



the society for creative anachronism, inc.



**Sign**



**Herald's**



**Handbook**



December 2014

Copyright 2014 - The Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

This handbook is an official corporate publication of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to researching and recreating the customs, combat, and courtesy of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Copies of this document can be ordered from SCA Marketplace, PO Box 360789, Milpitas, CA 95036-0789.

Members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc. may photocopy this work in whole or in part for SCA use provided copyright credit is given and no changes are made to the text. The contents of this document will be posted at <http://www.sca.org> and further reproduction on other internet sites is expressly forbidden.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	4
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
1.1. What is a Sign/Silent Herald?.....	5
1.2. Who Uses Sign Language?.....	5
1.3. Who "Employs" Sign Heralds?.....	5
1.3.1. Royalty & Nobility.....	5
1.3.2. Vocal Heralds.....	5
1.3.3. Members of the Populace.....	6
2. OFFICE REQUIREMENTS.....	6
2.1. Sign Heralds Are Heralds.....	6
2.2. Minimum Competency.....	6
3. GUIDELINES.....	6
3.1. Signers or Interpreters.....	6
3.2. Basic Skills Necessary.....	6
4. COURT HERALDRY.....	7
4.1. Deference to the Office.....	7
4.2. Signing for Court.....	7
4.2.1. Attending an Event.....	7
4.2.2. Preparing for Court.....	7
4.2.3. Voice of the Crown.....	8
4.2.4. Sign Everything Heard.....	8
4.2.5. After Court.....	8
5. OTHER HERALDRY.....	8
6. BEST PRACTICES.....	9
6.1. Saving Seats.....	9
6.2. Look Where the Action is Happening.....	9
6.3. Tabards.....	9
6.4. Quality Assurance.....	9
6.5. Sign Heralds Self-Monitor.....	10
7. KINGDOM DEPUTIES.....	10
7.1. Finite Resources.....	10
7.2. Prioritizing Events.....	10
7.3. Warranting Heralds.....	10
7.4. Available Resources.....	10
APPENDICES.....	12
Appendix A: Definitions.....	12

## **PREFACE**

There have been people signing for people with difficulty hearing at events in the SCA for decades, friends helping friends, others seeing a need and filling it. Signs were shared, written down, and learned. The term Silent Herald was coined, and a badge was registered.

Signing happened from the desire to serve and assist others in participation, albeit, for the most part, unorganized and haphazard. There were so many pioneers in this endeavor, too numerous to name them all. People had a vision to include everyone regardless of hearing status.

Then in June 2014, the office of Silent Herald Deputy was created under the auspices of the Laurel Sovereign of Arms. The Signers had a permanent home at long last. We were designated officially as Heralds.

This is the first Society Handbook for Sign/Silent Heralds. Within these pages are many years of experience, gathered from a variety of sources around the Known World, from talking to many people of differing hearing status, and from listening to comments of the Sign/Silent Heraldry community. No set of rules is perfect but hopefully this stands as a good beginning.

Remember burnout is insidious... Have FUN!

Done by my hand this December 2014.

Nesscia inghean Chearnaigh  
Silent Herald Deputy to  
Laurel Sovereign of Arms

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. What is a Sign/Silent Herald?

In the SCA there are several types of heralds. Some use their heads, such as book heralds; some use their voices, such as cry heralds; some use their hands, such as sign/silent heralds. The term Sign Herald and Silent Herald are used interchangeably and mean the same thing. The various heraldic positions allow a variety of people to serve in a variety of ways, picking one or more of the heraldic disciplines in which to work.

Sign heralds are closest in nature to vocal heralds, although their duties sometimes can take them into venues other than court or field. Sign heralds in the society are heralds who express auditory information into visual and/or tactile information. Sign heralds use sign language, lip movements, facial expression, gestures, and body language to convey what they hear, this is the visual part. As well, there are some members of the populace who require the sign herald to make signs into the person's hands, this is the tactile part. (See Appendix A: Definitions)

## 1.2. Who Uses Sign Language?

According to the Gallaudet Research Institute, approximately 14% of the population in the United States has "trouble hearing," which means approximately one out of seven people need assistance understanding auditory information. While these people may not be "deaf" and may or may not be fluent in sign language, sign heralds can still assist them.

