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Duration: 1 hour

Finding an historically-accurate name & unique coat of arms can be a fun part of getting involved in the SCA. Get an overview of the jargon, the registration process and timeline. Learn a few visual elements that match your persona's time and place, then talk about how to work with a herald (locally or on Facebook) to nail down the details and move forward with a submission.

## **The Heraldic Registration Process**

The registration process can seem daunting, because there is a lot of specialized jargon, and the rules can seem complex and arbitrary to newcomers, but it needn't be painful, and there are people who will gladly help you through it.

### **Two Kinds of Registrations**

Anyone involved in the SCA may register two ways of identifying themselves: names and armory.

A personal name is just that — a set of written and/or spoken words that people use to identify you.

Armory covers visual designs like a coat of arms, banner, flag, device, badge, maker's mark, or seal.

### **Registration Marks Items as Yours Forever**

Registering puts your name and armory in a central list (originally a big book, now a web database), marked as belonging to you, and kept on the society's rolls in perpetuity, unless you decide to release them. (When you die, ownership of those items passes to your heirs as part of your estate.)

### **Anyone Can Register**

Registration is open to anyone; you do not need to be a paid member of the SCA, have received an award, or otherwise obtain any kind of permission to start the process.

### **Registration is Inexpensive**

The cost of registration in the East Kingdom is \$9 for each name or piece of armory. (It varies by kingdom, generally from \$6 to \$10, except for Lochac where the cost is covered by the realm.)

### **Why Register?**

You do not have to register a name or armory to participate in the society, but there are benefits to going through the process — most notably, it avoids potential conflicts.

You can use a name or armorial design without registering it — there are no heraldry police — but you run the risk that someone else is going to (or has already) chosen the same (or nearly the same) name or design, and then people will mix the two of you up, and someone will wind up getting annoyed and complain — or if the other person later becomes famous, people might think you're deliberately trying to cash in on their reputation — or vice-versa — all drama that can be avoided by registering.

### **Why Register Now?**

There's no pressure to register anything right away, but there are benefits to doing so sooner rather than later, perhaps within the first year or two of involvement with the society, because it's easier to change things while you're still getting started.

Other people are going to have to call you something, and while folks are willing to switch to a new name when you change it, that becomes more awkward if they've known you for a decade. It makes things simpler if the name everyone knows you by also matches the formal name that ends up on your award scrolls and other official paperwork down the line when you're famous and important.

Likewise, if you want to use an armorial design, it's better to work out any issues now, even if that means you have to make some small changes to your design — it'll be much less work than if you've already painted a flag and sewn a tabard and stamped your design on all of your possessions before you discover that you need to change one color, or make the creature face the other way, or whatever.

### **Registrability Rules**

During the registration process, each name and piece of armory is checked to ensure it meets various criteria, including that it is historically plausible, and sufficiently unique.

These rules are sent forth in a document entitled "The Standards for Evaluation of Names and Armory", generally referred to as "SENA." (<http://heraldry.sca.org/sena.html>)

Many of these rules are easy to understand — and will be covered below — but some of them are pretty obscure, and it can take years to fully understand the finicky little details and exactly how to interpret the edge cases where multiple rules seem like they might apply.

### **The College of Herald**

Conveniently, you don't have to learn all of these rules, because the society has a whole class of people who will help you negotiate this process — the heralds.

(In addition to managing the name and armory registration process, heralds also perform other, seemingly-unrelated tasks, like making announcements in court and on the tournament field ("voice heraldry"), and keeping track of who's earned what awards and when that happened ("precedence"), but we're not going to address those here.)

The organization of heralds is collectively known as "the College of Herald." Some heralds are attached to local branches ("pursuivants"), a few hold kingdom or society offices, and others are independent, sometimes devoting their attention to a particular topic that interests them.

