

DESIGNING A SCROLL

Art is a communication between the artist and a specific audience of a message over and above the mere symbols used.

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AKA: Master, Saint Bob

Introduction

When designing a scroll, remember the priorities of who is important:

1. The Recipient.
2. You, the scribe(s)
3. Everyone else

Design the scroll for the recipient.

Laying Out the Scroll

When I was doing a significant number of scrolls, one of my apprentices asked to watch me design a scroll. The scroll she watched me layout and create was a Laurel scroll for a friend and fellow scribe. The design was a giant laurel with the wording inside the wreath. I had the words printed out by hand as printers at the time were dot matrix. On a spare piece of paper, I wrote a single line, measured it, made a few notes on the text, and proceeded to calligraph the scroll with the words dropping into the design perfectly. She considered it a miracle. It was only lots of experience and a knowledge of copyfitting.

Copyfitting is an easy process when done manually and even easier with a computer. A recommendation to all calligraphers is to study typography as typographers have developed several tools that can make life easier for a calligrapher.

Inspiration

I wish I had good advice for find inspiration, but I can say, from personal experience, sometimes inspiration doesn't come. All I can say, is to try to understand the recipient and inspiration will probably show up. The story of the Torn Scroll [in the examples section] is about a failure of inspiration—it happens to all of us.

Source Materials

When Inspiration finally strikes, document your sources so you can find them again (words of experience) and pay attention to the hand that goes with the source. Find enough samples of the hand that the person doing the calligraphy will know what hand to use and be able to duplicate it.

Wording

The words, their length and formality, will influence the design. If making a blank, then use a generic wording! If the words cannot be determined ahead of time, design the scroll for “infinite” length, i.e., leave the bottom open, i.e., do the left side and top, but not the bottom or right sides, and leave space on the bottom of the scroll for additional text.

Design

Always start with the words. Generic blanks can use generic wording. When designing the layout, consider if any names (kingdom, royalty, recipient, etc.) are going to be on their own lines. When ever possible, I try to have the recipient's name on a separate line, but this is personal choice.

Know for whom the scroll belongs! The recipient is the most important person. When the court is over, and event ends, the scroll is often the one thing a recipient has they can show to their non-SCA friends and family to explain their hobby. Consider the recipient's knowledge and experience before designing the scroll. Authenticity in materials and design is important to advance the craft and show one's skill, but ultimately are selfish concerns. That being said, there is no excuse for poor craftsmanship.

Design Order:

- Layout
- Calligraphy [Can include laying the ground for gilding]
- Gilding
- Painting

Missing from this list is Procrastination—insert by personal preference.

Reasons for this order:

Why layout is first should be obvious. The choice of the hand and size of the hand must be part of choosing the design. *This method assumes one has done the work of calculating the letter size and line spacing for the hand being used.*

Calligraphy is second because it is where most mistakes happen, those mistakes are often the hardest to correct, and should the correction fail or be impossible, it is least regrettable to trash. I often lay the ground for the gilding, before starting the calligraphy, to give it time to dry while doing the calligraphy. Laying ground is not that time consuming and can be considered part of the calligraphy and can be disposed of without much effort if the calligraphy fails.

Applying the gold is third as any problems can be corrected with the painting. Also, gold sticks to the paint enough to be annoying.

Painting is last as it is the easiest to correct and can be self-correcting.

Note: There are many who do the calligraphy last. This is a personal choice but putting the calligraphy on an otherwise completed scroll will force the scribe to accept poorer quality calligraphy to save the painting. If one is afraid to trash the scroll to keep a standard of excellence, then one will never excel.

Design Order for Creating a Blank:

The order is the same except one doesn't apply the ink in the calligraphy step, but **one must absolutely know how the text is going to interact with the painting.** Copyfitting will tell you how much space the text will take.

Additional things to consider when creating a blank:

Protect the writing area!

If working with parchment, one can pounce out finger grease and oil. If you touch the writing area, clean off the grease before submitting the finished piece.

If working with any form of paper, know the finger and hand grease, erasure marks, scrapping, etc., disturb the fibers of the paper and the ink will act differently on those areas. **If you touch the area where the ink should go, throw the blank out and start over.**

Note to the scribe working with a blank:

If you find the surface is taking the ink differently from grease and oil contamination, do not waste time trying to correct it. Throw out the blank and start with another. **Your time is more valuable than any material.**

Copyfitting

There are two methods for copy fitting: Manual and using a computer. Know both as the manual method always works and will explain the whys of the computer method. Both start with the same.