Sometimes sign heralds are told there does not seem to be a need for their service, or it does not appear that there are any Deaf people in attendance. While sign heralds serve the Deaf Community (approximately 0.2% of the population whose primary mode of communication is sign language), there are others who use this service. There are deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing members of the populace who know enough sign language to benefit from a sign herald, but don't use sign language as their primary mode of communication. At times, these people don't want anyone to know they have difficulty hearing. That is their right and choice.

Periodically, a sign herald may find themselves in the position of being asked who in the populace needs their service. Saying something simple with courtesy, helps deflect questions when the answer is confidential. For example: "My honor dictates that I not make public that which someone has deemed private," generally lets people know that the information they asked for is confidential without sounding rude.

Anyone desiring more specific information regarding the sign-using population in a certain Kingdom should talk to the kingdom Sign Herald or the Kingdom Principal Herald.

## 1.3. Who "Employs" Sign Herald?

### 1.3.1. ROYALTY & NOBILITY

Since hearing impaired people attend court, the Crown or Noble may have sign heralds in attendance to supplement the vocal court herald and act as the voice of the Crown for those who cannot hear the vocal court herald. Sign heralds convey information, primarily through sign, to the broadest audience possible regardless of the audience's degree of deafness.

### 1.3.2. VOCAL HERALDS

When on site at SCA events whether on the list field or for announcements, sign heralds work with vocal heralds to convey information, primarily through sign, to the broadest audience possible, regardless of their degree of hearing loss.

### 1.3.3. MEMBERS OF THE POPULACE

Sometimes Deaf members of the populace will make a specific request for the sign herald to sign for a class or part of an event.

## 2. OFFICE REQUIREMENTS

### 2.1. Sign Heralds Are Heralds

Sign heralds are treated the same as any other herald. They work for and are under the auspices of the Kingdom or Principality Herald. That herald may create a sign herald deputy to assist him/her in working with sign heralds in their kingdom. The Kingdom or Principality Herald may require that a sign herald be warranted as per Kingdom or Principality laws or customs. The Kingdom or Principality Herald also can create their own reporting requirements.

Copies of Kingdom or Principality reports pertaining to sign heraldry should be forwarded to the Society Sign Herald Deputy.

Remember, you are all heralds, and you have to work together to best do your job.

Please talk to your Kingdom or Principality's Herald for further information about specifics for your Kingdom.

### 2.2. Minimum Competency

Sign heralds must have at least a basic knowledge of fingerspelling and SCA signs. Kingdoms may create rules setting forth minimum standards of competency; however, such rules cannot require a sign herald to have an interpreter license or certification to act as a sign herald (warranted or not.) Any rules for competency do not grant any status for the sign herald outside of the SCA

Each kingdom establishes minimum standards for heralds in their kingdom based on the populations they serve. As a sign herald, talk to your Kingdom Principal Herald for additional resources and requirements for your area.

## 3. GUIDELINES

### 3.1. Signers or Interpreters

In the SCA, a signer can be a sign herald. While some sign heralds are interpreters in the modern world, other sign heralds are signers. (See Appendix A: Definitions)

There is a place for everyone who wants to serve. If you wish to become a sign herald, talk to your kingdom Sign Herald Deputy or Kingdom Principal Herald for more information specific to your kingdom.

### 3.2. Basic Skills Necessary

As a sign herald, you need to have some knowledge about sign language (regardless of if that is American Sign Language or some form of Signed English). Your knowledge can be as basic as knowing the manual alphabet or as complex as full knowledge of sign language with its syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. As a sign herald, you are expected to use facial expression, body language, lip movements, and signs to convey meaning. You need to have the basic ability to understand the gist of what is signed to you, and the ability to convey the gist of information you hear. Also, you may put auditory information onto your mouth for members of the populace who lip read. You should be familiar with signs specific to the SCA, and with signs only used within your kingdom.

As a herald, you are held to the same standards and have the same responsibilities as vocal heralds in the SCA. You must maintain a high level of confidentiality. As well, you must accurately convey information, content, intent, and mood, to the best of your ability, in the language understood by the populace, and admit when you have made a mistake. During court, remove facial jewelry or cover tattoos that may detract from the medieval experience of the populace watching you. Wear a tabard or other clothing to both identify yourself as a sign herald on duty and in order to make yourself seen by the people who understand sign. You have to be willing to work with others, attend meetings, make notes, see scrolls if offered to you, and discuss the program lineup.

