

# Heraldic Myths

---

## Information to Clear Up Misconceptions Involving SCA Heraldry

Compiled by  
**Baron Modar Neznanich, Volk Herald**

(Edited by Bronwyn ferch Gwyn ap Rhys)

There are many misconceptions involving SCA heraldry that have developed over the years. This article attempts to address some of the most common concerns, and provide current and correct information about them. Please note: a disclaimer must be given — over time some of these answers could change due to policy changes within the SCA College of Arms.

---

### Armory (Device/Badge) Related Myths

---

**1. I can register my family's coat-of-arms because it already belongs to me.**

If you are, in fact, entitled to arms in the real world, you can't register those exact arms. This is per the Administrative Handbook of the College of Arms (III.A.9). However, any blazonable difference, even if it isn't worth a CD, clears it of this problem (as per the August, 1997 LoAR concerning the device of David of Moffat, from An Tir).

*A side note concerning family coats-of-arms:* Arms are property. The first person to carry a coat of arms passes that coat to his descendants, who pass it on to theirs, and so on. Different countries have used different rules for the transmission of heraldry. Traditionally, the right to bear arms has been transmitted through the male line only. In some places, all sons of an armiger (someone who bears arms) inherit the arms; in others only the oldest male inherits the arms and all other sons must change the arms in some way to show that they are junior members of the family. British law was recently changed to allow women to inherit arms,

but this is such a recent change that it will not affect genealogical research.

Thus, finding that there are arms attributed to your surname does not mean that you have the right to carry them; it means that someone with your last name once had that right. The same surname is often borne by unrelated people, and you have to show a direct line of descent through your father (assuming he is a first child) through first sons back to the person who is known to have those arms. Demonstrating this relationship can be a major task<sup>1</sup>

**2. Sable is considered a fur in SCA heraldry.**

Sable means black, which is classified as a color, not a fur, in SCA heraldry. Confusion arises here because there is an actual animal fur known as “sable.”

**3. Furs are considered neutral with respect to the Rule of Tincture. Hence, they may be placed upon either metals or colors, or be charged with either metals or colors.**

This is mostly true in heraldry outside the SCA, but the SCA considers each fur individually. In the case of the ermine style furs, their background tincture categorizes them since that has the greater area. Therefore, ermine, being comprised mostly of argent, is treated like a metal. Counter-ermine, being comprised mostly of sable, is treated like a color. In the case of vair and potent furs, which have more or less equal areas of both tinctures, they are, indeed, considered neutral. However, a change of either constituent tincture is not allowed to go over or under a vair fur: i.e., if using the standard blue and white vair, one can't use either azure or argent on that area, nor can vair be placed on blue or white areas.

**4. The Heraldry have stopped checking against mundane armory, so now you can use any device you want, even if it existed in period.**

Perhaps it was best stated by the former SCA Laurel King of Arms, Da'ud ibn Auda:

*It is true that the SCA College of Arms no longer checks for conflict against any but famous non-SCA arms. But to deliberately search out a real coat of arms and to adopt it is, in short, theft. Your arms should represent you, not someone else. Independent invention or creation of a coat of arms which may be similar to non-SCA arms, however, is permissible.*

---

<sup>1</sup> "Genealogical and Heraldic Research Sources" , Academy of St Gabriel, 30 August, 2001 <<http://www.s-gabriel.org/faq/realworld.html>>.

**5. My spouse and I must use identical colors and/or charges to show that we are married.**

In period practice, the use of identical colors and/or charges by a man and a woman identified them as brother and sister, not husband and wife.

**6. All the “simple” devices are taken, so you will need to have a bordure or chief or some such thing on your device.**

While many “simple” devices have already been registered, thanks to the implementation of the Modest Proposal several years ago, a large amount of heraldic space has been made available, allowing greater ease in registering simple devices.

**7. The more complex a device is the more likely it is to pass.**

This is not necessarily true. The SCA Heraldry Rules for Submission states:

*Armory must use a limited number of tinctures and types of changes. ... As a rule of thumb, the total of the number of tinctures plus the number of types of charges should not exceed eight. As another guideline, three or more types of charges should not be used in the same group.”<sup>2</sup>*

**8. You can’t use the quartered field division because that means marshalling which isn’t allowed.**

You can use a quartered field, just not in a manner that implies marshalling. The SCA Heraldry Rules of Submission (XL.3) states:

*... Divisions commonly used for marshalling, such as quarterly or per pale, may only be used in contexts that ensure marshalling is not suggested.*

*Such fields may be used with identical charges over the entire field, or with complex lines of partition or charges overall that were not used for marshalling in period heraldry.*

*Such fields may only be used when no single portion of the field may appear to be an independent piece of armory.*

*No section of the field may contain an ordinary that terminates at the edge of that section, or more than one charge unless those charges are part of a group over the whole field. Charged sections must all contain charges of the same type to avoid the appearance of being different from each other.*

---

<sup>2</sup> “Rules for Submission” , Society for Creative Anachronism, June 18, 2007, <http://www.sca.org/heraldry>.

