

Breaking the ICE – lessons learned and things to consider for an “In Case of Elevation” document.
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Introduction

Many of us have seen elevations at this point. Some have been traditional. Others have been fantastical. And still others have had problems.

Like any ceremony, it is to your benefit to determine what you want, how you will go about it, and practice so that the big day is as great as it can be.

Throughout this document, I will be talking like it is a performance. That is more than just bias. Ceremonies ARE performances. Therefore, some of the same features apply.

This class will look at some of the elephants in the room, mistakes that have been made, and things for you to consider when making your own "In Case of Elevation" document.

Elephants in the Room

Let's start with some of the elephants in the room.

1) The first rule of Peerage is you are not allowed to talk about Peerage.

This topic is somewhat of a taboo topic, especially since I am not a peer! It is taken as a truism that you are not allowed to want to be a peer. Yet, anytime it is discussed in public, peer after peer will assure us that it is okay to have a goal and to want to be a peer. In fact, I am pretty sure there are no peers who didn't want to be a peer. You can refuse to be one if offered.

The problem is doing things only because you want to be a peer. It is a fine distinction. You can do things towards the goal of being a peer. You shouldn't do things ONLY because you think they will go towards that goal. The path to peerage is a noble one. And like the song says, "the point of a journey is not to arrive."

2) You are not even a peer. What do you know about it?

I am not a peer. I have made no secret that I would like to be recognized as one someday. I have done a lot of preparation and thinking towards that day. I have made mistakes (not on purpose) in other people's elevation ceremonies. I have seen mistakes in other elevation ceremonies. I know a bit about rituals and performance. This is topic that doesn't get talked about much so the discussion is useful.

3) It will never happen to me so why should I bother?

The process of peerage is somewhat occult. It is absolutely true that only 2 people will determine if/when you will be a peer. That is Their Majesties and we (in general; looking at you COVID) get new ones every 6 months. They can make a peer when they want to. In practice, the Order is often consulted or polled to get their opinion. It can be a short amount of time or a long amount of time. I have seen many people on the verge of giving up entirely before the boon is begged for them. Regardless of whether you think it can happen to you, it might. As I said before, the point of the journey to peerage is not to gain the title of peer but to be better person. Deciding on how that ceremony might go can be a great source of research for you.

4) Peers are watching you.

Yep. In general, this isn't supposed to be a creepy way or in a judgmental way. And Peers, you are often as subtle as a ton of bricks. Part of the job of a Peer is to identify up and coming people, mentor them, and give feedback on them. The Peerages exist to recruit more to their ranks. They exist to be examples to aspire to and they want to include more potential role models in their Order. These Orders are made up of people so sometimes mistakes are made. Poor examples get elevated or burnout occurs. I believe most Peers want to be worthy of our aspirations.

Who should have an ICE and when should you do one?

I would say ideally, everyone should have one. It is a worthwhile look at what you want and what is important to you.

If you become a dependent to another person, your Peer will likely ask you to start one. If not, you should start one anyway.

Plenty of peers are elevated without being a dependent though and I think it is even more important in that case to have one. Since you don't have an official advocate, having something that can be referenced is very useful for a potential staff to plan from. If you don't have a dependent relationship for whatever reason, I recommending finding a peer in the order that you like and trust. They can serve as an unofficial advocate.

While I think everyone should have an ICE and start it early, certainly by the time you get a GOA level award, you should start one. You have been on the path long enough that people are looking at you whether you believe that is true or not.

What is an Elevation?

An elevation is a ceremony. It is an initiation rite. It is a rite of passage. It is a mistake to think that it is a private ceremony that happens to occur in public. It is really a public ceremony that sometimes happens in private.

It can often feel very intimate and it is not unusual for peers to have a fondness for the royalty that elevated them. This is a source of some mistakes in elevations. It is too easy, especially if there is a close relationship between the royalty and recipient, to treat it casually. "I don't need to practice the name" "I don't need to practice the movements", etc. You are always being judged by others. You are always on. That is even more true during this kind of ceremony.

The whole purpose is to recognize a change in status. Even if done in private, there will be an announcement made about the recipient's change in status. You will acquire a title. You will be looked at differently by your new order and the populace. Even in private, there will be a small number of witnesses. It is a public event showing a public change in status. It is therefore important for everyone to acknowledge that it is a public happening. That means all parties, the royalty, the recipient, the order, and the populace, need to be aware that they are involved in an important, noteworthy event and behave accordingly. It can be fun and festive. It can be solemn and serious. But it is an occasion of record, even if done in private, and should be treated as such.