Measure the actual text area on the scroll:

Measure the area available for text. With is important to start, but the length will become important later.

If there is an indent for different lines, repeat this for each different length text area.

Note: In this example, inches are used. The method works with any unit of measure if you are willing to do the math, e.g., centimeters, furlongs, miles, whatever.

Write a line of text:

Write out a line of text in the hand you are going to use. If you are unfamiliar with the hand, write a few lines until you are comfortable writing with it. Write the line longer than the width of the scroll area to avoid the natural tendency to crunch at the end of the line.

Determine characters per inch:

Mark the place in the line of text that matches the width of the text area. This may be in the middle of a word or a letter.

Manual Method:

Determine Characters per Inch (CPI)

Count the numbers of characters and spaces in the line to the width of the writing area. Do not count a partial last letter.

Divide the number of characters by the length in inches.

You now have a good approximation of how characters per inch (CPI). Remember this number.

Determine the Line Breaks in the text:

Multiply the CPI by the width of the text area. This is the **maximum number of characters per line**. If there are different widths for text in the scroll, repeat this action for each area.

Take the text and count characters and find the space [or hyphenation point] closest to, but not exceeding the maximum characters per line. Repeat until you reach the end of the text.

Remember, if you are separating the recipient's name, to treat that as a separate line.

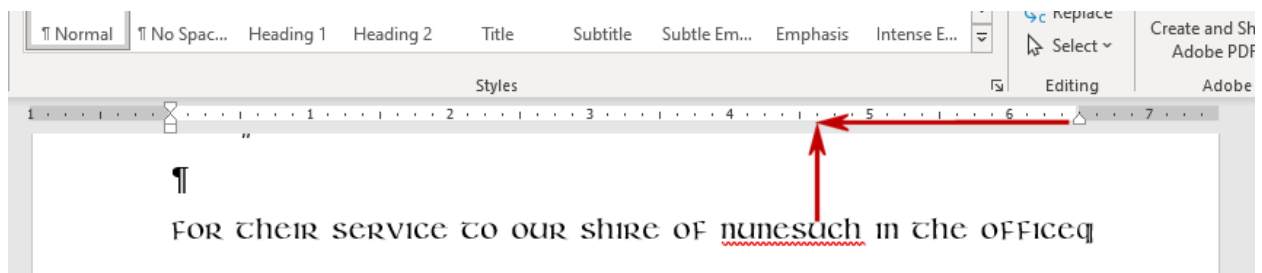
Determine the Required Vertical Length:

Count the lines and then figure the vertical space required. Remember, the line spacing is the distance between baseline to base line and allow the space for the text of the first line.

The "Use the Computer" Method:

Take the text and type it into a word processor. Find a font that matches the hand being used as near as possible. Fonts I use are listed below.

The sample uses Kells SD.



The example shows MS Word. Using the sample text, adjust the right margin to the point where the sample of actual written line matches. If it splits a character, that is fine.

Sample Text:

Make Adjustments (Both Methods)

Look at the spacing and pacing. Notice in the example, that "REX AND REGINA" is split between first and second lines. One can move Rex to the second line. At the bottom, the "a.s." can also be moved down a line.

Note which lines are exceedingly short and which ones are full. It is possible to lightly sketch the letters on a line in pencil so one can tell BEFORE getting of the end of the line when one is going to have a problem.

Possible Fonts:

A note about fonts. Fonts are considered copyrighted software. Graphics made with fonts are safe, but embedded fonts are not. The examples are graphics.

kells sD
ROMAN SD
Carolingia
BlackKnight
Italic (Old Style)

FORASMUCH AS WE, RICHARD AND JANE, REX
AND REGINA ORIENTALIS, HAVING RECEIVED
MANY GOOD REPORTS OF THE WORK OF OUR
NOBLE SUBJECT

Phillin d'blanc

FOR THEIR SERVICE TO OUR SHIRE OF
NUNESUCH IN THE OFFICE OF ARTIST
WITHOUT PORTFOLIO FOR THEIR WORK IN NOT
BORING PEOPLE TO DEATH WHEN TALKING
ABOUT THEIR CRAFT FOR THREE WHOLE
WEEKS, DO AWARD UNTO THEM THESE ARMS,
TO WIT:

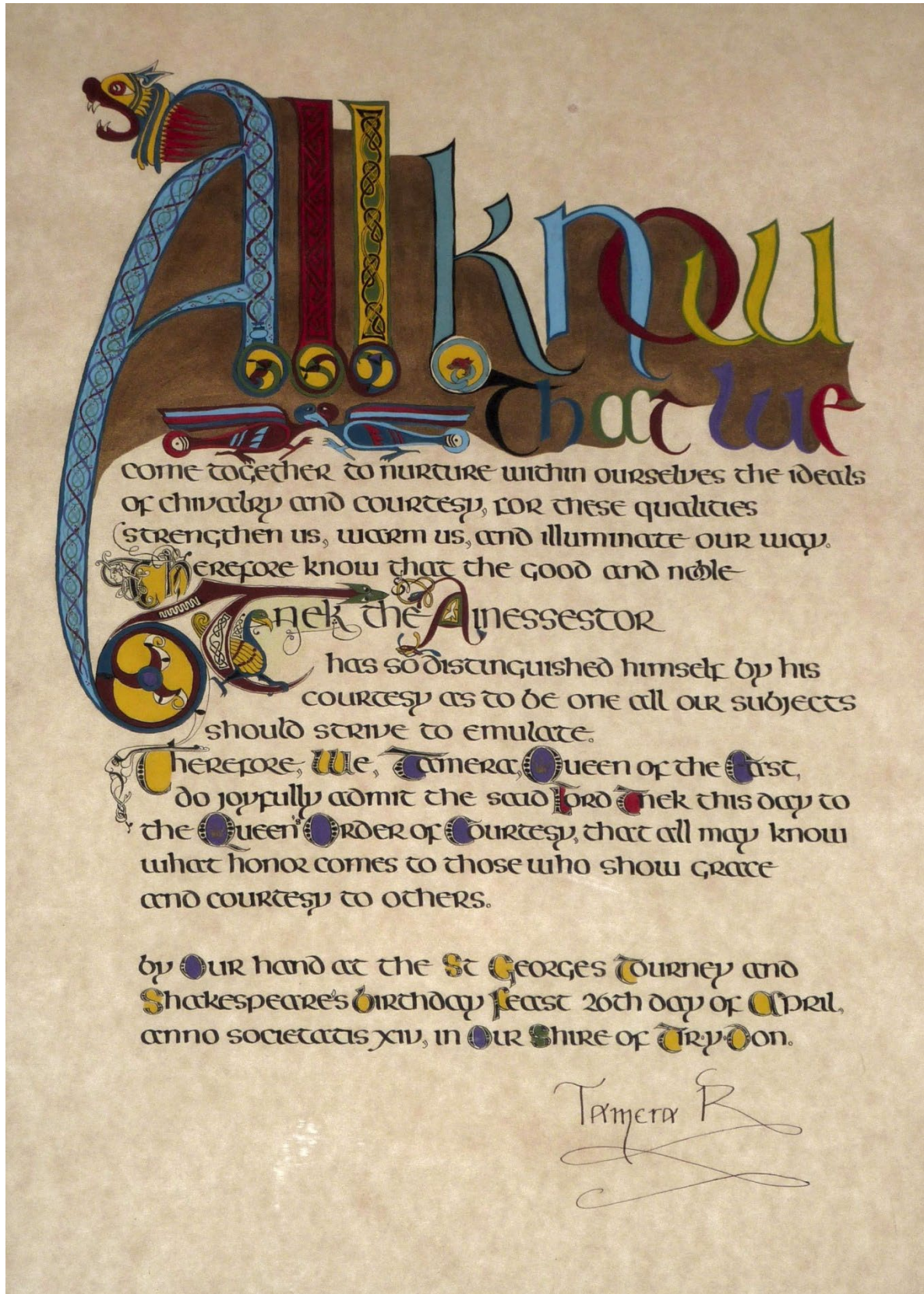
(blazon)

GIVEN THIS SIXTEENTH DAY OF OCTOBER, A.S.
LVI AT ANOTHER SCA EVENT IX IN OUR SHIRE
OF STRANGE NAME.

