

On the Proper Use of Heraldic Titles and Insignia

By Donal Mac Ruiseart, Conch Herald

In the SCA there are many ceremonial situations where you will encounter Royalty. The rules for how to behave in such situations are pretty well known. But there are also many times when you will encounter Royalty in the course of an event where it is not a ceremonial situation. How do you deal with such situations?

First, some definitions.

I will use the term “Royal” as a noun to collectively refer to the King, Queen, Crown Prince, Crown Princess, or any combination thereof.

The “Royal Presence” is generally considered to be a circle about 20 feet in diameter, so that in non-ceremonial situations, one “reacts” when a Royal gets within ten feet. This is called the “ten-foot rule.” (This is distinct from the ten-foot rule that applies to garb or armour.)

A “room” is a relatively small space, say 20 by 20 feet or smaller.

A “hall” is a large space such as a feast hall or exhibition hall.

A “reverence” (pronounced rev-er-AHNSE) is a bow, curtsy, or other such gesture of respect. Generally thought to have three degrees of “depth:”

- A small reverence -- A nod of the head with a slight leaning forward of the upper body, or a very slight bend of the knees as a curtsy.
- A moderate reverence -- Incline the body forward to about 45 degrees, or for a curtsy, drop perhaps as much as a foot.
- A profound reverence -- Reserved for ceremonial occasions so not really relevant here. That’s when lords do those long, sweeping bows, and ladies do the de-e-e-e-p curtsies.

It’s important to remember that in all these cases, you should **not** look at the floor. To do so is to debase yourself more than is fitting. All in the SCA are considered to be of gentle birth. Keep your eyes on the person to whom you are reverencing.

The sort of behavior described here is general in nature and is learned by practice. It is a constant process of learning. No one is going to call for the head of one who makes a mistake in this area; indeed, the Royals themselves will probably console with you if you err! Also, the form of reverence can vary. The bow or curtsy are conventional, but there will be those who for physical, cultural, or religious reasons cannot or choose not to follow the conventions or have an alternate form or reverence. Courtesy is a hallmark of the SCA, and that includes accepting the choices of different people in how **they** show courtesy.

Putting it into Practice

There follows a discussion of many of the situations other than at Court in which one may encounter Royalty:

Item: At an event, a Royal walks by without ceremony or escort (well, maybe an attendant but not a retinue).

If you are in the Royal's path, move aside; and when the Royal gets about ten feet from you, give a moderate reverence until they are past you.

Item: You are in the feast hall, and a Royal walks into the hall without ceremony or announcement.

If you're near the door through which the Royal enters, make a moderate reverence. But if you're much farther away, take note of the way they're going but no reverence is needed. It is always a good idea to note where Royals are, if in the same general area as you; so as not to be caught off guard by their approach.

Item: You are sitting at table at a feast and a Royal walks by without ceremony.

The convention is that unless a Royal addresses you directly, it is not required to rise or reverence when you're seated at table.

Item: You are sitting at table at a feast and a Royal comes up and greets you or someone seated near you.

In this case the person addressed by the Royal and everyone in their immediate vicinity (sitting next to or across from them) should rise and make a moderate reverence.

Item: You are sitting in a room and a Royal enters.

You should rise and make a moderate reverence. In addition, the first person to see them should inform the others by saying something like, "His Majesty!" so that all can respond appropriately. The Royal may call on you not to rise, but unless they do, you should rise; and remain standing until the Royal bids you be seated.

Also, all in the room should rise and reverence when a Royal leaves a room.

Item: You are sitting in your pavilion next to the list field and a Royal walks by.

In this case, your pavilion (even without walls) is considered "private space" and inside it you are separated from the outside world. So there is no need to rise or reverence.

However, if you are sitting in front of the pavilion, out in the open, you should rise and give a moderate reverence.

Item: You are sitting in your pavilion next to the list field and a Royal enters the pavilion.

This is as if the Royal is entering a room where you're sitting. You absolutely should rise and give a moderate reverence (along with words of hospitality). Or attempt to before the Royal asks you not to rise (which they often do).

However, as a courtesy to you, the Royal should send a retainer in first to warn you of their visit rather than just popping in; especially if it is to deal with something official.

Item: You are a fighter entering the list field and a Royal is near the entrance.

How to act in this case will depend on several factors.

If the Royal is in civilian dress (that is, not in armor) and you pass within ten feet, you should make a moderate reverence. If the Royal is directly supervising the list, say standing at one corner, a small reverence will do.

If the Royal is in armor and taking part in the fighting, a small reverence is all that is required. I will discuss separately what to do if you find yourself matched against a Royal in the lists. If when you enter the lists, the Royals are seated in their pavilion watching the whole of the list field, wait until the herald or marshal tells you to acknowledge them.

When entering the list, you should, if possible, avoid using the gate closest to the Royal pavilion.

Item: You are a fighter and find yourself matched against a Royal in a tourney.

If it's the Crown Prince or Princess, make a small reverence when you enter but no other special action is needed.

However, if you are matched against the King or Queen, some extra words are necessary. Strictly speaking, it is high treason to strike your sovereign; but anyone who enters the lists implicitly shows their intent to compete. So either before or after the herald announces you or the marshal tells you to take your guard, you should say something like, "Your Majesty, pray be assured that there is no disloyalty in the blows I will strike at you, but only the spirit of the competition."

Often, when a King or Queen enters a tourney, they will make some statement at the beginning that all who are matched with them are free to strike without concern. Alternatively, they may fight incognito or use an alternate persona.

And there is no stigma about besting a Royal in the lists. For one, it's not all that likely that you will do so, if you're fighting the person who won Crown Tourney; but if you do, everyone from the King on down will congratulate you.

Item: A Royal approaches you not wearing a crown.

Because this is most likely a casual encounter, you should rise if seated and make a small reverence. It's the possession of the crown, not wearing it, that makes them royal.

Item: You are at an event in the early stages or after it's actually ended, or at a post-revel; and encounter a Royal not in garb, that is, in modern clothes.

When they're not in garb, treat Royals with modern courtesy. Don't make reverence, but stand aside for them if you're in their way.

It's much the same if you're not at an event and you encounter a Royal. In that case, in fact, you ought to address them by their modern name if you know it, and should not address them as "Your Majesty" or "Your Highness." To do so might embarrass them or cause confusion to other people.

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