**9. If the blazon (word description) of the device is too long, they won't register it.**

As long as a device meets the SCA heraldry rules and does not conflict, it can be registered, no matter how long the blazon is. In addition, Laurel has the final say over the blazon - if it needs to be long to fit the emblazon, it will be long.

**10. The shape of the form on which you submit your device is the shape you must display it in (always).**

In period, coats-of-arms were displayed in various shapes, including lozenges, heart-shapes, roundels, heater-shields, squares, rectangles, etc. The escutcheon (shield) shape is a convenient armorial shape for most designs and perhaps the most commonly recognized. Hence, that is the standard shape place on forms. [The roundel is also common and used to quickly identify badge forms from device forms.] However, the shape on the form of your submission does not limit you on what shape you display your device in.

**11. The \*exact\* shade of color/metal used on the submission sheet is the \*exact\* shade you must always display your device in (always).**

You are not required to display your device in the same shade of tincture that was used on your submission forms. Period practice shows us that various shades were used for the same tincture. This was sometimes a result of local dyes, sometimes a matter of taste. And the metals can be displayed in a metallic or non-metallic tincture (Or as gold or yellow; argent as silver or white).

**12. Badges have to be fieldless.**

Badges may have fields, although the Society now encourages fieldless badges, since, in period, most had no field.

**13. Heralds consider the cutoff for period as 1485.**

This is currently false. The current cutoff is 1600, although there is a "gray area" for names: if it's documented up through 1650, it's allowed, on the premise that the reference was to someone born before 1600.

The origins of the 1485 cutoff belief for most people derives from a 1992 *Tournaments Illuminated* article, "Heraldry in the SCA" by Mistress Elis O'Boirne and Duke Frederick of Holland. On the second page of the article is a glossary where some terms and concepts are defined, among them is the following:

*Period: For heraldic purposes, charges must have been knowable before 1600 or invented within the SCA since AS I, and style should be taken from pre-1485 heraldic usages.*<sup>3</sup>

In the Early Years precedents, s.v. Period: “the College uses as a model Englis[h] Heraldry of the period 1300 to 1450.”<sup>4</sup>

Slightly later:

*It was decided to raise the cut-off date for the period approved by the College from 1450 to 1485, the date of the end of the Plantagenet line in England considered as marking the end of the Middle Ages in that country.*<sup>5</sup>

- Wilhelm’s precedent s.v. Name – Fantasy: “If the fiction deals with events on Earth, it must be using a pre-1600 time period.”<sup>6</sup>
- Alisoun’s precedent s.v. Names – Conflict: “We tend to take a more conservative view of name conflicts from current events (i.e., after 1650) ….”
- Da’ud 1.2 s.v. Names – By-names: “While the sense of ‘runt’ probably intended by the client is clearly post-Period, the meaning of 1614 of ‘and ignorant, uncouth, or uncultivated person’ falls within our “grey area.” (LoAR 8/91, p. 12).

#### **14. I can’t have a cloak with my device on it unless I’m a Peer.**

You may display your device on a cloak, tunic, or other garb. You merely may not use a symbol on your cloak display that is reserved for peers unless you are a peer. By law or custom, this may vary from Kingdom to Kingdom, but \*could\* include displayed around the device: a plain silver chain, a laurel wreath, a pelican in its piety (or vulning), a chapeau, a white belt, or an orle of blood drops.

#### **15. Charges that have been previously registered in the Society are always okay to use.**

The College of Arms’ level of understanding of period heraldic practices has increased greatly over the years. A number of charges that have been registered in the past are now seen to be at odds with the heraldry of our period of study and no longer accepted for registration.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Heraldry in the SCA,” Mistress Eilis O’ Boirne and Duke Frederick of Holland (Lee Forgue) in *Tournaments Illuminated*, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> JvG, Summer 1970 [6], p.8.

<sup>5</sup> HB, January 1, 1971 [10], p. 1

<sup>6</sup> WVS [26] [CL October 20, 1980], p. 2

**16. You can't have people/body parts (particularly a hand) as a charge.**

Such charges are allowed. However, a hand gules on argent in something that could appear as an augmentation is deemed the "Red Hand of Ulster," and is prohibited in the SCA. Additionally, a "Hand of Glory" (hand flaming, enflamed, or on flames) is also prohibited. Any other hands, even red hands on white, are OK barring conflict.