## 4. COURT HERALDRY

### 4.1. Deference to the Office

Like all heralds, you serve at the pleasure of the Crown. Regardless of your personal feelings for any Royalty or Nobility, They should be treated with the deference and respect due Their station. You may need to reassure Them that as a sign herald, you are there to assist and augment Them and Their court herald not to detract from Court or the event. Your sign heraldry is a service that the Crown of any kingdom provides to Their populace. Sign heralding during court is at the Crown's pleasure.

If you are unable to sign for the duration of an event, priority should be directed towards providing sign heraldry during court.

### 4.2. Signing for Court

#### 4.2.1. ATTENDING AN EVENT

Depending on Kingdom customs, when you are at an event as a sign herald, you should immediately contact the Crown's chamberlain, head retainer or the Court Herald to inform them of this and to offer your services. IT IS THE CROWN'S PREROGATIVE TO LET YOU BE A HERALD IN THEIR COURT. If a Crown refuses your services, do what you can to assist the members of the populace who want sign language used, but do not try to take over court. Likewise, do not countermand the Crown and just show up in court regardless and start signing. It is discourteous to the Crown and no matter what your opinion, we are a medieval society where the Crown has authority over Their Courts. (This is true for all courts, Principality and Baronial as well.)

For Kingdom events where you know ahead of time that there will be a Royal Court, it is good to inform the Crown and Chamberlain you will be in attendance, and ask if you may assist.

#### 4.2.2. PREPARING FOR COURT

To prepare for court, with the Crown's approval, you should attend the court meeting. Like other heralds, you should review the order of court or the court docket, review scroll texts, and most importantly the names of the recipients so you can spell them easily. This is also the time to ask the Crown or Court Herald if you as the sign herald will process into court with the Court Herald. This is also the time to work with the Crown or Court Herald to arrange to stand in a position where you can be most easily seen in court. Please note again, courts are the Crown's prerogative. You can ask for what you want but remember the Crown's preferences and demands must be followed.

Also remember that you may need to have the ability to move between a couple different places to accomplish your task, and/or bring a small light to aid in being seen after dark. There are two critical points for sign communication to happen: 1. You as a sign herald have to hear enough of what is happening to understand, so you have to be close to the speaker/s; 2. you as a sign herald have to be seen by the people who use sign to help understand, therefore sightline and lighting are crucial.

Even if you are a beginner, there are three things you need to sign to help make awards during court less befuddling: name of the recipient, name of the award, and the reason for the award. As well, consider future event announcements, the primary things you need to convey for future events are: name of the event/contact person, type/reason for the event, date/location of the event.

### 4.2.3. VOICE OF THE CROWN

As sign heralds, you are the voice of the Crown. Your primary duty is to the Crown, conveying the content and intent of Their Voice, primarily through sign, to the broadest audience possible. You conduct yourself with the decorum and dignity of Their office, mirroring what the Royals are doing, without adding or subtracting information.

It is the Court Herald's responsibility to ensure that courts have the majesty appropriate to the Crown's station. Court Herald's are the voice of the Crown. The needs of the Royalty (or Their representatives) are first and foremost. Members of the populace in the SCA recognize the organizational hierarchy and should not take precedence over the Crown. While your responsibility is to communicate information to the populace, always remember that the Crown's preferences rule.

### 4.2.4. SIGN EVERYTHING HEARD

As you sign herald court, you need to sign everything you hear unless it is a private conversation. If the Crown is having a private conversation, (a good way to judge this is if the front row can't or is struggling to hear what is being said) then you indicate that the Crown is in a private conversation. Also, if the Crown talks to the award recipient while scroll text is being read, then you should sign the scroll text.

When you are working as a sign herald in court and are called before Royalty, you should sign that you have been called into court, stop signing, and present yourself. As a courtesy, you should sign a summary of what happened as soon as you get back to work.

As a sign herald, you should sign in a manner that will communicate information to the broadest possible audience. The addition of lip movements can be used as well. If there is a Kingdom Sign Herald, they are in the best position to determine if one particular sign system should be used in various parts of their kingdom.

### 4.2.5. AFTER COURT

When court is over, the tabard is off, and all the appropriate salutations are made, then you should consider what you think went well, or not so well, and why. Dependent on what the protocol is for your kingdom, you can contact a senior sign herald for assistance.

## 5. OTHER HERALDRY

As a sign herald, you work with vocal heralds, primarily as a team, working with them to discuss placement and other considerations. You will sometimes work on the tournament field, at the entrance to an event, making announcements, and at various other places/times during an event.