Making the ICE

An ICE, "In Case of Elevation", document is a sketch of what you would like to have happen in your elevation. Think of it as a planning document, like for an important birthday or a wedding. It exists to help you refine your desires, give direction to others on what you would like to have happen, and help reduce mistakes. Like any good plan, you spend quality time before something is urgent to figure out what is important. Lastly, the ICE can help avoid mistakes that can ruin an otherwise special occasion.

It can be as long or as short as it needs to be but the more detailed the better. It should be updated regularly.

The Ceremony

Public or private?

One of the first things you should decide is do you want a public or private ceremony?

Sometimes an elevation is done in private. Often, the recipient is shy or has issues with crowds or attention. The royalty will often accommodate this as a “drive-by.” But there will still a small number of witnesses and helpers. Sometimes, it will be a drive-by due to time constraints. It doesn’t hurt to have an alternative version of a larger public ceremony for a drive-by if that needs to happen.

More often, these are held in public as part of a Court. With many elevations at the same Court, Court can be long and it can feel like your special time is a bit of an annoyance to others. My understanding is that you will be given a few potential dates to choose from on when you will have your elevation. You should consider the balance between when your support structure will be available and potential dates.

It is an important decision therefore on whether it will be public or private and when you will have it. The dates won’t be in your ICE though because you won’t know when you might be offered elevation.

You can, however, include your desires. For instance, if your region has a significant event that royalty normally goes to, put down in the document that you would prefer to do it at that event. Or a short list of potential events.

Traditional or Custom?

To an extent, all elevations have a custom element but the central question remains, will this be a traditional ceremony or a custom one?

The traditional ceremony will vary kingdom to kingdom. Pay attention to the elevations in your kingdom and notice what is the same.

Magistra Nika Dmitrieva doch’Zvezdina (formerly Nicolaa de Bracton) from Ealdormere as an excellent document, *Creating Peerage Ceremonies*ⁱ, that looks at a variety of elements in elevation ceremonies.

As per that document, there are common elements to these ceremonies, regardless of whether it is traditional or custom.

- “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. “

Many of these items can be customized and for some ceremonies, the whole thing is customized. A custom ceremony will require a lengthy ICE to detail what is supposed to happen and explain to the Royalty what you desire. It is also important that when the time comes that you get buy-in from the Royalty. It is useful to have alternatives if there is something they do not want to do.

I have seen very memorable traditional ceremonies and very memorable custom ones. The customization is often to align with a given persona but it can be more. I recall Azriel le Fay's elevation to Master of Defense. The ceremony itself was mostly traditional but the processional was A Midsummer's Night Dream themed.

Heralds and theater arts professionals are good resources for potential customizations to ceremonies. Some heralds are quite skilled at ceremonies and enjoy the challenge of scripting one out. This can then be added to the ICE.

All of the custom part requires planning.

Speakers

You should decide whether you will have the traditional layout of speakers or do something novel. This could also depend on the traditions in your kingdom as well. Add these names to your ICE.

If you are going with the traditional layout of one from each peerage and a royal, you might find gaps in your list. Maybe you don't know any royals. Then you know you should spend more time getting to know some. As with elephant number 1, this should not be a “fake” friendship solely for this purpose but a genuine one. While most royals fight in some respect, they have many other interests. Perhaps you are intimidated by royalty. Then it is time to network.

If you are looking at a non-traditional speaking layout, then you will want to consider what that looks like. Why are you using it? Will your speakers know and understand why you are using it? Do you have documentation or references for why you are using this layout? Put those details down in the ICE.

It is useful to have alternative speakers if you can. Your speakers can send a letter as that is a common method for “can't attend the event in question.”

Now to one of the mistakes. I was supposed to speak at a friend's elevation and I forgot. Yep. When the call went out for "is there someone from the populace to speak for this person?" I sat there just like everyone else wondering who it was. It got uncomfortable and eventually someone did stand to speak. I did eventually remember it was supposed to be me.

I see two solutions to this problem. First, make sure to remind your speakers that they are speaking at your elevation. The day of, remind them. Second, I would like the heralds to call out who should speak. It takes a bit of the mystery play out of the ceremony. It is cool to hear "is there a member of the order of water buffalo to speak for this person?" and you get "I Grand Poobah do" but the ceremony is scripted so I think it works to have the Herald call "Grand Poobah, do you speak for this person?" Either way, remind your speakers that they are going to speak. It will save a potential ruined elevation.