**17. Unicorns can't be registered because they're mythical beasts (or because they've all been used up).**

There are many creatures/monsters used in period heraldry that are mythical. And, while there have been a large number of unicorns registered in SCA heraldry, it is still possible to register a device with a unicorn on it.

**18. I can't use an annulet unless I'm a knight, because an annulet is a link of chain, and chains are reserved for knights.**

While unadorned chains have been reserved for knights in the SCA, an annulet is considered to be a ring, not a chain link, and may be used by non-knights.

**19. I can't use a lion on my device unless my persona is English, because lions are on the arms of England.**

During the very beginning of heraldry, almost everyone used a lion rampant on their arms<sup>7</sup>. Even today, in the SCA, any number of people use lions — as of the date this was written, there are over 1,800 registered devices that contain lions. It might be a little difficult to come up with a new variation, but certainly not impossible.

**20. Only Queens can use roses on their arms.**

What is reserved to Queens (and Companions of the Rose) are rose *wreaths*. Chaplets of roses are reserved to princesses. By extension, orles of roses are also reserved. Single and multiple roses may be registered as long as they don't look like a wreath. Note, however, that a rose tinctured both gules and argent is an English royal badge called the "Tudor Rose," and is not registerable in the Society.

**21. I can't use black roses because that is considered a symbol of evil.**

As stated in the previous answer, single and multiple roses may be registered as long as they don't look like a wreath.

**22. I can only use a sword on my device if I'm a fighter.**

Anyone, fighter or non-fighter, may use a sword as a heraldic charge.

---

<sup>7</sup> See Early Blazon.com at <http://www.earlyblazon.com/> for examples.

**23. You can't register paw prints.**

This is false. Anyone may use a paw print as a heraldic charge. The only concern about paw prints is that a paw print is a paw print is a paw print. No difference is given between the paw prints of different animals.

**24. You can't register knots.**

Some knots are allowed, but certain knots, particularly SCA-invented knots, are disallowed. For example, the LoAR of September, 1996 states that the Donnelly knot was disallowed after February, 1997.

**25. You can't register knotted serpents.**

Serpents, even nowed ones, are registerable. They must simply be in the form of one of the allowed types of knots.

**26. You can't register compass roses.**

While unattested in period armory, they are registerable. (See the Northshield arms — and yes, you can still use it individually.)

**27. You can't use red gouttes (drops) on your device unless you're a Pelican.**

While an orle of red drops is reserved to Pelicans, the general use of red drops is allowed for anyone.

**28. The use of dragons is restricted.**

(a) You can't use a dragon unless you're from the Middle Kingdom because that's their symbol.

(b) You can't use a dragon if you're from the Middle Kingdom because it's restricted there.

(c) You can't register a dragon because they've all been used up.

Neither the Middle Kingdom nor elsewhere restricts the use of a dragon as a heraldic charge. And, while a large number of devices have been registered that have dragons on them, it is still possible to register a device with on. There are only two restrictions:

(d) You may not use an Imperial Dragon (five-toed Chinese Dragon) as that is the symbol of the emperor of China.

(e) You may not use a Royal Dragon (four-toed Chinese Dragon) as that is the symbol of the ruler of Korea.

You may use a three-toed Chinese dragon.

**29. The use of tigers is restricted.**

(a) You can't use a tiger unless you're from the East Kingdom because it's their symbol.

(b) You can use a tiger if you're from the East Kingdom because it's restricted there. Neither the East Kingdom, nor anywhere else, restricts the use of tigers as a heraldic charge.

**30. You can't register mullets of five greater and five lesser points sable via Ansteorra.**

At one time, Ansteorra considered a policy, backed by the Crown that nobody in that Kingdom would be allowed to register such a charge unless it was for an augmentation granted by the Crown. However, anyone can appeal a kingdom heraldic decision, and the College of Arms would register such; there could be no general restriction on such a charge. Therefore, this policy would have been unenforceable.

**31. Apes and monkeys can't be used on devices because they were once used to represent slavery (several Civil War era pro-slavery handbills represented slaves as primates in chains).**

There is no restriction on the use of primates as heraldic charges.

**32. You have to have an Award of Arms before you can register your heraldry.**

Anyone can register heraldry. Until they received an Award of Arms (or higher award), it is called a "heraldic device" instead of a "coat of arms." Only the terminology changes when you become armigerous.

**33. You have to have an Award of Arms before you can display your heraldry.**

Anyone is permitted by law and custom to display their registered armory, whether they have awards or not. There is occasional controversy regarding unregistered devices, but, in practice, you can display just about any armory you like, even if it's not period style.

