

Build a Better Heraldic Tabard

It is a sobering thought to realise that while the SCA College of Heraldry spends many hours researching and encouraging appropriate heraldic display in the populace, the members spend relatively little time on their own display.

The design below was one I developed for Crux Australis Herald's tabard, which I researched and made for the Kingdom of Lochac's first Coronation. It is no harder to make than most of the tabards around and is a lot more authentic!

Considerations

- The tabard design should be based on historical examples
- The materials should be both historically and theatrically appropriate
- The construction should be sturdy
- The decoration should be historically appropriate and provide a suitably rich effect
- The tabard may need to be wearable by heralds who may vary widely in size and shape :)
- The tabard may need to be cleaned periodically.

Historical Notes

The Tabard or Houce (heuk) des Armes originated as a standard item of military clothing. Although it went out of fashion in the late 15th century, it remained the standard costume of the herald until our current day.



Fig 1 Garter King of Arms, c1415



Fig 2 Sicilian Herald, c.1420



Fig 3 Burgundian Herald, mid 15thc



Fig 4 Garter King of Arms, c1420



Fig 5 Brandenburg Herald, Mid 15th c



Fig 6 Book of the Tournament of King Rene c1450



Fig 7 German Herald, late 15thc



Fig 8 Spanish Herald, c1510

As can be seen in the many examples here, the tabard was worn over regular clothing – there was no official uniform or any headwear specified for a herald. Lower ranking heralds should always wear the tabard athwart, with the sleeves front and back, to indicate their lower status. Historically this applied to pursuivants; in our case to pursuivants extraordinary and cornets. This practice can be seen on the front heralds in figure 9.



Fig 9 Heralds to Henry VIII



Fig 10 Early 16th C
German Herald



Fig 11 Herald to Roman
Emperor, mid 16thc



Apart from the tabard, there were few symbols of the heraldic office. A short white staff was used as the symbol of the office throughout our period in England, whilst in Germany the heralds bore staffs in the colours of the sovereign. These staffs are seen with round finials and also fleur-des-lys finials.

During the 15th century, some European Kings of Arms wore a half cape of rich fabric, with a appliquéd square on the front, depicting a tournament, as seen in figure 12. I think that our College of Heralds could also consider such items, but let us start with a better tabard!

Fig 12 Herald from Book of the Tournament of King René Mid 15th c

Design

The standard SCA herald's tabard displays the crossed gold trumpets, which are the symbol of the SCA College of Heralds. Historically, a few rare heralds displayed the arms granted to their office, but each King of Arms had a different device - the College of Heralds did not have its own arms. In general, heralds bore the device of their sovereign: the King's voice wore the King's arms. Throughout most of our period, the device was depicted in full on the front and back and on each sleeve (where the sleeves are minimal, this may be reduced to front and back only).

For an SCA group herald, I propose that we adopt this historic approach and make a tabard that bears the appropriate group device in full on front, back and each sleeve. For heralds who are not attached to specific group, the device of the College of Heralds is appropriate – this should again be worn on front, back and both sleeves. It is *not* period practice to quarter the device of the group with the College of Heralds' device, so do not be tempted by this TSCA fashion! Laurel King of Arms has confirmed that the full depiction of arms is now the preferred use within the College.

Fig 13 Crux Australis Herald (photo by the author)



Materials

The materials need to provide a suitable compromise between authenticity, cost and maintenance. A group herald's tabard is more likely to be worn in court, whilst a College of Herald's tabard may see a lot of field use.

Although the extant examples show that higher-ranking heralds wore precious fabric, strict sumptuary laws appear to have been laid down well after our period, in Queen Victoria's time. The historical examples I have seen used a mixture of silk, satin, brocades and velvets, but these are high court examples and there is evidence that a range of fabrics were in use for other ranks, including linens.



Fig 13 and 14 Heraldic tabard from court of Isabella Eugina of Austria Shatzkammer, Vienna (Photos by Author)

Main field divisions and some ordinaries seem to be created by joining the cloth together, with charges appliquéd on top. Many tabards are further enriched by couching down braid or cord along the lines of division and around the charges. The fabric itself may be diapered with embroidery, or even enriched with spangles (sequins) or jewels.

