

## Creating Peerage Ceremonies Magistra Nicolaa de Bracton

This paper is the result of a little over 20 years' experience in writing Peerage ceremonies, starting with my own Laurel ceremony. Various kingdoms have different approaches to Peerage ceremonies. In some, there is a standard ceremony that is repeated with very little variation for all candidates. These kingdoms often have strong traditions of symbolism or regalia already in place. At the end of this article, I will touch on some of the things that can be done to personalize this type of ceremony. On the other extreme, there are kingdoms where custom ceremonies are very much the preferred approach. In Ealdormere, we have a set of basic Peerage ceremonies available, but it is more common to use a custom ceremony tailored to your own persona, views, and feelings about ceremonies. I see it as a tremendous honour to be asked to write a ceremony that is special to the person being elevated.

When planning these ceremonies, there are two things to keep in mind:

- 1) The ceremony should be meaningful to the candidate. He/she is your client.
- 2) The ceremony should be acceptable to the Royalty. (In other words, they need to see it beforehand, so that they know what they will be doing and saying and what to expect). Peerage elevations are often a highlight of the reign, and Their Majesties will want the elevation to reflect well on them and the kingdom as a whole. They will also usually care about making it meaningful to the candidate.

### **Components of the ceremony**

Most extant period ceremonies are what we might term "liturgical" — they are essentially religious in nature. This includes both explicitly religious ceremonies, such as the Catholic mass or the sacrament of baptism, as well as rites such as coronation liturgies. Most of these ceremonies mark the public acknowledgement of a transition in status of an individual through invocation of the divine. SCA ceremonies, while they do not generally invoke the divine, contain many of these same elements. These include:

1. Some sort of demonstration of the legal grounding of the ceremony — an attestation as to the legal requirements being satisfied and that the person who is the focus of the ceremony is ready and prepared
2. Some sort of symbol of a transformative, usually divine blessing. In a coronation, this is the process of anointing. In baptism, it is the sprinkling of holy water on the head of the child. In a knighting, it is the act of dubbing. In SCA ceremonies, divine sanction is often replaced by that of the Crown, Society, or people. In the period aesthetic, the person undergoes transformation to the new state at this point.
3. Oaths or promises made by the person going through the ceremony (or proxies) in the presence of God, sometimes involving ceremonial objects or relics. As

above, in SCA ceremonies the divine is usually replaced by the Crown, Society, or people.

4. Investiture. This is where the person undergoing the ceremony receives some symbol of their new status, usually permanent, visible, and in some way traditional. In a Coronation, these objects are the Crown and other royal regalia. In marriage, the traditional symbols are the rings. In the SCA, as relates to peerages, we have medallions, rings, cloaks, belts, spurs, and other such objects, often governed by each kingdom's unique traditions.

With that in mind, let's look at peerage ceremonies. Most peerage ceremonies contain a few common elements:

- 1) The person who originally begged the boon (or a stand-in, if for some reason that person is unavailable) will restate the boon. (This is sometimes omitted, particularly if it has already been done multiple times)
- 2) The Order will be called in and asked whether the candidate is acceptable
- 3) The candidate will be called in.
- 4) Usually, various people will attest to the peerlike qualities of the person. More on that in a moment.
- 5) If the candidate is in a dependent relationship, that relationship may be publicly ended at this point. (Sometimes this is done privately).
- 6) The candidate will make oaths or promises—usually including giving counsel to the crown, training of dependents, and continuing to increase their labours. Other promises may be included that are specific to the Order.
- 7) The Crown will elevate the candidate and bestow regalia. In Ealdormere, for Knights, this normally includes belt, hereditary Ealdormere chain, spurs, and sometimes a sword. For Masters, the baldric and sword are bestowed. For Laurels, a medallion, the hereditary Ealdormere ring, and other regalia (cloak, hood, Laurel wreath) are presented. For Pelicans, the hereditary Ealdormere medallion and other regalia (cloak, hood, cap of maintenance) are presented. For the Masters of Defense, the hereditary collar, knotted cord, and other regalia (sword, garter, cloak, etc.) are presented.
- 8) If the new Peer is a knight, he/she will do homage and swear fealty. If a Pelican, Laurel or Defense, he/she may choose to swear fealty.
- 9) The scroll (if present) is read.
- 10) The new Peer is greeted by the members of the Order.

As mentioned above, a common feature of peerage ceremonies is the attestation of others as to one's peerlike qualities—which when compared with period models provides the legal grounding for the ceremony to take place. You will sometimes hear of "three peer" or "four peer" ceremonies -- now "four peer" and "five peer", with the addition of the Order of Defense. The "four peer" ceremony usually includes members of the Chivalry, Laurel, Defense and Pelican, while the "five peer" variety adds a Royal

peer or a member of the Order of the Rose. The reasoning behind these multi-peer ceremonies is that a new Peer is becoming not just a member of a single Order, but a Peer of the Society, and is expected to exhibit familiarity with martial activities, arts and sciences, and service regardless of which Order he or she joins. Some ceremonies have expanded upon the four/five peers to include statements from other members of the populace who are familiar with the person being elevated. I have seen up to eighteen people speak in a ceremony. Still others have featured just a single speaker.