### **Finding a Consulting Herald**

To begin the registration process, you work with a local herald (the "consulting herald") who helps you to come up with a name or design that is both registrable and something you love. The consulting herald will help to get the submission paperwork filled out correctly and can check on its progress to let you know how quickly it is moving along.

If you have difficulty finding a suitable consulting herald, you can request one by filling out the East Kingdom "Ask A Herald" form.

Alternately, if you want to get your hands dirty, you can join the "SCA Heraldry Chat" Facebook group, ask questions and filter through the feedback you get from the heralds who respond, and then fill the forms out yourself.

Once your forms are filled out and send in to the kingdom submissions herald, the long wait begins.

### **Registration Takes A Long Time**

The process is admittedly slow — between eight months and a year — and if an item is returned as unregistrable, you'll need to fix it and send it through the entire process again from the beginning.

It takes a long time because there are a lot of steps along the way, each done by different unpaid volunteers in their nights and weekends, and then cross-checked by other volunteers to look for mistakes or fill in gaps with additional research.

There's no magic way to speed things up, other than triple-checking your submission before it's sent in to resolve any issues as early as possible.

### **Timeline**

After the forms (and payment) are mailed in, they are entered into a web application run by the College of Heraldry called "OSCAR" where they are reviewed in two stages, first at the kingdom level, and then at the society level.

At both stages, there is first a commentary period in which a pool of heralds can look at the submissions, add comments, and engage in discussion about possible problems and ways to fix them.

Then the senior submission heralds for that stage make their decisions as to which items are returned as unregistrable, and which ones continue to registration.

In the East Kingdom, this decision maker is known as the Blue Tyger Herald (office currently held by Yehuda ben Moshe of Lions End); at the society level the final decisions are made by the Laurel Sovereign of Arms and their chief deputies known as Pelican (names) and Wreath (armory).

- Month 1: forms received and entered into OSCAR.
- Month 2: kingdom-level heralds provide commentary, check documentation, and flag issues.
- Month 3: kingdom review and decisions, items either forwarded to society or returned to submitter.
- Months 4 and 5: society-level heralds provide commentary, check documentation, and flag issues.
- Month 6 and 7: society-level officers review, do additional research, and make decisions.
- Month 8 and 9: write-up of decisions, proof-reading, and announcement of registration or return.

Any of these steps can move a bit faster or slower than laid out above; most notably, in the East, so many submissions are received at Pennsic that it takes several months to process them all, and submissions received in August, September, or October are likely to sit in the queue for a few months before beginning this journey, so it's possible for this process to take a full year in those cases.

If someone finds a problem and your items are returned as unregistrable, you should be contacted directly. Likewise, when your arms are officially registered, someone should let you know about it.

However, sometimes that process breaks down, so you may want to check in periodically to confirm that things are continuing to move forward but haven't reached a conclusion yet.

Your consulting herald should be able to check on the process of your submission and let you know how far along it has gotten, but basically all you can do during this part of the process is sit and wait.

### **It's Not Over Until It's Over**

During this waiting period, try to resist the urge to paint a giant silk banner or spend a hundred hours embroidering your new arms onto a new gown, as you don't know for certain that your arms are going to pass until you actually receive the acceptance notice or see your items published in the Letter of Acceptances and Returns.

## Names

Everyone has a name, and over the years it becomes tightly bound up with your personal identity, so choosing another name for yourself can be an interesting experience.

While you can totally attend society events just using your mundane name or a nickname, coming up with a historically-viable name can help to set your time in the society apart from your everyday life.

Some people enjoy coming up with a detailed backstory for exactly where and when their medieval persona is from and the path their life has taken so far, but this is entirely optional.

### Alternate Names

In addition to your primary personal name, you can also register up to five more "alternate names".

Some people who are interested in different times or places, or different aspects of medieval life, will construct separate personas and register a name for each of them.

Alternately, if your persona is a traveler or lives on the boundary between two cultures, you might register both a name from their native culture and a second name from the place they've voyaged to, and those names could either be similar, like Peter and Pyotr, or completely unrelated.