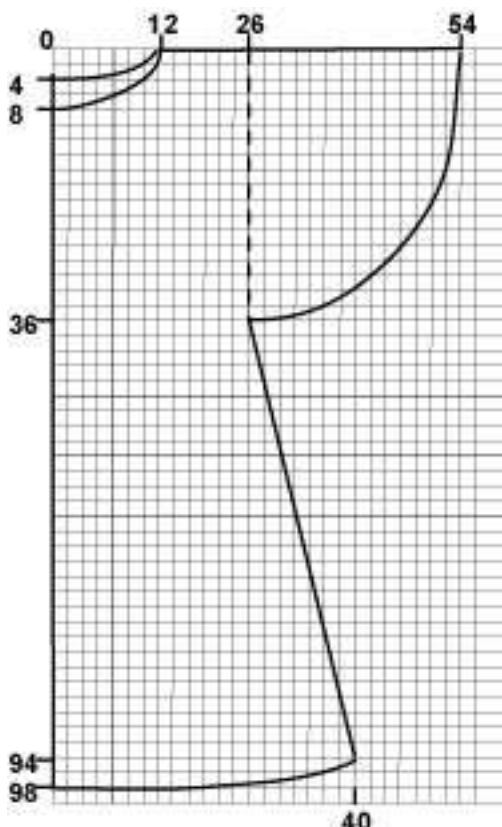
Similar enrichment techniques were also used on less grand fabrics. There is an armorial surcoat from 1240 of appliquéd linen on linen, with the edges outlined in solid chain stitch and the features embroidered on in a darker shade. A similar effect can be seen on the banner in fig 15.

Many tabards are edged with fringing, either in one colour or striped in two colours, as can be seen in figures 5, 8, 10 and 11.

This adds an extra level of richness and indicates the ceremonial nature of the garment.



Fig 15 Gofanon (detail) late 14th c



nature of the garment.

Rich materials would be suitable for any Group herald, but you can also obtain an excellent effect with less expensive materials. I made the Crux Australis tabard for the new Kingdom of Lochac from furnishing brocades, enriched with metal threads, furnishing braids and fringing. The overall affect is rich, as can be seen in figure 13.

For a College tabard, sturdier fabrics might be more practical, although I see no reason not to indulge in finer fabrics if your pockets allow. Try to use fabrics that are appropriate to our period and your persona.

The Pattern

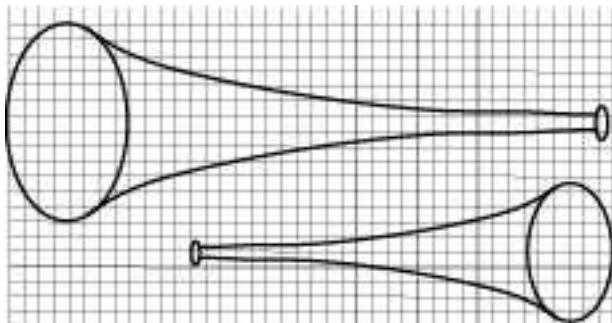
Heralds come in all shapes and sizes! The following dimensions below will work for most heralds and are useful for a group herald's tabard, where the herald will change periodically. You can adapt the pattern to suit your period if you'd prefer, with reference to the illustrations in this article and your own research.

In the tabard pattern shown here, one square = 2cm. You can draw this up on squared paper, or just measure and mark the main points and connect the dots. The pattern does NOT include seam allowance – add 1.5cm all around.

Fig 16 Diagram of Tabard

If you are making a standard (College) herald's tabard, you can mark out the shape directly on your main fabric. Fold the fabric in half or quarters and use tailor's chalk for an erasable line.

If you are making a group tabard, make a full size pattern of the front and one sleeve in cheap fabric or paper, as you will need to draw out the entire device on each piece. As with all heraldic display, make sure that your ordinaries are nice and fat and your charges fill the space. Once you are happy with the design, make full sized patterns of all your ordinaries and charges. If you have a divided field, make patterns for this too. Add 1.5cm for seam allowances on all seams. You do not need seam allowances if you plan to appliqué the pieces on top of a field or ordinary.



Here is a pattern for the standard trumpets - one square = 0.5 cm. You can scale it up using grid paper, or print and enlarge on a photocopier. You need 4 large trumpets to give you a crossed pair for front and back and 4 small ones for the sleeves.