The choice of speakers and what a candidate wishes their speakers to do is up to her/him. However, from a ceremonial standpoint, it is best if statements are kept succinct (especially if there are more than four or five speakers), that respect for the audience and the Crown is kept in mind, and that the speakers know in advance what order they will be called upon to speak. This helps the ceremony flow properly and avoids uncomfortable gaps.

### **Ceremony models**

One of the challenging parts of creating a peerage ceremony is that aside for a few descriptions of elevation to late period chivalric Orders, we do not have any extant period ceremonies to draw upon as models. So when someone says "I want a 13<sup>th</sup> century English Laurel ceremony," what this has to mean, from a scripting standpoint, that someone wants a ceremony that would be in keeping with that culture and time period, and possibly with what the person is being recognized for. How were leaders or nobility recognized within that particular era and culture? What can we draw from history or literature or legal documents or even artwork that may help us give the ceremony flavor? Were there guilds or other groups that recognized mastery? Were there court positions for poets? How would a warleader or trusted advisor be recognized? Are there other ceremonies or rituals for that culture that might lend flavor? In some of these cases, we may not have a ceremony, but we may have an idea of oaths that were sworn.

The best way to illustrate this is to take a look at some ceremonies I have written over the years:

Ceremony based on the inception of a university master: Nicolaa, Finnvarr (in Latin), Albrecht. In this case, I had a verbal description of the process one would go through when incepting (being promoted) as a master in a medieval university.

Ceremony with oath based on the Oaths of the London Masters of Defense: Jocelyn. Here, I had the text of the oaths, which was quite extensive and a lot of fun. It needed just a little bit of adaptation.

Guild ceremonies: Genevieve, Rachael, Emma, Lucrece. These were all based on descriptions of guilds plus an actual account of what was required to advance to master in a 15<sup>th</sup> century tailor's guild

Guild ceremony + alchemical secrets: Marguerite. Based on the same guild ceremony as above, but I had the speakers attest to various "secrets" (with alchemical symbols) of how a substance would be changed and purified through alchemy.

Ceremony based around a (Norse-ish) lawsuit: Eyrny. Based loosely on Icelandic law cases, with a speaker demanding justice for a candidate, witnesses being called, etc.

Ceremony based on Venetian processions and guilds: Asa. Venetian history provided a great deal of detail of their love for pageantry and procession. The candidate processed up the centre aisle, through crossed swords that opened with each attestation to her worth. Lots of banners and bling.

Ceremony based on the marriage ceremony: Alais. Her vigil and ceremony was based around the idea of a peasant wedding, so I used the wedding liturgy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Book of Common Prayer and adapted it to a single person making oaths rather than two.

Ceremony based on the late Russian concept of *Mestnichestvo*: Varenko. *Mestnichestvo* was the concept of rank in the court of Ivan the Terrible, and it was considered a great insult to be denied the rank and privileges one was entitled to through rank and birth. (I have written relatively few knightings, as they're the best attested in extant ceremonies, but Varenko wanted something specifically Russian).

Ceremony based on the Order of the Golden Fleece + adapted section from Gawain and the Green Knight on virtues: Colyne. I had a translation of the Golden Fleece ceremony (from an actual 15<sup>th</sup> century herald) that set up the basic structure of the ceremony and oath. For the speakers, I "filked" the part in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight where it talks about Gawain's arms and virtues to talk about Colyne's instead, which was inspired by his own "filking" of period chivalric literature.

Ceremony with poetry of the "defense of the liberal arts" – 12<sup>th</sup> century style – Wencenedl. Cenedl wanted a 12<sup>th</sup> century ceremony, which is pre-guild and just at the beginning of the university era. I wrote a multi-stanza poem based the defense of the liberal arts which was "performed" before the speakers spoke.

Ceremony based on the Irish traditions around the rank of ollamh + other Irish customs related to high status – Medb. I found quite a lot around the creation of the

ollamh (teacher in the bardic tradition), a high Irish court position, along with information about what rights were given to high-ranking Irish people.

Ceremonies based on Rus'/Russian oaths and culture: Xristina, Keja. Based on translations of text by Sofya la Rus, including the use of icons, bells, and other Russian elements.

Ceremony based on nine Virtues (Norse) with adapted poetry: Gaerwen. I took the poem describing nine things a Norse person should know and re-wrote it to suit things that Gaerwen did.

Ceremony based on the seven Virtues: Nicolaa, Tsvia. My own ceremony was based on the struggle of virtue vs. vice. Tsvia's was an evolution of that ceremony.

Ceremony based on works of chroniclers/historians: Milica. Milica was best known for her work as a Chronicler at several levels, so I used excerpts from a number of classical and medieval period writers/historians to frame the ceremony.

Ceremony based on Japanese promotion in rank: Gwendyon. There are accounts specifically referring to the recognition of master artisans plus promotions in status.

Ceremony based on the Persian court and protocols: Rozalynd. The colour in this ceremony was added by using Persian terms of address and titles (in Arabic), along with references to specific clothing denoting high rank.