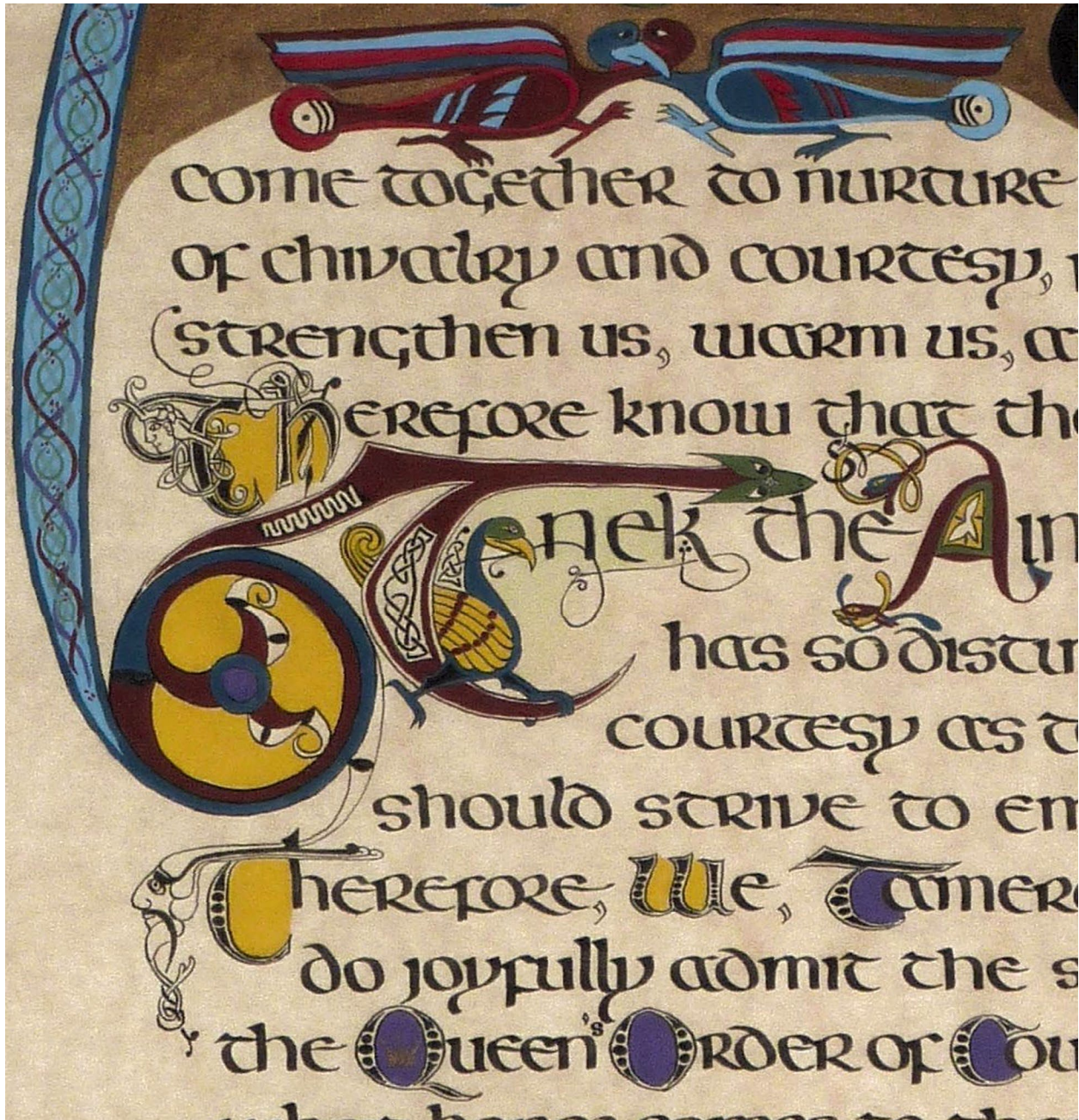
Examples of Scrolls

Learn from my successes and mistakes.