Fig 17 Pattern for Trumpets

The List

For a standard herald's tabard, you will need:

- 2m of 120 or 150cm wide mid green fabric, or 3m of 90cm wide
- 0.5m of golden yellow for trumpets
- Optional 0.65 m of bondweb for trumpets (the easiest option!)
- 2m of 120cm green or gold lining fabric (neat finish, better hang and wear, essential if using fringe or joining main pieces)
- Optional 0.75m of cord-edged braid (piping cord) to finish the neck (neat, hard-wearing finish)
- Optional 7m of braid/cord to outline trumpets (well worth the effort)
- Optional 6.5m of fringing (expensive but fabulous – the thick furnishing variety is best).

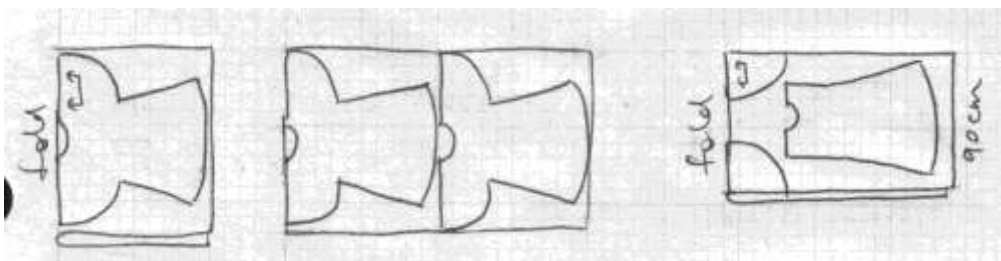


Fig 18 Cutting diagram for tabard.: 120/150cm without nap, 120/150 with nap, 90cm without nap

For a Group Herald tabard, the materials will obviously depend on your design. Refer to your full-scale patterns to work out how much fabric and cord etc you will need. The piping cord, fringing and lining will be the same as above.

If you plan to wash your tabard, make sure all the components are washable before you buy them. Overcast the edges first to avoid fraying, then wash it all before you cut anything out. You should also wash your braids too, since they can shrink more than fabric! Again, make sure then ends are finished, oversewn or knotted first.

If you plan to dry clean only, make sure everything can be dry-cleaned (especially any braids) before you buy anything.

Putting it together

As with designing a device, you start with the field and work up the layers.

Field

For a standard herald's tabard, this is simply a matter of cutting it out, and perhaps sewing on separate sleeves, if you have used narrow fabric to provide your field. The same applies to a Group tabard if the field is a single colour.

If you have a divided field or ordinaries, the simplest approach is to treat the front, back and sleeves as separate units until each is complete, then sew them together at the end.

If the field is divided along a simple line of division, join the pieces of the field and press the seams flat.

For a complicated line of division, the best approach is appliqué. Allow enough extra fabric to have a full overlap for the line of division. Draw the line on the top fabric with tailor's chalk or water soluble marker and follow the instructions under Charges.

Once you have completed your 'field', check that your completed tabard or sections still match your overall pattern and adjust if needed.

Ordinaries

Some ordinaries can be sewn into the field – this works well if you have a fess, bend or chief with a straight line of division. In this case, press both seam allowances to the ordinary side, so it stands out above the field.

If your ordinaries are complex, follow the same technique as Charges.

Mark hems

Once your ordinaries are in place, mark your hems with tailor's chalk, so you can see the limits of your field.

Charges

The easiest approach for charges is Bondweb, or equivalent. Draw the charges onto the top fabric with tailors chalk, then iron the Bondweb to the back of the fabric, following the instructions. Cut out the charges and peel off the backing paper. Iron the charges onto the field fabric and let cool. For a simple finish, machine a close, wide zigzag over the edges to form a satin stitch edge. Alternately, use a more basic zigzag, and then cover the join with braid, or couch down a decorative cord by hand or machine (see below).

Alternately, draw the charges on the top fabric, then cut out, leaving a margin of fabric. Pin very well, ensuring there are no ripples. For a satin stitched edge, straight stitch around the line, trim close to the stitching, then machine a close, wide zigzag over the edges for a satin stitch edge. Alternately, use a basic zigzag, trim and then braid or cord as above.

