

# MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING OF COURT

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*The nuts and bolts of planning for court, working with royalty, cooperating with scribes, making the moment memorable for the populace at large, handling change and chaos on the fly, and perhaps even having a little fun at the same time. If time and interest permits, we will touch on custom ceremonies, physical layouts, and integration of period elements.*

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Management and Planning of Court! Unlike other discussions we may have had about period ceremonies or historical references, or how to be a good herald, this class and paper are going to speak primarily to court as theatre, and the herald's job as the stage manager (managing from centre stage).

A good court is not overly long, entertaining, celebrates the achievements of others, and perhaps even contains a few pleasant surprises for the audience. A lot of the qualities that make a good court do not come from last minute planning or spontaneity, although it might look that way to the audience.



## PRE-COURT PREPARATION

Before court happens, there is some preparation and planning that needs to happen. Ideally you know you are Their Majesties' herald early on in the day, and can start early and work your way down this 'pre-court checklist'.

- At the very least you need to meet with the royalty in advance, confirm you are their herald, find out what they want done in their court, and get a court list.
- Ask the royalty questions about how they want to handle recipients of awards that are absent – should you call 'or someone to accept for them'? Or move on to the next item?
- If you are not given a court list (and you need to construct one) you should make that in advance. Your court list should have the names of people being called up, awards being given and the order they should happen in. Include things like 'Open Court', or room for incoming presentations.
- Call for incoming presentations, and note them on your court list.
- Review the court area – watch for things like acoustics, layout, stairs and platforms, audience placement, and potential hazards or complications to court (lighting, the bar at the back of court, inclement weather, etc).
- Go back to the royalty room, after the scrolls have been signed and sealed, put them in the order you will need in your scroll folder and pre-read them – actually read them aloud (softly) and get a feel for the wording and cadence.
- Five to ten minutes before court, have a washroom break and drink something to keep your throat wet! If you can arrange for a tankard.



## STAGING

So you are ready, and the royalty is ready, but is the court area prepared? Often the royalty's retinue are responsible for setting the stage, but the herald may have more court experience and input and assistance setting up or adjusting the royal presence before court can go a long way.

- Before mucking with thrones and banners and boxes, do you have permission from the royalty? Are your suggestions welcomed by the royalty's retinue? Make sure you are a part of making court better, not pushing their views on other volunteers. Ultimately, the royalty get what they want, they are in charge.
- Thrones traditionally are placed with the Queen on the right, the Prince and Princess to the right of the King and Queen, and then alternating visiting royalty and barons and baronesses outward left-right-left. Sometimes the royalty will prefer the prince and princess to flank them on either side. In any case, balance the various thrones so they are centred on the aisle if possible.
- Ensure that behind the thrones, there is room for banners and retinue and props. A little extra room to breathe doesn't hurt.
- If there are going to be multiple retinue behind the thrones, do you have a place where you can work, and still speak to the royalty as things are happening? Dead centre works, but in a pinch, to one side of one of the thrones can make do.
- Ensure that in front of the thrones, there is room to kneel or make presentations. Beware narrow stages!
- If other people have places to be (ladies in waiting, spear bearers, alternate heralds, champions, etc), and it's an unusual layout or newer people being involved, make sure you show the stage area to them in advance and explain where they should stand and help out when needed.
- If props are needed during court, do what you can to get them in court before hand, either in the royalty's box between the thrones, tucked behind the thrones, or on a table accessible by retinue. Try to keep obvious scrolls, coronets, gifts, etc, out of direct sight so they are surprises for the audience.



## TIMING

Everything comes down to timing – a good herald can speed court along and keep it from bogging out, deal with delays and obstacles while in court to keep things moving, and deliver lines and prompt others expediently.

- ❑ Don't step on the royalty's 'lines'! Keep a close eye on them, ask when they want to speak, and see how they want to call the shots. Some royalty are naturally dramatic, while others will say very little.
- ❑ Beware 'trucks'. In some theatre circles, a truck is a gap or unexpected delay in activity. This means a missed cue, people looking about as something that was supposed to happen that didn't, or in SCA court terms, people not coming up in court, misplaced scrolls, forgotten lines, or a herald that has lost their place.
- ❑ Having your court list written out, and kept to one side of your book or binder prevents a lot of 'truck' delays.
- ❑ Planning timing is an refined art that comes with practice – how long to wait for someone to come up in court, what to do while they fetch a worthy from troll or the kitchen, people running to the royalty room to grab forgotten things.
- ❑ Some timing needs to be planned around processions, boasts announcing royalty, inviting in guests with their own processions or retinue, and so on.
- ❑ The best time to prepare for the next item of business is before it needs to happen – while the royalty are congratulating someone, read ahead to the next item, set up the scroll in your folder, and so on.
- ❑ If you have an excessively long court, there are ways to tighten up timing – reading a scroll as people are processing in, truncating the date and time off the end of the scroll with the phrase 'done this day', calling up peerages and grant-level orders and keeping them up front for multiple awards for their orders, and so on.
- ❑ Understand that ultimately, a court can only go so long before the audience becomes bored, restless, and noisy. Being entertaining can stretch out this time limit, but only so much. Plan with royalty to have the most efficient court possible,



## PROPS

Aside from people coming and going, often there are props involved with court, that need to be in the right place at the right time, and within easy reach so fumbling about doesn't become a delay in court.

