

Attending Your First Coronation

by Rhiannon ui Neill, Azure Decrescent Herald

Earlier, we talked about attending a baronial investiture for the first time. Coronations are often set up with much of the same structure, so for this trip down the "What to Expect" road, I will take you into more of the detail of the happenings going on.

For purposes of clarification, we use the term "Crown" to refer to the individuals serving as King and Queen, and the term "crown" to refer to the headpieces they wear.

Just like with an investiture, one of the first activities of the morning will be the last court of the outgoing Crown (King and Queen). During this court, they not only give out awards, but they release all of their retainers and thank the officers and landed barons/esses. Then, they remove the crowns from their heads and either place them on the seats of the thrones or else, hand them to the kingdom seneschale or an appointed regent to guard them until the next King and Queen are crowned. During this period of time, as there is no Crown, any barons and baronesses, both landed and 'of the court' should remove their coronets when the King and Queen take off the crowns, as they hold their positions by leave of the Crown and if there is no Crown, then they have no position to hold. Once the new King and Queen are crowned, then they can place their coronets back on their heads.

There's usually a minute or two (or five or ten) between the old King and Queen leaving and the heirs arriving. There are a number of different coronation ceremonies and each one is chosen by the heirs apparent, based upon their personal preference. The simplest one is where the incoming Crown simply walks up the aisle, places the crowns on their heads and then gives an oath to the populace. One of the more complex, yet symbolic versions, has the couple stopping at 'checkpoints' along the aisle, to be clothed in the raiments of the position, with each article of clothing or accessory symbolizing some aspect of the responsibility of the job. Once they reach the thrones, they are then crowned by the kingdom seneschal. Coronation ceremonies can be extremely moving and provide some of the most outstanding "you were there" moments.

You will be expected to stand during the actual coronation ceremony. Be prepared. How long you will stand will depend upon the length of the ceremony and the experience of the court herald and the new Crown. Once, we stood through not only the ceremony, but the subsequent affirmation of fealties, because the Crown and herald forgot to give the populace permission to sit down. It was a VERY long time.

After the actual coronation, then they will go through the affirmation of fealties, in which they will receive the fealty oaths from the landed barons and baronesses, Great Officers of State, and the Peerage Orders. Sometimes, the Crown chooses to receive the Peerage fealties separate. If they choose to do it at this point in time, there is a specific order in which they are usually done. First, will come the landed barons and baronesses (some of whom will choose to leave their coronets off until after they have given their oath of fealty to the new Crown), as they hold specific lands in trust for the Crown and Kingdom. Then, the Great Officers (these are the kingdom officers) are called up. After that, the peerages are called in order of precedence by when they were recognized as such by the Society. Knights, Laurels and then, Pelicans.

After this, the Crown may choose to hold a small court, make royal appointments, etc., however, usually, they just end the morning's court activities and off we all go to the tourneys and competitions.

Often, in the early afternoon, there is a Queen's Tea, held in honor of the new Queen. Depending on who is hosting the tea and how many they have planned for, this is normally a "by invitation only" event, however, sometimes, it is open to all the ladies or even everyone. In that case, there would be either an announcement made by the herald(s) or it will say so in the event program you receive at Troll. When in doubt, assume "invitation only".

The new Crown will take time to sit in state some during the afternoon, in order to receive personal gifts, congratulations and oaths of fealty. If you have a gift for the Crown which is of a personal nature and is for them to keep, even after they step down in six months, this is the appropriate time to present it. Gifts of regalia, which become the ultimate property of the kingdom, are best given during court, but can also be given privately at this time.

The first court of the new Crown, often includes a bit of dramatic ceremony which you will not see at any other time. The King's Champion will come forth in full armor and throw down his gauntlet, proclaiming that he will take on any who dispute the King's rightful occupation of the throne. The duty of King's Champion is almost always held by a Knight (member of the Order of Chivalry) and they take this challenge and duty very serious. This would not be the time for an off-handed wisecrack, unless you want to find yourself out in the parking lot, being loaded into your car by a bunch of angry knights and forever being remembered as "that person". Those kind of "oh, yeah, I saw that!" stories haunt you forever in the SCA. Don't be the subject of one.

A first court is usually quite light-hearted, as the Crown proclaims their new champions, retainers and settles into their role, setting the tone for their reign. Feast follows court and entertainment is usually prevalent at Kingdom events, as are pretty good feasts! A coronation feast is usually worth paying for, as it is the top celebration we do.

One note about feast behaviour, before I end. Feast halls are notorious for bad acoustics. The ceilings are often high and open-beam and the floors are concrete. While it is expected that you should enjoy yourself during feast, there are a few times when courteous behaviour includes library manners (besides during court, of course). These are: during any announcements made by a herald or the autocrat; during any impromptu feast court held by the Monarchs; and during low-volume performances, such as poetry or story-telling or soft songs, sung by gentle lords or ladies. If you are seated near high table, please try to keep notice of performances and adjust your table's volume accordingly, giving the performer the respect and honor you yourself would desire. Nothing sucks worse than trying to be heard over 200 loud-talkers. And if it's a short court, just be quiet for a few minutes, even if you can't hear (and you often won't be able to if you are in the back). Feast courts never last more than 2-3 items and the person being recognized deserves to have his/her moment of glory without raucous laughter from the rear of the hall. Remember that golden rule. Yes, the day is done, but hopefully, we don't all put our manners aside or away just because the food is here.