At times, you will also work with the Marshallate. Listen to and work with them to make sure that you are safe and do not cause disruptions to combat. Likewise, you may need to help the marshals and teach them how to communicate with hearing impaired fighters.

As a sign herald, position yourself and sign in a manner to reach the broadest audience possible, and be flexible about repeating what was signed. As well, there will be a variety of other voices you will hear. The key is to use your best judgment, when there is more than one voice, to convey the primary information in the manner in which it was intended.

There are other venues where your sign services may sometimes be requested by a member of the populace whose primary mode of communication is sign language. Then your primary focus is on the needs of the person requesting service, to do your best to convey information in the language used by that person. Signing for a class is an example of a specific request.

While at a large event, such as a war, you may be on call by letting those in charge know you are on site, or you may be requested at event gate.

Consideration should be given to these requests while remembering that at times there are not enough sign heralds to meet all the demands of time and energy.

As well, you may endeavor to educate members of the populace as to the role of the sign herald, how to work with a sign herald, SCA specific signs, etc.

## 6. BEST PRACTICES

### 6.1. Saving Seats

Saving seats for members of the populace is up to the members of the populace. As sign heralds, you should empower members of the populace to save their own seats. Sometimes you may have to explain that arriving right before court and expecting people to move from the seats they have saved can cause resentment. Regardless of hearing status, people have the right to sit where they want and to arrive late if they choose.

### 6.2. Look Where the Action is Happening

As a sign herald in court, you should look to where the action is happening, thus redirecting the eye gaze of onlookers to what the Crown is doing.

### 6.3. Tabards

Sign heralds wear tabards when working to identify themselves as sign heralds on duty. Tabards can be made in the kingdom colors or the green for heraldry, and include the sign herald badge (outside the signing space) as an identifying mark, so members of the populace who use sign herald services can easily identify who will be signing. Tabards also allow a solid color background in the signing space so the signs can be seen more clearly. As a sign herald, wear your tabard when on duty and take it off when not on duty.

If you are working as a sign herald and are called before Royalty, (and there is no other sign herald to switch with you) inform the populace that you have been called into court, and let the audience know you will sign what happened as soon as you get back. Then stop signing, remove your tabard, and present yourself to the Royalty. After Their business is concluded, you put your tabard back on, reposition yourself, summarize what happened, and continue signing court. Members of the populace who have been involved in the SCA for any length of time understand the hierarchy and protocol of the SCA when it comes to the Crown. This acknowledgement of the hierarchy of the Royal prerogative is paramount.

### 6.4. Quality Assurance

Without having training as an evaluator, it is difficult to assess another's qualifications. Kingdoms cannot require a Sign herald to take a modern test to prove qualifications. Generally, for the purposes of the SCA, requiring a formal assessment is not necessary, because if a mistake is made, there is no harm involved.

To use the words 'assessment' or 'interview' or any form of the word 'test' you have to be able to give quantifiable feedback. Such as, "You make your 'K' with your palm facing toward yourself, to be correct

the "K" is made palm out" or "You used the wrong sign parameters for the sign MOTHER, the correct parameters for MOTHER are xyz." Using subjective words like skill, qualified, competent, expertise, is giving an opinion.

If silent heralds appear to not be doing well linguistically, each kingdom can have a process by which the people depending on the silent herald can speak with the Deputy Sign Herald for that kingdom. At that time, the Deputy has documentation that the sign herald needs more classes or training. As well, dependent on the norms of each kingdom's student/teacher roles, and availability of sign heralds in each kingdom, each kingdom can set up some sort of mentoring process.

### **6.5. Sign Herald's Self-Monitor**

You as a sign herald can monitor yourself. For example: when you are signing at an event, someone can video you (making sure you are the only one in the frame, with near complete frontal view), and create six to eight videos approximately five or six minutes long. After the event, you can then take the videos, with the sound off, and write down everything you see yourselves sign, essentially transcribing/glossing (what you call it when you write one language in another) the video. Then, with the sound on, you can check to see if what was said was what you really signed. This allows you to request help and improve the quality of your signing. The kingdom Deputy can suggest people to watch your video and assist with transcription/glossing.

## **7. KINGDOM DEPUTIES**

Every kingdom is different, every kingdom has its own traditions and populations and norms. If you are the Kingdom Sign Herald Deputy for your kingdom, in conjunction with that kingdom's Principal Herald, you will have to weigh what will work for your individual kingdom.