### Name Changes

You are allowed to change your primary name at any time, and you can either give up your previous name or retain it as an alternate.

### Names Must Be Unique

You can not register the same name as someone else — you need to have at least one substantial change to the sound and one substantial change to the spelling between your name and any other registered name.

For example, if someone had previously registered the name “Peter Smith”, you can not register “Pieter Smyth” because, despite the spelling differences, when spoken aloud the two names sounds the same, or nearly so.

It can be tricky to search for name conflicts, but heralds have tools that can match against patterns like “P <any vowels> <T or D> <any vowels> R” to find possible sound-alike names.

If two names have a different number of syllables, they’re clearly different, but sometimes it’s trickier to determine if two names are distinct — for example, “Mary” sounds substantially different than “Maria,” but in at least some times and places, “Mary” and “Marie” may sound the same.

If the name you picked out turns out to conflict with one that’s already registered, you’ll have to tweak your name to find a registrable variation, so don’t get overly attached to a single name until you’re sure it’s clear — try brainstorming a handful of variations, rank them in order of preference, and get a herald to tell you which ones are available.

### Consistent In Place and Time

Names differed from place to place and changed significantly over time. Although many names share common origins or etymological roots (for example, many cultures had a local form of "Peter"), the spelling might change significantly if you traveled a few hundred miles or a few hundred years. And other names were unique to a given culture and virtually unknown outside of a particular area.

To be registrable, a name must follow the grammatical rules of a particular medieval culture, and all of the elements of the name must either be from the same culture or from neighboring cultures that were known to have intermixed in period. For example, you may combine Greek and Italian name elements, or Gaelic and French, but not Greek and Gaelic because there just was not much overlap between these communities in period. (These combinations are listed in SENA Appendix C.)

Additionally, all of the elements of a name must be documentable as having occurred within 500 years of each other, using precisely the spellings you intend to use. That timeframe is reduced to 300 years if you're mixing name elements from neighboring cultures.

The cultural groupings considered here are closer to linguistic groupings than national ones. For example, in 14th century Scotland, people in the Highlands primarily spoke a form of Gaelic that mirrored that in use in Ireland, while their cousins living in towns twenty miles away primarily spoke Lowland Scots, which was related to English — and their names generally followed the same patterns, although obviously some people used both languages, and had names that combined elements from both cultures.

### **Society Names Must Be At Least Two Words**

You can not register a name that consists only of a single word.

However, in many historical cultures, people typically only had one name. For example, the use of surnames became common within the area of the Roman Empire, but then died out in much of Europe during the medieval period before re-emerging over time in various European cultures.

Before surnames became common again, people would differentiate individuals that had the same given name through descriptive, locative, or occupational “bynames.”

For example, if there were two men named Peter in the same village, people might call them “Big Peter” and “Peter the Blond,” or “Peter of London” and “Cornish Peter,” or “Peter the smith” and “Farmer Peter.” As in these cases, bynames could come before or after the given name, be just a single word or be marked by a standard part of speech (like “of”), might be uppercased or lowercase, and many other variations, depending on the local name patterns and linguistic rules.

In other places, the more common pattern was to use patronymics or matronymics — in other words to say who your parents were, like “Peter David’s son” and “Peter grandson of Michael,” using the locally appropriate terms for those relationships.

Over time, in most European cultures, these bynames eventually “stuck” and turned into inherited family surnames, but if you’re interested in an early period name, you’re likely to use a byname.

One type of byname that anyone in the society is allowed to use is a branch name, like “Peter of Østgardr” or “Peter of Northpass.” You don’t have to live in or be from a particular area to use a branch name, although that is the most common case — you can use any branch name in this way.