Ceremony based around gaming and gambling: Eirik. The initial part of this ceremony is pure schtick and involves gambling with TRM over the candidate, who owes his Pelican gambling debts. Once that is completed, it resolves into a standard ceremony.

Practical tips and questions to ask while drafting the ceremony:

1. Does the candidate want a low-fuss or standard ceremony? This is the most important first question to ask. Some folks do not want fancy, or do not like to be the centre of attention. In these cases, simply making sure the basic ceremony is tweaked to meet the person's needs is all that needs to happen.
2. If the candidate wants a custom ceremony, what is most important? Authenticity in the ceremony itself? Incorporating friends or family? A particular culture? Music? Concepts or ideals (e.g. virtues and vices)? Take note of the requirements, and then start looking for information to help flesh out these ideas. Talk to other people with similar interests. What can be found using your Google-Fu?

3. Has anyone else (or you) done a similar ceremony before? Can that ceremony be adapted?
4. Are the Royalty on board with what you want to do? How far ahead of time do they need the ceremony text?

Once you have the basics down...

1. Take a look at the four components of period ceremonies mentioned above. The three that are almost always present in SCA ceremonies are the legal grounding, the oath, and investiture. The second element, the transformative, can be separate (as in dubbing) or can be implicit when the oath is given. Some kingdoms are expanding the concept of dubbing to other Orders outside the Chivalry, sometimes using a scepter in place of a sword for peaceful Orders.
2. You are scripting a dramatic presentation. How will the audience be involved? How will you make sure they can see and hear the ceremony? Will this ceremony take place indoors or outdoors? How much space do you have? Is there an elevated stage? Will there be sufficient space in the front for the Order? What needs to be added to the ceremony regarding stage directions? What items are needed, and who will have them? Is a center aisle required? Are chairs required? Will musicians play processional music, and what is their cue? If the candidate is processing, what is their cue to form up? What are the cues for the speakers?
3. Lay out the basic structure of the ceremony, as mentioned at the beginning of this article. Then begin inserting the various elements.
4. Who will the speakers be? How many? How will you call them or frame this section? Getting the speakers on board with the ceremony is often the forgotten step, and speakers will turn a ceremony from words to reality. Generally, avoid having them speak pre-written material; give that to the herald to introduce or frame the speakers. If you are worried about wordy speakers, a great technique is to give them something to speak to – a virtue, for example. This can be chosen by them. The idea is to avoid long rambling reminiscences or “no sh\*t, there we were” stories in the midst of a ceremony.
5. Large or difficult blocks of words are best given to the herald or another person to read. Make sure you keep what the Royalty say short, and preferably not involving foreign languages they do not speak.
6. If you put in a release of a candidate by the Peer, do not script this. It will happen as it happens.
7. Generally, the Crown then states their intent to elevate and asks for an oath or promise. What will the oath be like? What does the candidate want to promise to do? Is it important that it be a promise (rather than an oath)? Does the candidate want to swear on “relics” or something else (such as a book or the medallion of the order, etc.)? In Ealdormere, this oath is not normally done on the Sword of State, but this may differ in other kingdoms. Always make sure to clear the oath

- with the candidate before the ceremony. He/she needs to know what is being promised.
8. What kind of regalia will be bestowed? How will this be done? Who will have it, and what are their cues? Who will have any legacy items, and when will those be presented?
  9. Does the candidate want/need to swear fealty? Make sure the proper oath is part of the ceremony.
  10. Can you get the scroll text ahead of time? (It's particularly effective if the text and the ceremony support each other).

Once you have a draft, read it over a few times, and then ask at least one other person to read it again. Next step is to get it to Their Majesties. Once they have confirmed, get it to the person heralding court (if it's not you), speakers and all other involved parties, as well as the candidate (if there are surprises, with those parts redacted). Be ready to answer questions and/or adjust.

On the day of the ceremony, bring extra copies to the event (I usually bring at least five) with large text in case of emergencies. If you're heralding, spend some time reading it through one last time to catch any errors. Also, confirm the final blocking for the ceremony, including the setup of the hall, the participants (do they know what they are saying, and where they need to stand), all regalia or props (who has them or where will they be placed) and any other "wild card" items you might run across that may impact the ceremony.

Then, enjoy the moment and the opportunity you have been afforded to create something unique in the Society.

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A few useful resources:

The SCA Authentic Ceremonial Facebook Group

D'A.J.D Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown: The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe, 1325-1520*. New York, 2000. This very dense and information-packed book includes information on some of the actual extant period ceremonies we do have.

"A Study of the London Masters of Defense", <http://iceweasel.org/lmod.html>. Includes the oaths the Masters swore.

MP Davies, *The Tailors of London and their Guild, 1300-1500*, <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:577c6a65-92cb-4f30-b4fd-e123096dbf43/datastreams/ATTACHMENT1>. This doctoral thesis covers the Guild in some depth, including qualifications for becoming a master.

The Internet Medieval Sourcebook has a number of documents relating to guilds, including charters: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/search/index.asp?q=guild>

My ceremonies archive: Including texts for Peerage ceremonies I have written and some source material:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BykFg7PIKkCqdIVSZIV3eGFXd00>