

Collegium AS XXXV: Documenting Arts and Sciences Entries

A&S Competitions

This class is not about research

However I strongly advise you to do as much research as possible BEFORE beginning to work on your entry. While you are researching you can bear in mind the elements that will go into your documentation. There are three steps to a successful arts entry: Research, creation, and documentation. Any of these can let your entry down. This class is to help you improve the last step.

Why we have them

The SCA is an educational organisation that aims to teach members and help them teach themselves about the Middle Ages. It is unashamedly focused on recreation of period techniques, styles and items. Therefore a number of the things that we do are aimed at improving our recreations of those things. A&S competitions are one of the things that we do.

- Contests encourage people to put more thought and care into their recreations than they would otherwise, in the knowledge that they will be judged
- Many people enjoy the competitive element, just as many fighters enjoy the competition of the tournament
- Many people welcome the opportunity to receive unbiased and constructive criticism and feedback on their work
- They encourage greater visibility of our artisan's work
- They offer recognition for artisans

What is the point of documentation

It is not possible, especially in a small group like ours, to find three experts in every field of arts and sciences. Therefore documentation

- Gives the judges the information that they need to make an informed comment on the work
- Provides proof to the judges that your work has been thoroughly researched and is a valid reproduction of a period item
- Is not required at some competitions (such as laurels prizes) because the artist is expected to be on hand to answer questions

Documentation should answer the following questions

What is it?

How was it made/done in period?

How was this made/done?

While answering these questions you should seek to

Justify any discrepancies

Neither over- nor under- inform your audience

Provide evidence for your arguments

What Is It?

Documentation should ALWAYS begin with a simple statement of what the judges/spectators are looking at: what it is you are attempting to recreate. This should include:

- what it is called eg a flat cap
- what category of thing it is eg a hat
- where it would have come from eg France
- what period it is from eg mid 16th century (be as specific as possible – its better to say 1570 if you are sure that you are right)

For example: The shoes that I have attempted to recreate here are a pair of shoes found on the Island of Middelburg, off the coast of the Netherlands, from the eighth century.

This information simply tells the judge what it is they are looking at. It locates the item in terms of period, style and purpose. Try to keep it short.

How was it made in Period?

This is where you summarise all your research. When doing this remember that you are not writing a research paper about everything that you have discovered about X. It is likely that while you were researching X you found out a great deal about both your specific X, and other variations of Xs as well as processes, history and possibly quite unrelated things about X. The basic rule is that if it doesn't support your X then leave it out.

What you need to tell the judges is what characterises X in period. Not all of the following will be appropriate to every entry: use your judgement. Think about

- Shape: 2 dimensions, 3 dimensions, what about the bits that you can't see?

- Construction: how was it made, what techniques were used, are there extra bits added on?
- Colour: how was the colour achieved? What colour is it?
- Materials: what were they made out of? What are the important characteristics of those materials ie. rigidity, water resistance/absorption, density, thickness etc
- Preparations: are there any special preparations that were used to achieve the above ie. dyeing, tanning, waxing, gluing etc? How were these done in period?

These questions are relevant whether you are copying a single period item, or whether you are creating your own version.

By the end of this section we should know everything there is to know about the period item

If possible you should write this section BEFORE you begin to make your item – that way you will know if there are any unanswered questions in your research.

It is vitally important that you illustrate your points with examples – as many as possible. Use quotations from period works, pictures of period items and the opinions of reputable sources.

How is this item made?

OK, this is where you get to discuss your creation. The goal here is to demonstrate how authentic your X is by referring back to the points made in the previous section. Make sure that you pay attention to the same factors that you discussed in that section.

*Please note that you will be judged on **how well** you create your X, not just how period it is: skill is very important too.*

Londinium we have a problem!

OK so you've done the research and made X and suddenly you find that !gasp!! there is a gap between what you've said they did in period, and what you have in front of you.

Never fear, all is not lost. Because we're a nice bunch of people who are in this FOR FUN (just in case we need reminding) we do not expect everyone to be turning out museum quality reproductions. We want you to have a go and make something – that is far more important than spending quadrillions of money on pounds of gold thread or losing your job because you were too tired from hand sewing a million gems to a gown. So anyway, here are some creative (because that's our middle name) ideas for what to do if you find yourself stretching reality a little. The first thing to be aware of is why you have a gap. Below are some possibilities:

There was a gap in the information

Yes it happens – we can't always get all the information that we want, either because the information simply doesn't exist (for example there may be many techniques that have been lost over time), or because you simply didn't have the resources to find it (we can't all get Government research grants). So you are going to have to

extrapolate. First of all look for something similar in the same place at the same time. Keeping to the same period and place ensures that the technique/materials were known and available (you may also need to consider social class here). Beware that you don't extrapolate too far – or if you do at least admit it.

