



# What is an S.C.A. Branch Name?

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Unlike names of individuals in the SCA, branch names must be registered in order for the group to become an official SCA branch. All branches must have a name, but not all branches must have a device. [Corpora III.C.4-7: Kingdoms/Principalities/Baronies must have registered name and device, Shires and below need a registered name.] It is therefore somewhat difficult to separate the name creation process from the heraldic registration process, but we will try and explain in easy terms. The creation of a branch identity and the choosing of a branch name go hand-in-hand. Take it slow; keep in touch with your kingdom officers (the Kingdom Seneschal, the Kingdom Principal Herald, and any deputies they might have to assist). Be willing to be flexible. It's difficult to keep a group from being disappointed when their chosen name turns out to not follow period naming patterns. We understand how difficult it can be to bring a group to consensus regarding its group name, but if you follow some of the advice offered here, it will help make the process easier for all involved.

All SCA heraldic registration (and therefore name and device creation) is based on two fundamental documents: The Administrative Handbook of the College of Arms of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc. [Admin Handbook] (<http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/admin.html>) and The Rules for Submissions [RfS] (<http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/rfs.html>). The Kingdom Principal Herald and other local heralds can help explain these documents to your group. It will save a lot of time and possible heartbreak if the group follows these guidelines from the beginning of its name creation process. The Admin Handbook is especially useful for its appendices which contain bibliographies of approved resources.

It should be noted that the SCA College of Arms has had many Rules changes over the course of the history of the Society. As our expertise and research into period naming practices has progressed the quality of our names and devices has increased. It is generally NOT a good idea to look at current Branch Names when choosing a new one. The Rules in force at the time of that group's registration may be drastically different from those currently in place. It is best to review the current rules (see above paragraph) and get advice from your friendly heraldic consultants.

## The Branch Name

Your group's SCA Branch Name is the name it will use for SCA activities. The SCA models itself on Western Europe as it was before 1600 C.E., so the name your group picks should be one that uses medieval/renaissance placename patterns. SCA Branch Names may be names of actual places in period as long as the name is not a famous place like London or Harfleur or Antioch. A Branch Name must be true to itself for time-period/culture/language and it can't be offensive, even if that offensiveness is a period construction. It matters not what language or culture the name comes from as long as it falls within the "contact with Western Europe, pre-1600 C.E." guidelines. Please note that branches cannot legislate the persona of the group or its individuals, so the group should feel free to have a Spanish placename even if all the current members of your group have Norse personas.

Placenames are like personal names in that they were originally meant for grubby, hands on, everyday use. They could be witty but in an obvious way. Names were not high flown, poetic, delicately metaphorical, or invented by the highly educated. No matter how wispy and dreamlike they now sound, how evocative of faraway romance and dreams of yesterday, they originally meant things like "dwelling place of the swineherd". Placenames were based on common, ordinary, real life features. If the name just happens to sound keen, that's a bonus.

When your group has found a name, try it out. Make sure you all like it. Will you be proud of it in Court? Can other people (friends, strangers, and heralds alike) pronounce it? Do you have to spell it out every time you tell it to someone? Try the name on with other designators (the group might be a Canton now, but what if you become a Shire or a Barony?) Your group must show support for the name in order to start the heraldic registration process. In AnTir the College of Heraldry has put together a document called, "Branch Requirements for Heraldic Registration" ([http://www.antirheralds.org/Resources\\_for\\_Heralds/Submissions/Resources\\_for\\_Heralds/Branch\\_Requirements/branch\\_requirements.html](http://www.antirheralds.org/Resources_for_Heralds/Submissions/Resources_for_Heralds/Branch_Requirements/branch_requirements.html)).

This article discusses the forms and petition requirements for branch heraldic submissions in AnTir.

## An Example Construction in Early English

Let's say your group is based in an area where there are many sheep and oak trees. The following is one way of constructing a place name from name parts found in the early English family of names. Citations are taken from the Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names by Eilert Ekwall.

(Abbreviations: OE=Old English, ON=Old Norse, OSw=Old Swedish.)

'Oke', 'Oken', 'Oak', and 'Ock' may all signify 'oak' in placenames. 'Head' (OE 'heafod') can mean variously 'headland, summit, upper end, source of a stream, promontory, hill'. 'Gate' in a placename can mean either gate, or a road (from ON, OSw 'gata'). If you like the idea of a fortified place, instead of keep you might try OE 'Chester, Ceaster, 'Cestre' from Latin 'castra', or fort.

'Oakenhead' (note the one-word formation) is a plausible construction [meaning the name is not found in period, but is well constructed from parts found in period]. It's a good period form.

'Oakbottom' is a perfectly unexceptionable place name, it means 'oak valley'. 'Ramchester' might be a little less intrusive than Sheep Keep. Also, though you don't have to tell anybody, the word 'ram' can also derive from the word meaning 'wild garlic' in OE.

Then try your group designator with the name: Canton of Ramchester, Shire of Ramchester (alternatively Ramchestershire), Barony of Ramchester, Principality of Ramchester. They all sound good.

Other placename patterns include (depending on language/culture):

1. Single physical description of the location: hill, valley, glen (generally too generic for SCA names)

2. Physical description with adjective modifier: "headland near the rocky part", "lake where the ducks roost", "pig-valley". Modifiers include: animals, colors, directions (east/west/upper/lower), new/old, etc.

3. People + description (habitative names): Sven's valley, Otto's farm, the king's wood.

4. Building/structure + description: Castelo Branco (Portuguese: White Castle)

5. Saint's names: Bury St. Edmunds

### Remember:

- Talk to your Kingdom Seneschal, Seneschal's Deputy for New and Incipient Groups, Kingdom Principal Herald, and Principal Herald's Deputy for New Groups.

- Non-fiction authors, even good scholarly works, usually use the current "common" name of a place, not the name and/or spelling the place had in period, example: York, vs. Jorvik. It is best to

document the name from one of the recommended sources in the Admin Handbook.

- Fiction authors make names up, even placenames, and they don't necessarily research period naming practices. It is generally best to avoid placenames from historical fiction and fantasy literature.

- Use a single language/culture and timeperiod and its naming patterns for your group name.

- It's important to check the name for hidden nuances, jokes, or other embarrassing connotations of which your group may not be aware.

- You must research the placename practices of the language/culture your group chooses for its Branch Name. It's no good applying German placename practices to an early Irish placename.

### Resources:

- Administrative Handbook

<http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/admin.html>

- An Tir Branch Requirements for Heraldic Submissions

[http://www.antirheralds.org/Resources\\_for\\_Heralds/Submissions/Resources\\_for\\_Heralds/Branch\\_Requirements/branch\\_requirements.html](http://www.antirheralds.org/Resources_for_Heralds/Submissions/Resources_for_Heralds/Branch_Requirements/branch_requirements.html)

- An Tir Handbook, Tell Me About... Starting A New Branch

<http://www.antir.sca.org/Pubs/ATH/2newbran.html>

- Emery, Dana S. "Old Norse Place Names"

<http://www.scaducks.org/arts/heraldry/ON/toponymics.html>

- Bahlow, Hans. *Deutschland Geographische Namenwelt*.

- Dame Cateline de la Mor la souriete, "A Survey of the History of English Placenames"

<http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/names/engplnam.html>

### Bibliography for further research:

- Dauzat, Albert and Rostaing. *Dictionnaire tyologique des Noms de Lieux de la France*.

- Ekwall, Eilert. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*.

- Johnston, James R. *Place-Names of Scotland*.

- Room, Adrian. *A Dictionary of Irish Place-Names*.

- Rules for Submissions,

<http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/rfs.html>

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