning to you from the back of the hall.

Regardless of how serious the mood of the court is, try to keep the actual opening serious, if not pompous. This is the introduction of the Royalty; they deserve to have their status projected. The common format for opening is:

"Here opens the court of (titles of address), (name) and (name), (titles of office)"

For instance:

"Here opens the court of Their Royal Majesties, Mathghamhain and Katerina, King and Queen of Atenveldt."

You then bid the populace to be seated.

The first part of any court will be words from the Royalty. Usually, they will jump right in without any prompting from you; however, if they seem to be waiting for something to happen, ask them politely if they have words for their subjects.

The court is open, the Royalty is talking; here we go.

### **Conducting the Court**

*Samuron's Second Law: Have no fear; you will screw up.*

*Helen Jeanette's Principle of Contraction: After you have read a scroll enough times the entire text will come out in one syllable.*

*Angela's Principle of Consort Replacement: When announcing a couple you will give the name of the person the Sovereign last sat with.*

*Maechyll's Theory of Epistemology: No Welsh name has ever been properly pronounced.*

*Porky Pig Principle: After three unsuccessful tries at pronouncing a name, it is perfectly acceptable to substitute something totally incongruous and move on.*

*Samuron's Theorem of Inverse Memory: The longer you have known someone, the more likely you are to forget their name in court.*

If all has gone well, at this point you have a good idea of what is going to occur in court; it may even be completely laid out. Still, it is a good idea to confirm each point of business with the Royalty before announcing it. Sometimes, they may wish to alter the flow of events; also, those involved may not be at court at the correct time. Be flexible, and be ready to move on to other business.

If an award has a ceremony, follow the script; if not, call the individual(s) into the presence. As a general rule, with an award you call up the individual; with an order, you call up the members of the order first.

The Royalty will usually speak to the individual, and then to the populace. When they are done, they will turn to you. They may ask for the scroll to be read, or they may simply nod.

A point about reading scrolls: they may not be accurate. As was said

before, read scrolls BEFORE court. Make sure you can pronounce the name, and that the date and signatures are there. If not, you must be prepared to insert them as you read.

After reading the scroll, hand it to the Royalty. They will present it to the recipient; they may speak more, or they may hug the individual. As soon as it is apparent that they have no more to say, call for three cheers.

When calling for cheers, it is a good idea to slow down after each one. If you stay at the same pace, you will find yourself calling "Hip, Hip" while the populace is still cheering. Space them out, and build in intensity.

Calling forth cheers is fairly straightforward when it follows an award; it's a matter of "For this newest (award name), Hip Hip, etc." However, much business in court has nothing to do with awards, such as announcements, presentations, etc. Even after something such as an announcement the Royalty may take occasion to speak of the individual's work; PAY ATTENTION. They may well call for three cheers. Trying to come up with something sensible at this point is difficult; therefore, whenever anyone approaches the thrones, be thinking about how you will call for cheers.

Each time you read a scroll, put your heart into it; remember, this is extremely important to the recipient. Don't read in a monotone; use emphasis and inflection to bring the words alive.

This is even more important if more than one award of the same type is given in a row. If you read the scrolls the same way each time, they can lose their impact. Vary your timing,

emphasize other points. This helps to make each scroll special.

If you have trouble reading the scroll, don't get too hung up trying to figure it out. Most scrolls follow the same general pattern; if you diverge a little from the exact text, but it flows well, no one will know the difference. They will enjoy it more if the presentation is smooth.

When you totally mess up, and you will, don't let it destroy you. People will understand; if you continue on and have a good time, so will everyone else.

If you know that two people up for awards are married, let the Royalty know; they may wish to call them up together. Ask if they want the scrolls read separately or together. If you do them together, just read both names, and change words like "him", or "you" to "them" or "both of you". This can be a real thrill for everyone.

Finally, remember that this is a show, and you are the emcee. Don't be afraid to liven it up. Most Royalty are very forgiving, and love anything that makes a court more memorable.

## **Recessing and Closing**

*Samuron's Theorem of Court Recursion: Once a court plan is overloaded, some other Royalty will announce that they intend to hold a court as well.*

*First Corollary: They didn't bring a Herald.*

*Second Corollary: They didn't bring chairs, either.*

*Angela's Law of Court Extension: If you ask for more business, you will get it.*

Many courts, especially big ones, will have several other courts nested in them. This can be good and bad; it means that you can break up the business of your court into more manageable sections, but it means that you're going to be standing there a lot longer.

Obviously it's best if you and the other herald(s) have planned things out; you simply announced that your court is recessed when the proper time comes. If you have not made such plans, suggest it to your Royalty when you reach a sensible place in your court.

If you are the other herald, be ready to open your court when the time comes. Don't get caught napping; it's up to you to set the tone as the focus shifts to your Royalty.

If, ha ha, you are BOTH heralds, get into position quickly, and open the next court. Try to be serious through this; you can have fun when you get going, but remember to open with the respect and dignity that the Royalty is entitled to.

When finished close the court as you opened it, with full forms of address.

In a big court at a major event, chances are that no other business will be allowed. At smaller events, there will be autocrats, sub-autocrats, co-autocrats, feastocrats, fightocrats, etc. Chances are, someone forgot to ask to get on the court. If the Royalty permit, ask the populace if there is any further business.

In recent years, it has become common practice, if no other business is allowed, to immediately say "there being no further business, etc." It needs to be stressed that the populace has caught on to this trick. In the pause you take to

breathe, fifty hands will shoot up. Instead, it is preferable to simply close it on behalf of the Royalty with something like: "Their Excellencies having no further business at this time, etc." There aren't too many people that will try to override this.

Once all business is done, close the court, and give the populace leave to depart. It is the prerogative of the closing herald to lead the "Long Live.."; however, someone may beat you to it. If so just go along with them, but remember to mispronounce their name at a later date. The full discourse of the cheer is:

Long Live the King  
Long Live the Queen  
Long Live the Prince of..  
Long Live the Princess of..  
Long Live the Landed Barons  
and Baronesses  
Long Live these Sovereign Lands  
of (kingdom)!

Generally the full cheer is only done at Grand Courts; usually only the King, Queen, and Lands are called. If any rank below King and Queen are called, then all intervening ranks must be called as well.

You're almost done; gather up your stuff, and go sit down.

## **Court Reporting**

*Angela's Grand Understatement:  
Heralds have more paperwork than  
anyone else.*

You're done with the court; everyone's happy. Now, before you go anywhere, before you lose your lists, **FILL OUT THE COURT REPORT**

FORM! If you leave it until later, you run the risk of forgetting someone, and it will be too late to find out how their name was spelled, where they were from, etc. Get it done right away, and then you can relax.

Make copies of the forms and mail them to everyone that needs them as soon as possible. Remember, the awards are not official until they have been recorded and published.

## **Conclusion**

*Samuron's Third Law: If you're not enjoying it, stop doing it.*

While it is a very egotistical, and therefore thoroughly heraldic, thing to say, it has much truth: heralds are at the center of the SCA experience. From the devices to the announcements, from the "Victory to" to the "Hip, Hip", so much of the medieval atmosphere comes through us. As a result, we have a duty to maintain a level of enjoyment and spirit; if we are grumpy, we do a disservice to those who count on us for our part in the dream. If you find at any time that it's too much to keep up with, take a break; rest assured, it will be available when you get back.

As a court herald, you see the joys of the SCA up-close and personal; it is a very special position to hold. Welcome to the club; have fun, and let them hear you in the back!

*First Edition of this document written  
A.S. XXX, by Samuron the Inconsistent*