Titles

There are traditional titles for each order: Sir/Dame for Knights and generally Master/Mistress for all the others. For some part of the population though, these traditional titles can be problematic. They are certainly appropriate and period. However, Master can be problematic due to American slavery and Mistress can be problematic due to BDSM. If you do prefer these titles, that is fine.

For many time periods and cultures, other titles can be used. You can even research your own. You should expand your research beyond your persona however. Heraldry.sca.org/titles.html is a great place to start for alternative titles.

For example, I considered Thane/Thegn. Early in Anglo-Saxon England, a thane was a servant. It then was a vassal to the King. It could be a peer to the King. However, it is often used in SCA context as a baron equivalent title. Using it might send the wrong message. I also considered Reeve. I envisioned my persona as a port-reeve for Bath and that would be an official in the King's court. Again, it already has a meaning in SCA context.

Many potential titles are just cultural variants on master. Because they are pronounced differently and spelled differently, they have less connection slavery or domination. Other options I have seen are variants on "teacher", "wiseman", "councilor" etc. Dame is also not limited to the Order of Chivalry. Likewise, Master is not limited to the male gender.

Any new or different title will take people some time to get used to. Just expect to educate people on your preferred title.

Oaths

You should think about oaths. For some people, the oaths are just part of the game. They don't hold any particular significance, regardless of what they actually say. For others, all oaths are very serious matters. How do you feel about them? If you haven't discovered how you treat oaths, you should spend some time considering that.

For example, I was a "student" to a non-peer before I was a dependent. My mentor and I swore oaths to each other. I had not actually sworn many oaths previously. I didn't spend much time considering what

the words meant either. I came to understand months later that I treat oaths very seriously. Knowing that, I read thoroughly what the words to an oath are and how I interpret them and how I feel about them.

To oaths, are you going to swear any? Have you thought about them?

There are traditional oaths for each Order. It is generally expected that you will take the traditional oath upon elevation. Whether you take the oath going forward is a matter of personal preference. Oaths are often greatly varied by Kingdom so make sure to double check your Kingdom's oaths.

It is also not unusual for recipients to memorize the traditional oath.

Are there other oaths you want to take? Include them here with your documentation.

For instance, in my ICE, I have two non-traditional oaths I would like to include. Both are from Anglo-Saxon sources. One is a private oath to the Royalty based on an Anglo Saxon form of Commendation where the oathsworn promises to fulfill his duty, so long as both parties do what they are supposed to do. The second is an accountability oath sworn among all those who will agree to hold each other accountable. It is based on the Mead Oath that Harold's huscarls swore before the Battle of Hastings.

Scroll

The elevation to peerage is an award and as such generates a scroll. Are there artists that you particularly like the work of? Make note of that in your ICE. Is there a particular style you would like your scroll to be? Make note of that in your ICE. Do you want the scroll in a non-English language? Make note of that in the ICE.

These details are all good to pass on to whomever will ultimately do the scroll or can help determine who will do it.

Regalia

The various items of regalia can take time to put together. Sewing clothes, making medallions, scrolls, etc. all take time and effort. To look great and be part of your special day, advance notice helps a lot. While you may not know that you might be elevated soon, it is possible your advocates will. Having a list will help get these items started.

Often, these items will be reflective of your persona. Perhaps there is a particular scribe you like the work of. Go ahead and put in your ICE that you would like that person to do your scroll. Perhaps there is a particular style to the medallion. Go ahead and specify that. All of that applies to any particular item would might be gifted with. The more you include with your desires, the more likely those wishes are to be honored.

Also include things you do not want. This can be things like allergies or just general colors to avoid. This is especially true if your conditions are not well known. Or perhaps, you don't like medallions because you don't like wearing things on your neck. State that.

This part is likely to be updated often. As you learn more about your wants and the abilities of your friends, your desires can be more refined.

The Vigil

Most elevations include a vigil and this can be as important as the elevation itself. These items should be in your ICE as well.

In period, the idea of being on vigil is to consider one's relationship with God and one's ability to fulfill the new position that will be given. It was a time of fasting, cleansing, mediation, and prayer.

In the SCA, it is often more like a reception. The vigilant will be in a small space to receive visitors. Visitors will come to offer advice, thanks, or congratulations. And those visitors need a space to wait and be refreshed while they wait their turn. It therefore becomes somewhat like a party or event on its own.