**34. A Grant of Arms gives the right to bear the Kingdom arms as part of their device.**

Nobody can bear, as part of their personal arms, the complete arms of an SCA branch. Some kingdoms give augmentations of arms, however, and the Crown may ask that it include something very close to the Kingdom arms.

**35. Only the Seneschal can display a banner with the Shire's arms on it.**

This appears to depend on local custom. While there appears to be no official regulation on it, the most common *custom* appears to be that a group's arms are displayed at official functions held by that group or at other functions when the

Seneschal and/or Deputy Seneschal are present. However, if the shire has a badge, it may be displayed by any shire member.

**36. The jessant-de-lys charge is either symbolic of the English “leopard” devouring the French “lily, or it is a representation of a panther’s face issuing that sweet breath that can spellbind even a dragon.**

Like many stories of heraldic symbology, there appears to be no support for either of these claims. Several of those sort of “pat explanations” evolved during the revival of romance during the Victorian Age. Generally, they have no basis in history.

**37. There is a set manner in which ermine spots/semy charges have to be drawn.**

- (a) They can’t be chopped by the edge of the shield.
- (b) They *must be* chopped by the edge of the shield
- (c) They *can’t* lie under a charge.

**38. They *must* lie under a charge.**

There is no single set manner. These charges may be complete or chopped as the bearer wishes. They may lie under a charge or not, as the bearer desires. They may be drawn in a regular pattern, or placed in where they fit. The only *recommendation* is not to place such under charges of the same tinctures since this can blur the Identifiability of the charge.

**39. You can fimbriate anything OR you cannot fimbriate anything.**

Both are false. The Rules for Submission (VIII.3) states: “Voiding and fimbriation may only be used with simple geometric charges placed in the center of the design.

**40. Semys are field treatments, not charges. In terms of layering, semys count as a treatment; in terms of difference, they count as a charge group.**

They are *charges* for all purposes – for layering, contrast, differencing, style or whatever. *Exception:* semy of ermine spots are part of an ermined tincture, not a charge. *Quasi-Exception to the Exception:* on or a few ermine spots are not semy, and therefore count as separate charges, not as part of a tincture.

**41. You can’t get more than one CD for a group of secondaries.**

Different changes to the same group of secondaries get one CD per change.

**42. You can get more than one CD for a group of tertiaries.**

You can’t get more than one CD for all the changes to a single group of tertiaries.

**43. There are restrictions against using letters.**

- **You can't register anything with letters.**
- **You can register words but not letters.**
- **You can register letters, but only on a badge, not a device.**

Letters and words may be registered on either a badge or device. The only current restriction is that *armory containing only a single letter (and nothing else)* will not be registered. This decision was in the LoAR of August, 1994 by the then-Laurel King of Arms, Da'ud ibn Auda:

*Precedent still disallows armory consisting of a single letter or abstract symbol which, as the astrological symbol for Earth, this is. Otherwise, letters, words, and abstract symbols are fair game.*

**44. You must have registered armory in the SCA, even if your persona wouldn't have it.**

In some Kingdoms, one must have a registered device in order to obtain a scroll for an Award of Arms – not the award itself, just the scroll. Furthermore, some Kingdoms require you to have a device (or one in progress) if you want to fight in a Crown Tourney.

**45. A badge only needs one CD from other armory.**

Badges are subject to the same rules of conflict as devices.

**46. You can't have an argent bend, because that's reserved to Masters of Arms.**

Argent bends are not reserved heraldic charges. This myth may have arisen from a misunderstanding of an entry in the College of Arms' Glossary of Terms, which states that only a Master of Arms can have a white *baldric* in their arms. A bend is not a baldric. In fact, it is hard to see how a baldric could be put on arms in a recognizable manner except by vesting a human with one.

**47. A bar sinister, a bend enarched, a bend sinister, or a bendlet sinister on a coat of arms shows that the bearer is a bastard.**

First, there is no such thing as a "bar sinister" in heraldry. A bar is a narrow horizontal stripe, so there is no way for it to be sinister. Second, there was no set general pattern in any armorial system to designate bastardry. Neither a bend enarched, a bend sinister, or a bendlet sinister denotes bastardry, although some acknowledged bastards of the French crown did us a "bendlet sinister coupé overall" (also called a *baton sinister*) on their devices.

**48. You can't have charges on flanches.**

There are examples of charged flanches in period, although they were not very common. Such are perfectly registerable.

**49. You can't have a metal charge on a fieldless badge.**

Charges composing a fieldless badge may be either a metal or a color.

