

On the Proper Use of Heraldic Titles and Insignia

By Donal Mac Ruiseart, Conch Herald

As I mentioned in a previous article, heralds have the unique duty and privilege to speak with the voice of the Crown or Coronet, or the noble or house, that they serve. If the King instructs you to make a particular announcement, the words you speak carry as much authority as if His Majesty himself spoke them.

This, however, can have a dark side. So unique is that privilege, that anything you say or write as a herald can be construed as being an official pronouncement.

Does this mean you can't talk politics, or discuss a book, or tell a joke? No, it only means you should not do those things as a herald.

Just what do I mean by that emphatic qualifier? Are you not always a herald if you hold the office? Yes, but there is a difference between acting officially (i.e., "as a herald") or acting as a private subject.

In Person

At events, when you don whatever heraldic regalia you use, be it a tabard or baldric or other such mark, you are in your official capacity and should conduct yourself accordingly. This means always acting with dignity (but not being pompous), and avoiding any sort of potentially controversial personal remark, or prolonged personal conversation. When you take off the regalia, you revert to private citizen status. You might wear a small herald's badge somewhere on your person, but that is not regalia.

You should, in fact, wear regalia ONLY when you're actually serving a heraldic duty.

- When Court is over, and you've either processed out or dismissed the company, take off the regalia.
- If you're heralding a Court, and you are called into Court yourself, take off the regalia unless you know you're being summoned specifically for some issue relating to your office as a herald.
- When you're finished making a round of announcements, take the regalia off.
- When you herald the Lists, don the regalia when you go on duty. Take it off only if you take an extended break. That is, don't take it off while the match goes on. However, you should avoid making any comments about the fighting when you're in regalia.

Because the office of herald is not your personal property but given by the Crown through the Triton Herald, you should not wear heraldic insignia or the herald's badge anywhere about your person when you fight. Heralds are non-fighters by definition, and enjoy immunity to attack in battle (Henry pulling Montjoy off his horse as Branagh's Henry V showed was a serious breach even for a king.). Again, that does not mean you cannot fight if you hold a herald's office. It does mean that you should not represent yourself as a herald when you fight. It also means that you should not don herald's regalia when you are in armour, and should not wear dress steel other than a dagger when heralding.

In Writing

When it comes to writing, it's a matter of how you identify yourself. If I sign a letter simply "Donal," then it is my own personal view, opinion, or position; and there is no trouble with it. If I sign it "Donal, Conch" or Donal Mac Ruiseart, Conch Herald," then it's official. Those who notice my postings on the Merry Rose or my barony's newsgroup will note that I most usually sign my name alone, not even identifying my Order affiliations or my baronial rank. And I never use my heraldic title unless I'm writing on a heraldic subject. As I am now.

There are many who add their various titles and offices to their e-mail signature line, which gets added automatically any time they send an e-mail. The problem with this is that if you have your heraldic title (and that includes any identification as a herald) as part of your signature, anything you have written can be considered official. In most cases, this is not terribly important. At some point, though, you may become involved in some controversial discussion on the Merry Rose or a group mailing list, and if you express a controversial opinion, especially one that is derogatory to the Crown or Coronet, you could be in trouble. You have just attributed your controversial opinion to the King or Baron, who very likely will not appreciate it.

In the Original Middle Ages, such action could get one banished or executed. In the SCA it can get you reprimanded, and might get you fired from your post as a herald.

Let me point out that ANY officer who uses their office as part of a signature like that could be censured for this kind of thing. But our unique visibility makes us more susceptible to that sort of trouble.