



A Guide to Heraldry for a New SCA Group.

One of the most daunting activities for a New Group is registering a name and device with the College of Heraldry. This article is designed to answer some of the more commonly asked questions and prevent the most common mistakes that are made in the process.

CHOOSING A GROUP NAME:

In order to be officially recognised as an SCA Group (Branch), you will need to register a Group name. Just like personal names, Group name submissions require supporting documentation showing that the name could have been (or was) used as a real place-name in pre 1600 Europe, or known to Europeans of that period.

Although this is not the place to delve into the complexities of medieval place-name formation, here is some basic advice:

- Look for reference books specifically on place-names. Highly recommended are:
The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names, by Eilert Ekwall,
A Dictionary of English Place-names, by A.D.Mills,
Place-names of Scotland, by James R. Johnston,
A Dictionary of Irish Place-names, by Adrian Room,
Dictionnaire Etymologique des Nomes de Lieux de la France, by A. & R. Dauzat.
- Books on medieval history (or translation of medieval documents) can also be suitable for documentation but it must be remembered that not all such books are as well researched as others. Often, place-names are modernised or Anglicised to make it easier for the reader, and do not reflect the actual name recorded in the primary sources. The better books usually have a note somewhere stating the approach the author(s) has taken to personal names and place-names.
- If the name sounds like it came from a fantasy novel, (eg. “Valley of the Purple Unicorn”, or “Dragons’ Eyrie”) then it’s probably not medieval in style!
- Don’t base the Group’s name solely on the interests of the founding members - for example, just because everyone happens to be interested in brewing now, that may not necessarily be the most common interest in the group in five year’s time, in which case the name will no longer be relevant to the majority of the Group.
- Don’t hesitate to consult the Crux Australis Herald (and other senior heralds) early on about the name(s) the group is considering, and be prepared to make changes if advised to do so. Note that being told “it seems OK”, by a passing herald, should NOT be taken as good evidence that the name is medieval or can be registered. On-the-spot opinions are no substitute for solid research!
- Submit early. The worst thing a Group can do is choose a name assuming it will be ‘registerable’, use it for several years, then find it cannot be registered. It is also easier for a Group to change its name when it is still young and there is lots of enthusiasm, rather than later when changes become more difficult.

SUBMITTING THE NAME:

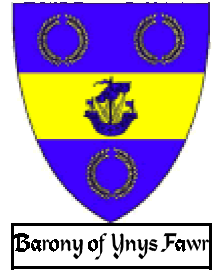
Once a name has been chosen and sufficient evidence gathered to support it, you then need to get the paperwork right so as to submit the name for registration with the SCA-wide College of Arms.

You will need to forward the following to the Crux Australis Herald:

- TWO copies of the “Name submission form for Society Branches”.
- TWO copies of all supporting documentation, including the title pages of any books used (and

the pages on which the evidence appears). If you have used a website, make sure the full URL is somewhere on the page.

- A petition showing “evidence of support”. This is NOT the same petition as used for requesting recognition of your Group as an official SCA branch. It must show the name being submitted, the legal and SCA names of all active participants in the group, their signatures, which office (if any) each holds and whether or not they support the submission. Plain writing in biro is much preferred to calligraphy. A standard form is available from the Crux Australis Herald should you require one.



Also, make extra copies of everything for your Group’s files and, if appropriate, your Baronial Herald’s files.

No payment is required - branch name submissions are always free.

If possible, get an experienced herald to look over the forms before you send them, to ensure that everything has been filled in correctly.

As with personal names, once submitted, it will be considered at the next monthly Crux Australis submissions meeting. If it looks ‘registerable’ it will be forwarded to the SCA College of Arms. After 4 months of discussion by the College it will either be registered or, (if there were problems not spotted at Crux’s meeting) returned for further work.

If a problem is found at Crux’s meeting then a letter will be sent shortly afterwards explaining what the problem is and some possible solutions.

CHOOSING THE GROUP’S DEVICE (COAT OF ARMS):

Unless your group is considering becoming a Barony, Province or Principality, there is no requirement to register a device (arms) for your group, especially when a badge may do just as well for people to show their allegiance to the group.

However, if your group does need, or greatly desires, a device, then the following points should be borne in mind.

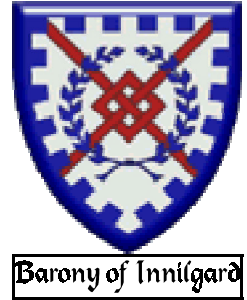
- Look at some medieval civic heraldry for ideas.
- The device needs to prominently feature a laurel wreath. That’s a circular wreath, not a couple of crossed sticks with some leaves on them. Nor does it have to be green. . . .it can be any heraldic tincture. Finally, you are not limited to just one wreath.
- Don’t try to display everything that everyone is interested in, eg.: a rapier, because you have fencers plus a barrel for the brewers plus a quill for the calligraphers plus. . . .etc. It is impossible to combine so many elements into a design and still have it look medieval.
- Choose at most three colours and three types of ‘charge’, including the laurel wreath.
- Avoid the combination of “a whatsit, plus a thingamijig within the laurel wreath”, as this arrangement can, depending on the charges used, be illegal by the SCA’s rules of heraldry, (technically, it’s called “three types of charge in a single charge group” and is a big no-no).
- Get some senior heralds to help design the device, or review it, before preparing the submission forms. And be prepared to accept constructive criticism and make changes if necessary.



SUBMITTING THE GROUP'S DEVICE (COAT OF ARMS):

You will need to forward the following to the Crux Australis Herald:

- **FOUR** coloured copies of the 'Device Submission Form', and **ONE** outline copy, (ie. a line drawing).
- A petition showing "evidence of support". This is **NOT** the same petition as used for requesting recognition of your group as an official SCA branch. It must show the Group's name, the legal and SCA names of all active participants in the group, their signatures, which office (if any) each holds and whether or not they support the submission. ***It must also have a written description of the device,*** (in blazon or plain English) ***and/or a drawing of it.*** Plain writing in biro is much preferred to calligraphy. A standard form is available from the Crux Australis Herald should you require on. (*Forms enclosed: Ed.*)



Also, make extra copies of everything for your Group's files and , if appropriate, your Baronial Herald's files.

No payment is required - device submissions for branches are always free.

If possible, get an experienced herald to look over the forms before you send them, to ensure that everything has been filled in correctly.

As with all devices, once submitted it will be considered at the next monthly Crux Australis meeting. If it looks 'registerable' it will be then forwarded to the SCA College of Arms. After 4 months of discussion by the College it will be either registered or, (if there were any problems not spotted at Crux's meeting) returned for further work.

If a problem is found at Crux's meeting, then a letter will be sent shortly afterwards, explaining what the problem is and some possible solutions.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

If you require any further information or assistance then do not hesitate to contact your nearest Baronial Herald or the Crux Australis Herald, who can be reached at herald@sca.org.au