**50. Laurel wreaths have one leaf for every kingdom in existence at the time of submission.**

If this was true, the laurel wreath on the arms of the Middle Kingdom would have two leaves, the East's would have only one leaf, and the laurel wreath on the arms of the West Kingdom would be a stick with no leaves.

**51. A reasonable way to draw up a coat of arms is to put everything you do on it.**

In period heraldry, the only devices that had charges dealing with what activities you did was that of merchants' arms, and that was done in a limited way.

**52. If you have "a charge and another charge tincture semy of charges," the semy applies to the first charge as well as the second.**

For example, you have a device with a blue field, a white roundel, and a bordure that is white with green dots. Is the correct blazon "Azure, a roundel and a bordure argent goutty vert," or "Azure, a roundel argent and a bordure argent goutty vert"? While this one was debated at one time, it has been determined that "Azure, a roundel and a bordure argent goutty vert" puts gouttes on both the roundel and the bordure. However, "Azure, a roundel argent and a bordure argent goutty vert" gets the gouttes only on the bordure.

**53. You only have to check badges for conflict versus other badges.**

You must check all armory against all other registered armory.

**54. All charges whose tinctures are "proper" are considered neutral with respect to the Rule of Tincture. Hence, they may be placed upon either metals or colors, or be charged with either metals or colors.**

Not all "proper" charges are considered neutral. Some "proper" charges are considered to have a metal tincture class and some are considered to have a color tincture class. This depends upon the charge. In the SCA College of Arms' *Glossary of Terms*, there is a table entitled "Conventional "Proper" Colorings," that lists which tincture class various charges are.

**55. You have to check your devise against every known coat-of-arms for conflict.**

In January, 1995, the "Modest Proposal" took effect. As a result, the only heraldic devices that must be checked against are those listed in the SCA Ordinary and Armorial ("O&A"). All protected mundane heraldry is included in it.

## **56. Changing a group's heraldry affects its status.**

Once a group is established, changing its device does not affect its status. Note, however, that a petition, signed by the members of the group, is needed to make a change. The Administrative Handbook does state in IV.C.5

Submissions involving the name or arms of an active branch must include evidence of support for the action on the part of a majority of the active members of the branch. In the case of branches with no ruling noble, this support may be demonstrated by a petition of a majority of the populace and officers or by a petition of the seneschal and at least three-quarters of the other local officers. In the case of branches with ruling nobles, such petitions must also include a statement of support from the ruling noble.

---

## **Name and Title-Related Myths**

---

- 1. I don't need to register my name again with the College of Arms because I have I on my membership card so it's already registered with the office of the Registry.**

This is false. The name on your membership card is whatever name you put on your membership application. It has nothing to do with registering your name with the College of Arms.

- 2. Any name that sounds medieval can be registered.**

All names must conform to two rules:

*(RfS 1.a Compatible Content) All submissions shall be period in content.*

*(RfS 2.) Every word in a Society name must be compatible with period naming practices, as is required by General Principal 1.a of these rules.*

- 3. You can make new names based on known patterns, so you can make any letter substitutions you want.**

This is misleading. In some languages, you *can* form names using documented elements, or interpolating between existing names or using known patterns. A random substitution of letters does not count as "following the language constructs."

- 4. Spelling was quite variable before the modern era, so you can spell a name any way you like.**

Not exactly. In our period, the spoken version of a word was primary, while the written form was simply a way of recording it. Any spelling that would reproduce

the sound was “correct,” but the way sounds were represented varied widely from language to language and even from one period of time to understand what the rules are for the language. What you can depend on is that the rules for languages in period are distinct from those for 21<sup>st</sup> century American English.

**5. If you find a masculine name that you like, you can make its feminine cognate by adding “-a” to the end.**

This isn’t true, even in modern English. In many of the Latin-derived languages, it is sometimes true, but in the Celtic language such as Irish, Scots Gaelic, or Welsh, it is almost never the case.<sup>8</sup>

**6. If a name element has been registered before, it can be registered again (even if it’s not documentable) because of the Grandfather Clause.**

The “Grandfather Clause” relates only to previously registered arms that might no longer be acceptable under the current rules, and has no bearing on names, although the concept is applies to names.<sup>9</sup>

The College of Arms’ level of understanding of period naming practices has increased greatly over the years. A number of names that have been registered in the past are now no longer accepted for registration.<sup>10</sup> All names must conform to the following rules:

*III.2.b.iv: Household names must follow the patterns of period names of organized groups of people. Possible models include*

---

<sup>8</sup> Although feminine cognates may not be made in this manner, you should know that there was a custom in many cultures during our period that allowed women to use men’s names. – Ed.