Embellishment

Period embellishments include embroidery, braid or cord couched along the lines of division and around the charges, spangles, beads and so on. Figs 13 and 14 provide some examples. Details on the charges can be drawn on with tailor's chalk or vanishing (water or air soluble) pen, and sewn over by hand or machine, or further embellished with braid or cord. The ordinaries and fields can also be embellished.

Satouche braid can be sewn down by machine along the centre groove (sew with the threads, like this >>>>). Fine cords can be machined using a zigzag stitch and invisible thread. Heavy cord is best sewn by hand. For a neat finish, take the ends of your cording or braid through to the back of the fabric. Poke a hole through the fabric using an awl. Push a threaded needle through the hole from underneath, loop over the end and pull the to the back. Fray the end to reduce bulk and sew down with a few stitches.

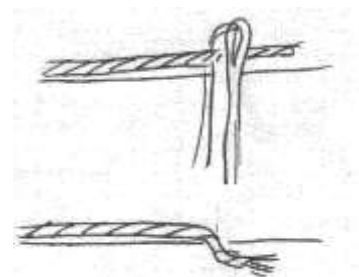
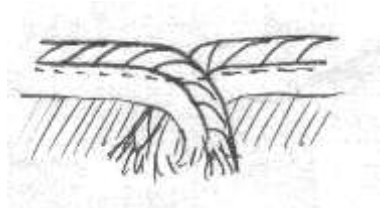


Fig 19 Pulling cord to back of fabric

A College tabard will normally be seen from a distance, so concentrate on those decorations which will give you the best impact for the least cost and effort. A Group tabard will get a lot more close court work, so your efforts will receive more scrutiny. If you are not sure, try out various options using scraps and see how they look close up and at a distance.

Assembly

Once your sections are complete, sew them together (if needed), to complete your outer layer.



Neck

The neck will get a lot of wear, so a row of piping cord will add to both strength and appearance. Pin the piping (cord side in), with the stitching line 1.5cm from the edge. Overlap at the centre back, taking both ends into the seamline for a neat finish. Sew the piping on and remove the pins.

Fig 20 Overlapping piping cord at back of neck

Fringe

Fringing adds an extra level of richness and pomp to a tabard. Pin it around the edge of the tabard, fluffy side in, with the stitching line 1.5cm from the edge. Take care at the corners – clip or fold as needed. Sew the fringe on and remove the pins.

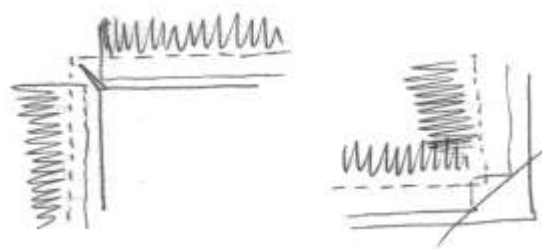


Fig 21 Applying fringing – inside and outside corners

Lining

Lining is the simplest finish and will make the tabard look and wear better. One option to consider for a Group tabard is to make a standard College tabard as the lining, giving you two for the price of one (almost!).



Fig 22 Clip corners before turning

Lay out the finished tabard on the lining fabric (right sides together) and cut the lining to match. Don't cut out the neck just yet. Pin the lining to the tabard, right sides together. If you added fringing, sew over the same stitching line for the neatest finish. Clip carefully at the corners and turn out through the neck. Pull all the hems out and press well. Now cut out the lining at the neck to match. Clip and turn under the neck lining, then hand sew to the neck edge.

After all your hard work, you might want to put a name tape in with a contact phone number/email address. Cleaning instructions are probably a useful precaution too, especially if it is a Group tabard.

Finally, press the whole thing and you are ready to take your next court or field job in style.

Bibliography

Boucher, Francois *A History of Costume in the West* Thames & Hudson, NY: 1987

Fox-Davies, Arthur Charles *Heraldic Designs* Bracken Books, London: 1988

Fox-Davies, Arthur Charles *Complete Guide to Heraldry* Bonanza Books, NY: 1909 Reprinted 1978

Houston, Mary G *Medieval Costume in England and France 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries* A&C Black, London: 1939

Neubecker, Otfried, *Heraldry Sources, Symbols and Meaning* Macdonald & James, Great Britain: 1977

Norris, Herbert *Medieval Costume and Fashion* Dover, NY: 1999

Mistress Rowan Perigryne

Robyn Spencer 2003