Technique was not available to me

It *may* be OK to have a little help with particularly difficult techniques eg welding, so long as the technique is not that main part of the work and the work does not become a joint effort. If you are unsure *please* check with the competition organiser. Otherwise either learn that technique or find an alternative that was used in the same time and place for as similar an item as possible.

Material was not available to me

Because

- It is no longer made
- It is not affordable

Whatever the reason you should use the best alternative that you can find/afford. You should discuss how similar it is to the period material in terms of its characteristics (discussed above). Bear in mind that the judges will and should make a judgement about how valid your alternatives are.

Couldn't be bothered, ran out of time

OK this is a pretty poor excuse but lets face it, we all have only so much time. If the discrepancy is not too obvious ie machine sewing in a non externally visible place, I advise simply not mentioning it. You won't get to show how period your construction is but neither will you be drawing attention to a non-obvious flaw.

One thing to think about is this. It takes a team of three judges somewhere between 20 and 30 minutes to read your documentation, judge your piece, write the comments etc. This can easily mean that they don't get to enjoy any of the event that they are attending.

Using notes, quotes and the bibliography

One of the key things about your documentation is that you provide *evidence* that your work is period. If you don't do this you are simply asking the judges to believe you know what you are talking about. This means that part B, your discussion of period examples should be supported with pictures of those examples and quotations from period sources or reputable experts in the field, and finally a bibliography of all your sources so that the judge can draw their own conclusions about their validity.

Notes

Notes should be used wherever you directly or indirectly quote another source. That includes where you say anything like “studies show” or “it is said” or “Fact A”: the note tells us where you got your information from. Notes, whether endnotes¹ (where they are all listed at the back of the documentation) or footnotes¹ (where they appear at the bottom of each page) should always use a consistent format that provides the reader with the full details of the source, plus the page numbers upon which the quote/picture etc occurs in that source. There are many accepted formats for these. Use whatever suits you, but be consistent.

¹ This is a footnote: example; author (surname, initial), year of publication XXXX, page number.

Quotations

Quotations should always occur in double quotes “as so”. Quotations within the quotation should occur within single quotes ‘as so’. Quotations should always be followed by either a footnote or endnote detailing where the quote comes from. Be cautious with quotes: they should only be used where they are the perfect support for your point.

Pictures

In the SCA we often rely (perhaps too much) on pictorial evidence. If you have pictures that you have worked on you should include them in your documentation. If you are doing all your work from one item you must include a large, good quality image of it, in colour if possible. In general it is not good practice to just provide the book – it is harder for the judges to pick up and may be disturbed by casual onlookers.

Bibliography

The bibliography is a list of all the sources that you worked from in researching your item. Do not include sources that you looked at but didn’t really make use of: this is called padding and is usually obvious to the judges. Do ensure that you include everything mentioned in your notes. All items should be given full details – sufficient for the judges to track them down themselves if necessary. It is usual to order your items in alphabetical order by author although large bibliographies may group items by source type eg book, serial, webpage.

For Books:

Author(s)/Editor(s) (always surname first, then full names or initials²), title (underlined), in brackets (Publisher, place of publication, year of publication of this edition³).

For Articles:

Author(s) (as above), title of article (in double quotes), title of serial⁴ (underlined), volume/issue numbers, date/month/season (where relevant), year, page numbers.

For web pages

Author(s) (as above – if known⁵), title of web page (not web site), URL, date downloaded⁶.

¹ This is an endnote: example; author (surname, initial), year of publication XXXX, page number.

² Authors may also be organisations eg Statistics New Zealand

³ Note that the edition is not the same as the printing. A first edition may be reprinted several times but the information stays the same.

⁴ A serial is the general term for anything which comes out on a regular or semi-regular basis. Listener magazine is a serial as is the New Zealand Yearbook.

⁵ Very important for websites as there is never any guarantee that the information on them is true. If you can’t find out who wrote it, consider very carefully whether the information is valid.

⁶ This is really important: web pages can change like the wind so it is important to know when the information was acquired.