<sup>9</sup> From the Administrative Handbook, III.B.1:

*Armory Registered by the College of Arms - Devices and badges submitted to and registered by the College will be listed in the Society Armorial and Ordinary and protected from conflict against future submissions. Once registered, an item shall be protected until written notice of release is received by the Laurel Office from the registrant. In the case of a defunct Society branch, release may be granted by joint consent of the Crown and Kingdom Seneschal after appropriate notice in the newsletter of the kingdom in which the branch was located. Protection shall apply even if the item in question could not be registered under the Rules for Submission currently in effect (Grandfather Clause).*

<sup>10</sup> In the May, 2008 LoAR, it was announced that the use of the “SCA-compatible elements” would no longer be permitted as of the May, 2009 decision meetings. There were four exceptions to this ruling. See Appendix B for the complete text of the decision.

*Scottish clans (Clan Stewart), ruling dynasties (House of Anjou), professional guilds (Baker's Guild of Augsburg, Worshipful Company of Coopers), military units (The White Company), and inns (House of the White Hart."*

**7. Names need only one or two citations.**

There is no fixed limit, just whatever makes a plausible argument. In practice, usually one example suffices. If it's clearly of the same culture and general time period, in the spelling and usage desired, used by a human, and if there's no reason to believe it was unique (as for a legendary hero). Otherwise, you may need more to demonstrate plausibility.

**8. Citing the use of a name in a book about the Middle Ages or Renaissance is sufficient documentation.**

Unfortunately, many writers of non-fiction about our period translate or modernize spellings (called "normalization," a word we'll be using later), so you can't even rely on a history text for the correct spelling of a name. Furthermore many historical fiction authors either make up names or use out-of-period names for the time they're writing about.

**9. If you can find a name in a "what to name the baby" book, you have documented it sufficiently.**

While such books are great when choosing your baby's name, they almost never give information needed to make them a good resource for choosing a historical name. They also usually only give you the normalized form. Furthermore, the meanings shown are very often inaccurate.

**10. You always address someone using their highest title.**

This is correct, although there are very rare times when a person's title is superseded by the title of her office (although the office's title is usually appended to the end of the person's name). Of course, sometimes, in play, people do and always will address a person with every title a person could use.

**11. "Title stacking," like "Duke Sir Master Baron," is fine.**

Title-stacking is far from period practice, and most SCA authorities recommend not doing it. This could, however, vary with local custom.

**12. "Alphabet soup," like "John of York, OP, OSM, ASC," is period and fine.**

Using initials to indicate awards is post-period, and is generally discouraged, although this does vary with local custom.

**13. All the elements of a name have to date to within 300 years of each other.**

THL Aryanhwy merch Catmael, Pelican Sovereign of Arms stated.

*If two elements cannot be dated within 300 years of each other, that is a step from period practice. If there is no other step from period practice, then the name will be registerable (barring conflict/grammar/style issues etc.). Elements which cannot be dated within 1000 years of each other cannot be registered in combination with each other. <sup>11]</sup>*

**14. “Fitz” denoted bastardy.**

This is false. “Fitz” is simply the Anglo-Norman word for “son,” ultimately derived from the Latin *filius*.

---

## Herald-related Myths

---

**15. If you don’t have a booming voice, you can’t be a herald.**

There are many aspects of heraldry, and not all of them require a loud voice. Book heraldry – neither doesn’t heraldic administration -- doesn’t require such. As for vocal work, almost anyone can be taught the projection needed to make them heard across a field or in a court. Almost all heralds start off with armory, however, and then move on to find their own niches.

**16. All heralds know everything about Heraldry.**

Many heralds have specialties, e.g., armory, names, field heraldry, or a mixture). And, like everything else, there is a learning curve. Some heralds pick up one area faster than others. Some heralds never bother to learn all aspects. If you have an interest any form of heraldry, don’t hesitate to get involved.

**17. Shires have pursuivants; Baronies and Kingdoms have heralds.**

This is a matter of local custom, and will widely vary from Kingdom to Kingdom. In some Kingdoms, the title depends the level of herald, with the Kingdom-wide and Kingdom level deputies called heralds, and the local levels called “pursuivants.” However, there are exceptions to the rules; and sometimes all people within the particular kingdom’s College of Heraldry are called, simply, “heralds.”

---

## Procedure-related Myths

---

**1. Heraldic customs and sumptuary laws are universal throughout all SCA Kingdoms.**

Almost all kingdoms’ customs and laws are different. Northshield has no sumptuary laws or heraldic customs as of this writing.

---

<sup>11</sup> Aryanhwyl ferch Catmael (Sara L Urcleman). Private correspondence, January 17, 2009.