### **7.1. Finite Resources**

While the ultimate goal would be to have a plentiful supply of sign heralds at every event, the fact is, not every event will have any sign heralds in attendance, and at some events only one sign herald will be available to provide services. Most kingdoms have a small variety of limited resources available. Every attempt should be made to provide services wherever possible. It is up to your discretion as Kingdom Sign Herald Deputy to assist in making these arrangements and in determining the best use of local resources and where to send a sign herald when specific requests are made.

### **7.2. Prioritizing Events**

When there are conflicting events on the same date, and no specific request has been submitted, sending the sign herald to the event at which the Crown holds court should be given priority. After providing for the need of the Crown, the next priority is given to field heraldry, so that the largest number of the populace receives the information given by vocal heralds. Then you can turn your attention to individual requests.

### **7.3. Warranting Herald's**

Depending on the norms and customs of the individual kingdoms, some kingdoms warrant heralds. In this case, kingdoms may warrant sign heralds following the same basic procedures and protocol they use for other heralds. Kingdoms may not require modern licensure or certification to obtain a warrant as a sign herald, even though some sign heralds may have them.

### **7.4. Available Resources**

As the kingdom Sign Herald Deputy, you should be aware of resources available so the sign heralds in your kingdom can improve. Depending on the norms and customs of your kingdom, mentoring relationships can be set up to assist new sign heralds in attaining the standard set for your kingdom.

Having videos and teaching tools available to people who are in isolated situations but wanting to learn is key. And it is highly recommended to have videos available of kingdom specific signs as well as having any frozen text ceremonies available for sign heralds to practice.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Definitions**

#### **SIGNER**

A signer generally has knowledge of signs, anything from knowing a manual alphabet to fluent signing. They may or may not understand that there is a difference in languages. They may or may not have had training in interpreting. A signer may or may not have passed any tests, or screenings to qualify as an interpreter, they may or may not hold any licenses to practice interpreting in various states.

Signers generally know enough sign to give the gist (or more) of what is happening during events. These signers can take classes and get better and help in the SCA. Signers should not call themselves interpreters.

Signers are able to interact, receive awards, and participate in all SCA related activities. They assist in communication of language and SCA culture, working with Royalty, other heralds, and members of the populace. Sign heralds are participants in the SCA who have a unique skill set to offer.

#### **INTERPRETER**

Interpreters are professionals who work between two complete languages and cultures to provide communication access to both groups. Interpreters work between the predominant spoken language of their country and the signed language of the Deaf Community in that country, i.e.: in the United States the predominant spoken language is English and the Deaf Community in the United States uses American Sign Language.

Interpreters have generally studied for years, and have a complex understanding of the syntax, structure, and language as well as the culture of the Deaf Community in their geographical area. They are able to convey vocabulary, context, emotions, and ideas from one language and fully convey that information into a different language easily and freely.

In many states there is licensure. If you want to interpret in that state, you must have a license. As well, there is national certification and/or state credentials. The national organization for interpreters, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), and the National Association of the Deaf sets the bar for interpreter standards and qualifications through national certification in the United States. Many states have their own screening processes, too.

Credentialed and/or licensed interpreters generally have the training and qualifications necessary to go in to a variety of situations and are able to smoothly facilitate communication between two languages and cultures. They generally earn (at least part of) their living from interpreting skills. For more information see the standard practice paper the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf has published.

As well, interpreters follow a code of professional conduct and are non-participants. They do not interact, receive awards, or participate in SCA related activities beyond their primary role of facilitating communication and cross-cultural interactions. People in the role of professional interpreters are not participants in the SCA.

### SIGN HERALDS

While some sign heralds are interpreters in the modern world, other sign heralds are signers.

Signers generally know enough sign to give the gist (or more) of what is happening during events. These signers can take classes and get better and help in the SCA. Signers should not call themselves interpreters.

In the SCA, a signer can be a sign herald. A sign herald is a herald who signs. Where, when, and how sign heraldry happens is dependent on the kingdom norms. Since there are interpreter licensure laws in various states, don't call a sign herald an interpreter and subject them to the possible ramifications of that title, signers are not interpreters. As well, dependent on the norms of each kingdom student/teacher roles, and availability of sign heralds in each kingdom, each kingdom can set up some sort of mentoring process.

**The relationships between  
Signers, Interpreters, and Sign Herald**