Since it is very important, there are considerations for the vigil as well.

Personal Assistant

You will likely be on vigil for many hours of a day. One virtual event I heard of had 18 hours of vigil! I recommend having someone as your personal assistant.

This person has no other duties (or at the very least, minor duties that involve access to your person) other than to look after you. They are empowered to tell you to eat, drink, use the bathroom, go for a walk, etc. Make sure the rest of the staff knows who this person is and that they have your full support for whatever decision they make. If they say "the vigilant needs 5 minutes to stretch their legs", the rest of the staff doesn't get to say "but so-and-so has been waiting for an hour to talk to them." This person will keep you safe, sane, and healthy.

Show Runner

The saying goes "not my circus; not my monkeys". For the show runner, it is their circus and they are definitely their monkeys.

The rest of the vigil is run by this person. The show runner should not be your personal assistant. They can work together but they are not the same people. It is very likely that the show runner will be your peer or advocate. Please make sure to discuss this with that person. Many peers are proud parents on this day and want to make it as good as it can be for you.

It is most likely that the vigil will be an event. The show runner needs to confirm with the event steward what is allowed at the event and what might be available. If it is a camping event and the vigil will be held in a private camp, the show runner will want to check with the camp as well.

The show runner organizes if you need to borrow tents and tables, where those items will go, where your personal space will be, the order that guests will be seen, if there is a vigil book and how that will be handled, etc. The show runner can have individuals under them to handle these individual details but ultimately, where there is a question that doesn't involve the vigilant's body, the show runner answers it.

The show runner often is your peer or your advocate. They have had a vigil before and probably seen several. They are in the best position to know what needs to be done. But it doesn't have to be that person. Anyone who is good at organizing and cares about you is perfect.

Guests

A large variety of people will come to a vigil.

The most common visitor will be other peers. They wish to offer advise to you about your new order.

Non peers will often attend as well. Some will only want to say "gratz" but non-peers can have good advice as well.

I often will attend the vigil of friend. I have no idea what their new order will be like. My advice is often along the lines of "don't forget who you are." The person you are got you to this point. Don't lose sight of that with the new responsibilities you have.

The Royalty and barons will often visit as well. I am going to recommend that you have standing instructions to allow Royalty at least to jump the line. The Royalty's day is often extremely busy. They likely carved out 10 minutes to see you. This might be the only time they have to verify how the elevation will actually happen as well. The vast majority of SCAdians will understand this and not be upset by this desire.

That said, I did hear of one case where the vigilant specifically said to not allow the Royalty to jump the line. I have no idea how that was perceived by the parties involved. Given that the Royalty is going to elevate you, probably later that day, it makes sense to accommodate their schedule.

Set a reasonable time limit for guests and make sure your show runner knows it. Arrange a signal for when it is time to for a guest to leave. Having your show runner stick their head in every five minutes seems awkward but perhaps a small bell or other signal is not amiss. Typically, I have heard of 5 to 10 minutes per person.

Even with short times like this, potential guests can wait hours before getting to see you. Often there will be seating for those waiting. Combine waiting guests with food, and potential drink, and it can get noisy. If that is what you want, that is fine but state your desire in your ICE.

A great way to handle this I saw at one vigil was, the vigil tent was in one location and the vigilant was in another tent about 20 ft further back. There were discreet barriers to keep others from just wandering back there. If you wanted to see the vigilant, you approached through the main tent only.

The show runner should have the authority to tell hangers on to move on or for people to keep the noise down if necessary. I have yet to see a problem like this arise. I am just mentioning it as a potential issue.

You can't specify who you want as guests at your vigil because you don't have anyway of knowing who might attend. However, if there are specific people who you really want to be there, let them now that beforehand, even before you are elevated. You might be able to specify that in your potential dates.

You can specify that you don't want certain people to visit you though.

That does seem a bit rude but ultimately, this is your mini event and the idea is that you are preparing yourself for a momentous change. If certain people will be disruptive to that, then you can give instructions that you don't want to see those people.

Gifts

It is not unusual for visitors to bring gifts. It is not unusual for the vigilant to give a small gift to each visitor.

Make sure your show runner has a plan for taking and keeping gifts given safe. Some of these might be lifelong treasures for you and you will want them honored. Also make note who gave what. You might think you will remember but it can get lost in the events of the day. I suggest making a note in the vigil book (the show runner can do this) when a gift is received.