- ❑ Double check your ceremonies – do you have everything you need in court? Nothing is more embarrassing than not having a coronet for the new court baron, a missing scroll, gift baskets forgotten in the royalty room, and so on.
- ❑ If the royalty have gifts or items to give out, make sure they are at hand for them, or make sure one of their retinue can hand them tokens as they need them.
- ❑ Make special plans for oversized props (huge scrolls, rocks, swords, Tor Brant dioramas, etc).



## WORKING WITH ROYALTY

The herald is the stage manager, not the star – nothing can happen in court without royalty, so it's important you support their role during the court itself.

- ❑ The best way to create a sense of royalty being in charge is to present 'submarine commands'. In advance of each item, lean down to the royalty, ask them if you can proceed with the next item, tell them the name of the person, and then stand up and announce the item of business. This creates a sense of royal authority, and also assists the royalty to know what is happening next.
- ❑ In complex ceremonies, you may want to gently prompt royalty, 'submarine style' for their upcoming lines. Keep it brief and simple.



## MISTAKES, CHAOS, AND SURPRISES

No plan survives contact with the enemy, or interaction with the audience, or the whims of royalty. Be prepared to be unprepared! When things go wrong, your ability to adapt, improvise, and keep a healthy sense of humor while pushing items along on schedule.

- ❑ Be prepared for royalty to change the rules of the game on the fly – be receptive and open minded, and roll with the punches. It's their court, and they are in charge!
- ❑ Any incoming presentations should be approved in advance, and if it's going to be long, not entertaining, or only appreciated by a select portion of the court, gently recommend to the royalty it be moved to feast, or a private presentation.
- ❑ If a presentation is going on and on and on, try to consult with the royalty and if they wish, help wrap things up with a timely 'for the good gift of Bob of London, wassail!'
- ❑ Surprise interruptions, while very rare, need to be dealt with – this could be someone moved to speak out of turn in a peerage ceremony, or some irate audience member.

- ❑ When something goes wrong, take the blame. Even if it wasn't your fault. Royalty should not look at fault, and a self-deprecating herald looks far better than stammering retinue or a fidgeting king or queen.
- ❑ Noise at the back of the hall may happen now and then – if it becomes disruptive, try to get their attention (politely) or have the royalty weigh in. Try to keep it positive and upbeat.



### BEING A GOOD HERALD

Ultimately, practice is the best way to become a good court herald. Some people are naturals, while others need practice – but here are a few proactive tips to avoid missteps, from a stage management and a personal performance standpoint.

- ❑ Be prepared – if you are planning on being a regularly contributing court herald, have a tabard, a scroll folder, a copy of the kingdom ceremonies book, lined paper and pens, and anything else you might think you need when you attend an event.
- ❑ Anything you are unsure of, write it out in advance. Hector or Pelayo may be able to boast royalty into court off the top of their heads, but if you can't, take your time and write it out in advance.
- ❑ Project to the space you are in – large echoing halls are different than outdoors.
- ❑ Read down your nose, keeping your head up, and don't block your voice with scrolls, folders, thrones, or people.
- ❑ Don't steal the show – wearing nicer clothing than the royalty, wearing coronets, standing in front of the thrones, ignoring the royalty's prompts and cues, or being pompous are not good theatre.
- ❑ Royalty hate surprises – if someone asks to make an incoming presentation, get the gist of it, and tell the royalty as much as they want to know in advance – start with 'Tor Brant wishes to present a gift', and if the royalty want to know more, give them 'Tor Brant wishes to present a 5' tall wooden diorama made of logs'. Royalty may push the presentation to feast.
- ❑ Not sure how to pronounce a name or what titles they prefer to be addressed by? Ask someone in advance.
- ❑ Know when to 'Wassail', and when not to ... and lead the audience in timing on a Wassail, be predictable.
- ❑ Recognize the scribes! Find a way to read the scribes names after each scroll, and double check the back of the scroll for the scribes name(s).
- ❑ Roll with the punches, and don't be flustered.
- ❑ You will get 'herald-brain', where you blank on the person's name you just called up 10 seconds ago, keep your court list handy!
- ❑ You will get 'bumblemouth'. If you get tied up on saying a line, reading a scroll, or pronouncing a name, stop, take a deep breath, and start over.
- ❑ If an opportunity presents itself, a little humour goes a long way. However, you are not the star of court, so make it less Lewis Black and more "Yes, Minister".
- ❑ Don't be repetitive – once you have the hang of things, change up wording for calling people into court, congratulating people with a wassail, and so on.
- ❑ Tone and enthusiasm go a long way to making court memorable – remember the people receiving awards are having a personal moment, and make it more than a single item on a checklist. Read the scroll like it's very important.
- ❑ If you have to read something boring, like kingdom law, race through it. If you have to read something exciting, slow it down and give it the moment it deserves.
- ❑ Know your limits – if the court is very long and your voice won't last, scrolls are in Danish and you can't pronounce any of the words, the stack of scrolls is more than you can hold at once, or you are confused by a ceremony, don't be afraid to ask for help – in advance.
- ❑ If the royalty ask you to do something absolutely wrong, do it anyway, they are in charge.
- ❑ Don't look bored, take a nap, pick your nose, lean against the throne, chew your nails, or otherwise be distracting or detract from court – while you aren't the centre of attention, you are on display as a supporting cast member.
- ❑ You are an old pro? Share what you know! Give new heralds a chance to fly 'sidekick' in court, and pass on your skill.

If you have questions about court heraldry, or the stage management of court, feel free to contact myself any time, at [checkyboy@gmail.com](mailto:checkyboy@gmail.com)