- 2. The heralds only look for ways and reasons to return a submission. They don't try to help it pass.**

Nothing could be further from the truth. Sometimes, a submission will be returned at Kingdom or Laurel level; but during the commentary period at each level, heralds will look for evidence to *support* the submission. Even local heralds try to find a way to get a submission to be passable. There are also kingdom-level and Society-level mailing lists where heralds go for help.

- 3. You *must* be a paid/registered SCA member in order to register a name/device.**

Anyone can register a name/device. The only heraldic benefit a paid member receives is, if there are two submissions in conflict at a single Laurel meeting, the paid member's submission will be registered, and the other will be returned for conflict.

- 4. You can send a name and device registration through any group in any Kingdom.**

The College of Arms Administrative Handbook (III.b) states:

*Kingdom of Residence - Submissions must be made through the appropriate heraldic officers as defined by the kingdom of which the submitter is a subject according to Corpora and Board policy. A submission already in process above the local level when a submitter leaves a kingdom may continue to be processed by the kingdom of origin until it is registered or returned by Laurel. In this case any resubmissions must be made through the new kingdom.*

- 5. If you register arms, you cannot change them. Ever**

You will have to pay another submission fee, but you may change arms as often as you want.

- 6. War (Pennsic, Estrella, Lilies, etc.) submissions are different because:**

- a. They stand a better chance of passing and will be processed sooner;*
- b. Submissions taken at Pennsic go straight to Laurel;*
- c. All Kingdoms take submissions at Pennsic; and/or*
- d. If the heralds at Pennsic don't find conflict with my submission, it will pass*

Not all Kingdoms accept submissions at Pennsic, and those that do vary from year-to-year. The same is true of other wars. Furthermore, items submitted at wars go through the same submission process as if submitted at the local level. What this results in is that you have to wait a month or so longer for the

submission to get through the process since the War submissions must be sorted out and sent to each Kingdom. This is the downside.

There is an upside, as well. The submission stands a better chance of passing because it will be looked at by a crew of experienced (and inexperienced, “student” heralds. Furthermore, an experienced heraldic artist, using tools that might not be available locally, will draw the submission for you.

**7. If you resubmit, you don’t have to pay.**

This varies from Kingdom to Kingdom. Because of the heavy use of computers in today’s SCA heraldry, the price of submissions has gone down to begin with. In Northshield, people who are resubmitting a rejected device or name have a few chances before having to repay.

**8. To herald court, you must have a warranted herald.**

This varies by local custom and Kingdom by Kingdom. Northshield requires by a warranted herald as well as a warranted Seneschal.

**9. According to Corpora, the herald is the deputy seneschal, and must step in should be seneschal be unable to perform her duties.**

There is nothing in Corpora like this. While a Kingdom could put such into its laws, none have done so to my knowledge.

---

## General SCA Information Myths

---

**1. You have to have a name and armory before attending your first event.**

There is no such requirement. In many local groups, it’s customary to help a newcomer to find a name before she attends an event, this is by no means universal. There is a caveat to this, however, a newcomer should find a persona name as soon as possible; otherwise the members of the group may do so for her.

**2. You need a persona name to authorize to fight.**

This can vary from kingdom to kingdom. There is a need to have some form of name in order to be registered by the Earl Marshall as an authorized fighter, in Northshield; this does not have to be a registered SCA name.<sup>12</sup>

**3. You can’t have purple clothing because purple is reserved to royalty.**

The SCA has no such restrictions. This idea may come from confusion with some of the Renaissance Faires that have rules that *only* the Queen may wear purple – no other performer is allowed even a scrap of ribbon unless the Queen gave it to

---

<sup>12</sup> Cassandra Antonelli (Lee Norton), ex-Northshield Earl Marshal, private communication, January 17, 2009.

him. However, in the SCA, if you like purple, either in clothing or arms, you can use it.

**4. Plain, unadorned, red, green and yellow belts are reserved for squires, apprentices and protégés, respectively.**

This is a custom. In the Middle Kingdom, this is an official sumptuary customer. However, while there are no rules in Northshield regarding it, most of the Kingdom believes it to be true.

**5. Anyone in the SCA can wear a simple, unadorned circlet.**

Since there are no sumptuary laws within Northshield, except regarding the coronets of barons and above, populace can wear circlets – even adorned ones as long as they don't conflict with the restricted styles (e.g., six rounded stones set into the coronet proper), they're legal.

**6.**

---

## References

---

Academy of St Gabriel. "Genealogical and Heraldic Research Sources."

Alan Fairfax. "The Heraldry Cliché Checklist."

Ælfwyn æt Gwyrum (Jodi McMaster). "Heraldic Mythology (or The Good, the Bad and the Cool-but-not-Period).