If you are giving gifts, include what you think they will be in your ICE. This can change as your thinking does. It is generally something small but meaningful. If it is something someone needs to be made, advanced warning is always welcome. To the extent possible, be aware of common allergens and make those known if necessary. That applies to food as well 😊

Food

Speaking of which.

There is often food at vigils. There really needs to be two types of food: food for you and food for your guests.

Your personal assistant should have your food. Things you like or that will give you energy throughout the day. If there is a lunch tavern and you are expecting to eat that, the personal assistant can send someone to get that for you. Notice I didn't say they go get it. They stay near you. Someone else can get it. But you will need your own stash of food just to make it through.

Many vigils also have other food though. Given the number of good chefs in the SCA, some of it is really good! If there is someone's food that you particularly like, indicate that in the ICE. As with gifts, ingredients and common allergens should be clearly listed.

You are not expected to feed everyone though. Finger food and quick bites are often the best bet but it can be more elaborate if you desire. Portions can be hard to figure out as the expected attendance is unknown. Have a plan for leftover food if you can. Who will take it, donate it, or dispose of it.

Don't forget plates and utensils as well. As with the food, have a plan for dealing with it afterwards. Who will clean, collect, or dispose of these.

Related to food is trash. As many of these happen during the warmer months, opened trash of food scraps can attract wasps and other insects. Plan accordingly.

Consider similar things with drink. Some sites will allow alcohol. If you serve alcohol, you need a plan. You need someone to be responsible for it, a bartender. They need to check IDs, control portions, and potentially cut people off if it gets excessive. Non alcoholic drinks can be self dispensing.

The main point is: this is your vigil and you are not required to feed the masses. Most people will be respectful.

Ending Thoughts

A little planning can go a long way to making this significant moment special.

I have often said, “you can write that down in your ICE.” For many of these people, check with them early in the process. Even if you aren’t likely to be elevated for years, it is just common courtesy. If any of these people are peers in the order you are likely to be elevated in, they may have advanced knowledge that something is going to happen and can start before you even know about it. That is the power of planning.

This document can change often. That is to be expected. This document can show you were the holes are too. “I want to do a hobbit themed vigil but I don’t know anyone who has X thing.” Time to start looking and talking to people you trust.

The elevation itself is a public ceremony. Practice your lines. Is there an oath, memorize it. Does there need to be blocking (who stands where when)? Figure that out as well. Do you want/need a highly customized ceremony? Keep your ears open for people who are interested in helping to create that.

Watch and attend other vigils and elevations. One it is just courtesy. It is an important day for them and your job is to witness that it has happened. But also take note what you liked and didn’t like. Add those things to your ICE if appropriate. Talk to the people who organized it if it something non obvious you want to duplicate.

For most, this is a day they won’t forget. It deserves your attention to make it as special as you want it to be.

Appendix A: Potential Template for an ICEⁱⁱ

What type of ceremony: Public private

Notes: _____

What type of ceremony: Traditional or Custom

Ceremonies I am inspired by: _____

Aspects that are very important to me: _____

Notes: _____

Preferred Events to hold Ceremony:

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

Potential Speakers:

_____ Notes: _____

_____ Notes: _____

_____ Notes: _____

_____ Notes: _____

_____ Notes: _____

_____ Notes: _____

Potential Titles:

Notes: _____

Notes: _____

Notes: _____

Notes: _____

Oaths:

Oath Type: _____ Source: _____

Oath Type: _____ Source: _____

Notes: _____

Scroll:

Style: _____ Notes: _____

Type period: _____ Notes: _____

Potential Scribe: _____ Notes: _____

Potential Scribe: _____ Notes: _____

Potential Scribe: _____ Notes: _____

Notes: _____

Regalia:

Style: _____ Notes: _____

Type period: _____ Notes: _____

Potential Sewer: _____ Notes: _____

Potential Sewer: _____ Notes: _____

Potential Sewer: _____ Notes: _____

Notes: _____

The Vigil

Personal Assistant:

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

Show Runner:

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

Guests I really want to be there:

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

Gift Ideas to make:

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

Food

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

____ Notes: _____

ⁱ Creating Peerage Ceremonies by Magistra Nicolaa de Bracton,
<https://heraldry.sca.org/kwhss/2018/Peerage%20Ceremonies.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Credit to Becky Vandewalle for the template.