

Terms and Expressions

By Donal Mac Ruiseart, Conch Herald

Every club, every organization has its slang or jargon; the SCA is no exception. One form is our tendency to use initials to describe an event or an office, such as KASF and KMoL. We have unique terms for some items, such as the Western expression of calling a list-enclosure an “Eric,” which came about because red rope or ribbon was used to enclose some early areas. We call the person in charge of an event the “autocrat,” and for a while (gratefully not so much now) we tended to call their assistants some or another kind of “-ocrat” by filling in the blank with their area of responsibility. We call ourselves SCAdians. In some kingdoms they pronounce “SCA” as a word.

And we still call the gatekeepers at events “Trolls,” apparently because the way to an early event took you under a bridge, and the gatekeeper took up station there, and under a bridge is a place where trolls hang out... There have been attempts to do away with this but it's pretty firmly lodged.

Some of these terms and expressions are manifestations of our creativity. Others, however, show a lack of creativity or even a lack of respect. And respect, which is one method of showing courtesy, is an important element in our Society.

As heralds, we must be aware that a good many terms one might hear used among the fighters (and which we as fighters might have used ourselves) are grating or even offensive to some. And it is also our duty as heralds to promote dignity of speech and deportment. Mostly by setting an example.

When announcing the fighters at a fighting event, take care to use the proper expressions for their weapons forms:

- Sword/Mace/Axe and shield.
- Great Sword (if it's Japanese style you can call it a Katana)
- Two-Sword (or if the weapons are different, name them or call the form “Two-Weapon”)
- Pole-Arm (Better to use the descriptive names if you can identify them.
If it has an axe-head it's a halberd.
If it has a long, mostly straight blade it's a glaive.
If it has a club-head it's a maul.
- Spear (You'll rarely see this in a tourney.)

Resist, at all costs, the temptation to use a common rhyme for the most common weapons form. It is not “sword and board!” A shield is not a board.

When you call upon the next pair of fighters to prepare for the upcoming match, use a phrase such as “Make Ready!” or “Prepare Yourselves.”

Resist, at all costs, the temptation to use either a common rhyme for headgear and weapons, “hats and bats” (a helm is not a hat, nor are any of our weapons bats), or a term from a mundane sport (The Lists is not a ball-field; fighters are not “on deck.”)

Some fighters will ask you to introduce them by whimsical nicknames. Sometimes those are appropriate, and indeed add to the colour of the announcement; but others are best left unsaid. Once I heralded an Iron Rose Tourney at Pennsic and had to convince one entrant, who wanted to be introduced by a

rhymed nickname neither of whose elements was complimentary, to tell me her true name. She claimed that it was unpronounceable but I had no trouble with it. Use your judgment on this... does it sound complimentary and dignified?

If you know the fighters' titles, use them! If you can, hover by the MoL table as the fighters sign in and ask them their titles. Some will be obvious, if they wear white belts or coronets, but some have additional titles that aren't visible. If a fighter has more than one title, find out from them which title (yes, that's singular) to use. Usually a title won by martial prowess will be preferred.

Note, though, that sometimes a person will specifically ask that a title not be used. In that same Iron Rose Tourney, one of the entrants was a reigning Queen who did not want those from other realms to know her rank beforehand because she didn't want to intimidate them. Honor such requests!

Likewise, in some tourneys the organizers prefer that no titles be used. Again, honor those requests.

And finally, my esteemed colleagues, I urge you to set the example not only when on duty, but off duty as well. Avoid using modern-sounding slang and especially derogatory-sounding expressions like "stick jock." Happily, that term seems to be waning in popularity; I cite it as an example of the vulgar terms we ALL ought to avoid. Even "sword jock" is better, but I'd rather see that one go away too.

As heralds, we all should strive to speak well and somewhat formally. No longer do we attempt to emulate the speech of characters from the works of Sir Thomas Malory; but by keeping our speech from getting too casual, we can play a big role in maintaining the dignity that should attend on all SCA doings.