### **Finding Name Patterns and Elements**

If you don't already have a specific name in mind, the best starting place is the "Medieval Names Archive" (<https://www.s-gabriel.org/names/>), where you will find groups of articles covering different cultural groups, from classical Rome through all of the major linguistic groups of Europe and at least a smattering of material for some of the regions outside of Europe.

Typically you will find an article or two covering the general form or pattern of names, such as "given-name + surname" (English) or "praenomen + nomen + cognomen" (Imperial Rome) or "given-name + given-name + de place-name" (Catalan).

Accompanying that will be lists of name elements found in period documents, such as lists of male given names, lists of surnames, and so forth, along with dates showing when those names are known to have been in use.

You can then choose a pattern and fill in the blanks with any of the names from the historical lists.

In some languages there are tricky grammar or spelling rules that will kick in for certain cases and require subtle adjustments, but if you have a name that follows the basic outline of one of these historical naming practices, you're 95% of the way there, and the heralds will find someone who is an expert in that culture to make minor corrections to ensure that the details are all correct.

## Armory

The shield-shaped pattern known as a “coat of arms” is the most recognizable form of armorial design, although there are several closely related forms with various specialized names.

### Device and Arms Are Two Words For The Same Thing

Anyone can register such a design, but in the society your primary armory is formally called your “device” if you haven’t yet received an “award of arms” or another award that carries an “AOA” with it, at which point it’s then known as your “arms,” but the only difference is the name they’re given; in both cases, they mean your primary armorial design.

### Badges

In addition to your primary armory, you can also register up to five more designs known as “badges”.

### Registration Requires a Name

Although you can register a name without any armory, the reverse is not true — you can't register armory without having a personal name to go with it, although you can register both of them at the same time.

### Armory Changes

You are allowed to change your primary armory at any time, and you can either give up your previous armory or retain it as a badge.

### Armory Must Be Unique

You can not register the same armory as someone else — you normally need to either have a substantial change in the primary charge or two distinct changes to elements between your design and any other.

In period, family members such as siblings or cousins would often use the same basic design, but with a single change, like just changing the color of the primary charge, or adding a stripe around the edge or across the middle of the field, or adding a smaller secondary charge to the existing design.

Therefore, a design which is only one step from another would potentially create an impression that the two bearers are closely related.

You can register a design that has only one distinct change from another piece of armory if you obtain a letter of permission from the other registrant.

Similarly, you can register two designs that have only one distinct change from each other without any special paperwork.

### Historical Practices

Although there were a number of precursors, including royal seals and the flags of military unit, the system of heraldic armory really only emerges in the twelfth century, quickly spreading through all of Western Europe.

Some of the conventions for armory varied slightly from one kingdom to the next, but mostly the followed the same rules throughout this region for the next few centuries, and these practices form the basis for the “core style” rules of our society’s armorial registrations.

In the fifteenth century, with the Crusades over, the Renaissance under way, and battlefield practices evolving as firearms became more prevalent, armorial design became increasingly ornate, but the society generally frowns upon this as excessive, and doesn't make it easy to follow those practices — you can register a crazy Tudor design with six different colors and charges on top of charges on top of charges, but you'll have to jump through a bunch of hoops and fill out extra paperwork to do so.

### **Blazon**

When you hear heralds talking about armory, you'll notice they use a peculiar way of speaking to describe its design. This formalized design language is known as "blazon," and in contrast, any graphical picture of the armory is known as an "emblazon."

Blazon provides a way of describing a piece of armory in words that could be included in a letter, mailed a thousand miles away, and then drawn out again to create a picture that was, if not identical, at least recognizable the same basic pattern as the original.

The language of blazon has a very standardized structure — for example, we always describe the color of the field first, then list the central primary charges if any, and then move on to any peripheral charges around them — so two heralds looking at a given picture would likely blazon it in very similar ways.

Many of the words used in blazon are peculiar, stemming from historical use during the time when heraldry was being standardized, and include an odd mix of period French and middle-English vocabulary and old-fashioned spelling.