Aryanhwy ferch Catmael (Sara L Uckelman), Pelican Sovereign of Arms. Private correspondence, January 17, 2009.

Cassandra Antonelli (Lee Norton), ex-Northshield Earl Marshal, Private communication, January 17, 2009.

Gawain of Miskbridge, Master. "Frequently Given Answers (That are Wrong)"

Reinholdt von Trollenhagen (Mark Doyle), Northshield Compass Herald. Private communication, January 17, 2009

Lincolia, Daniel de (ed.). Archives of the SCAHRLDS mailing list.

Private discussions with members of the Academy of St Gabriel.

Private discussions at SCA events with (not limited to):

Ælfwyn æt Gwyrum, Alanna of Volchevo Lesa, Alasdair MacEogan, Alison Macdermot, Alisoun MacCoul of Elphane, Amanda of Coldcastle, Anguss Scrymgeour, Antonio Miguel Santos de Borja, Arval D'Espas Nord, Aryanhwy merch Catmael, Astrid Thorkelsdottir, Athenais Bryennissa;

**Banba MacDermott, Barak Raz, Beatrix Hammeloune, Betony ferch Meilyr ap Emrys, Blaise de Cormeilles, Briana Etain MacKorkhill, Bronwen o Gydweli, Bruce Draconarius of Mistholme,**

**Caelin of Andred, Calum Ra'arsach mac Leoid, Cat of Castlemere, Caterina, Cathal, Ceatt o Gulcleth, Charles Stewart O'Connor, Christian de Holacombe, Christopher Thomas, Clarissa Wykeham,**

**Damien of Baden, Daniel de Lincolia, Da'ud ibn Auda, Devnet macShiehie, Dierdre, Dmitrii Volkovich, Donal Galbraith, Dorcase Whitecap, Drogo the Forgetful, Duncan MacConacher,**

**Eadric Flecher the Wild, Effic neyn Kenyeoch volcano Ralte, Eilidh Swann, Eloine ni Mhaoileoin, Elisabeth de Rossignol, Elizabeth Raidwood, Elspeth Anne Roth, Elspeth inghean Doughall, Eogan mac Ailpein, Ermenrich von Duisburg, Etienne de St Amaranth, Evan da Collaureo;**

**Fergus Stout, Fi MacKenzie, Frithiof Silversparre;**

**Gawain of Miskbridge, Genevieve la flechier, Chislaine d'Auxerre, Giles of Redheugh, Giulietta, da Venezia, Gorm of Berra, Gotfrid von Schwaben, Gwalchmai Saethydd;**

**Hartmann Rogge, Herveus d'Ormonde, Hywel ap Ieuan;**

**Iona Lynch, Isabella Benalcazar, Ivanor M'Quhairr of Sighy Crag;**

**Jacqueline de Meux, Jaelle of Armida, Jadwiga Marina Majewska, Jadwiga Zajaczkowa, James of the Lake, James the Mercer, Johan Magnusson Kivisuo, Julien de Monfort,**

**Kwellend-Njal Kolskeggson,**

**Lindorm Madoc Argundel, Livia Montgomery, Llydoden Llwyd, Lothar von Katzenellenbogen, Lyle FitzWilliam;**

**Madoc Arundel, Madawc Caradawg, Marcello Caprioli, Margaret Makafee, Maridonna Benvenuti, Marten Bröker, Martinus Draco Byzantios, Maryn Grey, Mongke Gal, Morgana yr Oerfa;**

**Naitan de Yerdeburch, Nastasiia ("Tasha") Ivanova Medvedeva ;**

**Owen ap Morgan ;**

**Pedro de Alcazar, Pendar the Bard, Perronnelle Charrette de La Tour du Pin, Predslava Vydrina ;**

**Quintonus Alexander ;**

**Rafaella d'Allemtejo, Ramon de la Luna, Raonull Modar, Raphael Karl der Heidelberg, Raphael van Antwerpen, Rayah Blackstar, Robert the Bald, Roberto Carlos DominguezRodrigo, Rory, Rouland Carr, Rys ;**

**Sandor Dosa, Seraphina MacDonald, Seumas Fraser, Shauna of Carrick Point, Solveig Thronmarsdottir, Sorcha MacLeod, Sven Noren ;**

**Talan Gwynek, Tangwystyl verch Morgant Glasvryn, Teceangl Bach, Thomas Blackmoor, Thomas the Black, Þorfinn Hrolfsson, Tibor of Rock Valley, Tibor the Indecisive, Tristan ap Syrddin of Ellesmere, Twilleliah nic Taillier;**

**Vasili iz Naitemnesoi Dollina, Walraven van Nijmege, and  
Zenobia Naphtali.**