### **Standardized Design Elements**

In order to allow a design to be successfully converted back and forth between blazon and emblazon, many aspects of the design are standardized.

There is a very limited palette of colors, and we don't differentiate between different shades of a color. You can't specify that the lion on your shield is light blue, or sky blue, or navy blue — it's just blue. Conversely, if the lion is supposed to be blue, you can draw it using any shade of blue you like, and they'll all be considered to be heraldically equivalent.

Similarly, there are a set of standardized postures your lion can be in — walking, leaping, resting, and so forth — and you can't put them in arbitrary positions, because even if you could draw it in a way that everyone would recognize it as a lion, the heralds need to be able to describe it in their blazon in a way that it could be written down and someone else following those instructions would draw it out and produce the same design as you had started with.

### **Tinctures**

The color palette used in heraldry consists of seven colors known as "tinctures."

They are divided into two light tinctures called "metals" and five dark tinctures called "colors."

The metals are gold or yellow (called "Or" and always capitalized), and silver or white ("argent").

The colors are red ("gules"), blue ("azure"), black ("sable"), green ("vert"), and purple ("purpure").

The "rule of tincture" or "contrast" requirement dictates that an item that is light can only be shown on a dark background, and dark shapes only on light backgrounds. Even though we can recognize a red shape on a blue background, you're not generally allowed to make such designs in heraldry.



### **Fields and Divisions**

The background of the design is called the “field” and can be a single tincture, or it can be divided in two or more parts.

There are a lot of possible ways to divide the field, but again you can only use one of the standardized formats that can be reduced to blazon and reliably re-emblazoned to look like your original design.

For example, a field split into two pieces by a horizontal line is said to be divided “per fess,” and one split into four by horizontal and vertical lines is said to be divided “quarterly.”

### **Charges**

On top of the field you can arrange additional elements, known as “charges.”

The largest, most central charge or related set of charges is known as the “primary” charge group, while any smaller charges or ones arranged around the outer edge are known as “secondary.”

You can place charges on top of other charges, which we call “tertiary charges,” but you can’t repeat that process a third time — for example, you can have a red heart with a gold star in the middle of it, but you couldn’t then put a green leaf in the middle of the star.

The simplest charges are geometrical shapes whose size and position are defined relative to the field, known as “ordinaries.”

For example, a stripe extending horizontally across the middle of the field is known as “a fess”, and a pair of intersecting horizontal and vertical stripes is known as “a cross.”

Other charges are known as “mobile charges,” so called because they may be repeated or moved around to be positioned in specific areas of the field.

These include regular geometric patterns and more representational images of everyday objects and items from nature, including plants, animals, and people.

Each charge is drawn in one of the standard tinctures, or less frequently, may be divided in the same kinds of ways as the field.

### **Finding Field Divisions and Ordinaries**

There are lots of web sites that catalog possible field divisions and the standard ordinaries, including a fairly-complete collection on my Traceable Heraldic Art website (<http://heraldicart.org>).

### **Finding Mobile Charges**

The best reference source for mobile charges is the Pictorial Dictionary of Heraldry (the “PicDic” at <http://misholme.com/dictionary/>) which has illustrations and descriptive text for over five hundred charges recognized by the society.

### **Period Armorials For Inspiration**

You can follow the society’s style rules and still create designs that don’t particularly look like something that people would actually have used during the medieval period.

If you're interested in designing armory that looks historically plausible, a good starting point is to look through period "armorials" which are scrolls or books that were created to show the arms of all of the knights in a certain region.

After looking at a few pages filled with coats of arms from 15th century Spain, or 13th century England, or 16th century Germany, or whatever place and time you're interested in, you'll be better able to come up with designs that could fit into one of those collections without sticking out.

There are several collections of period armorials available; one good starting point is Yehuda's listing which has search and sort functions to find rolls by place and time (<http://yehudaheraldry.com/rolls/>).