Queen's Order of Courtesy for Tnek the Ainessestor

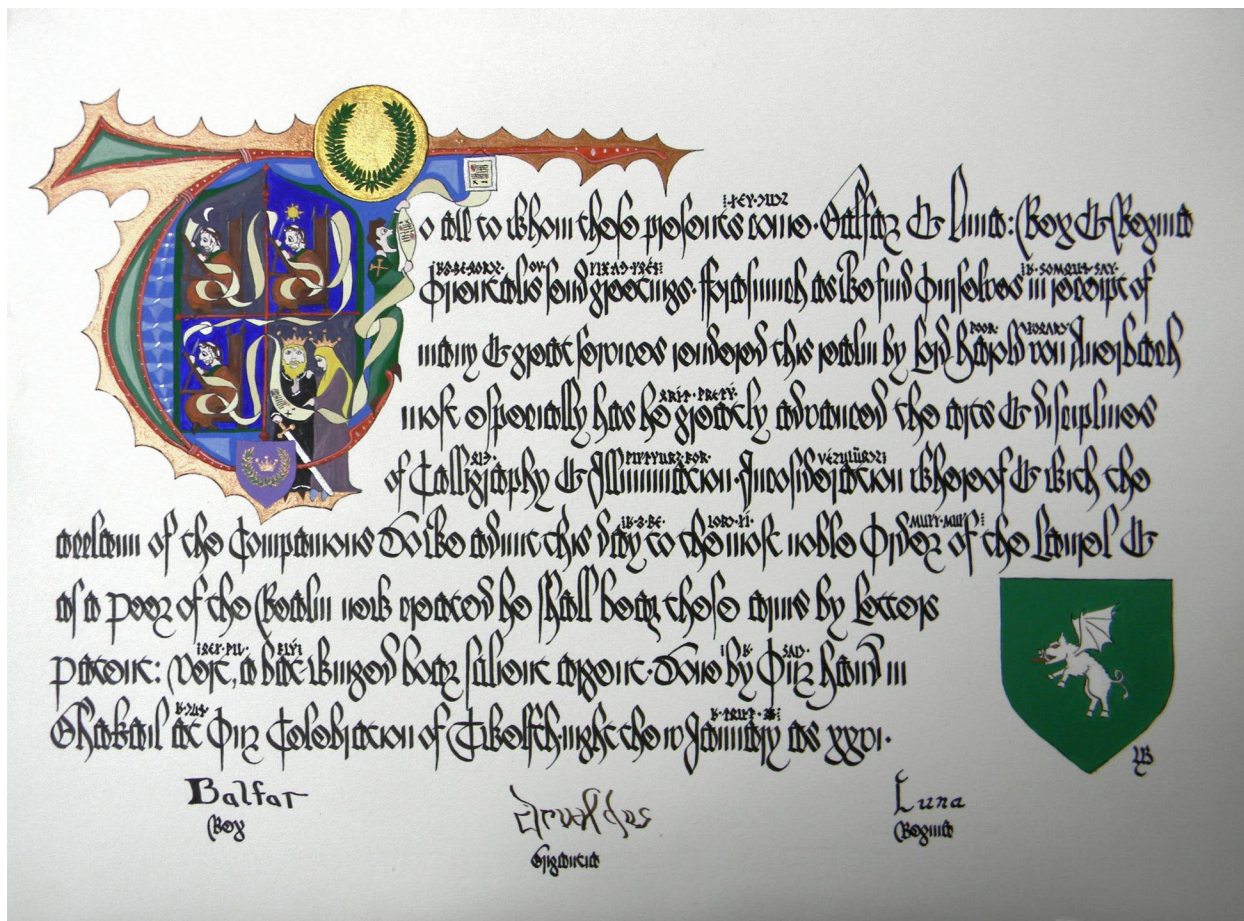


This was the first scroll I ever did in the SCA. I made a few mistakes. I used a soft, mottled, imitation parchment paper which made corrections...challenging. If you look carefully at the detail, the area around the Tnek is slightly discolored. I'm dyslexic and I also knew his mundane name was Kent, so I originally spelt his name as Tenk. There was no time to redo the scroll, so I scratched out the "en", burnished the area, mixed two colors of beige paint to match the light and dark of the mottled paper, and painted it to match the paper. I then painted the pen strokes in. After 38 years, the paper has aged to the point that the difference between the paper and paint can be seen. Also, the gold paint has dimmed over time. Some of the detailing is a bit distorted as there is a lot of JPEG artifacting in the picture that makes the lines waver a bit.



From this scroll onward, I used pH neutral paper with the thickness to survive corrections.

Master Harold's Laurel Scroll



This picture of Master Harold's Laurel scroll demonstrates my constant struggle to personalize a scroll to the recipient (and occasionally make a "statement"). The text is written in a barely period, barely legible, English secretary hand with the wording copied without any correction from the wording I was sent. The historiated letter represents the rather biased, from the scribe's point of view, process of creating a scroll, from working on it day and night over many nights (moon changing phases, hair getting greyer) to being signed by the king and queen with an X and a scribble, to curious handling by the herald, and ending in a cheap metal frame.

The wording for those who don't read gibberish:

To all to whom these presents come, Balfar & Luna, Rex & Regina Orientalis send greetings. For as much as We find ourselves in receipt of many & great services rendered this realm by Lord Harold von Auerbach most especially has he greatly advanced the arts & disciplines of Calligraphy & Illumination, In consideration whereof & with the acclaim of the Companions do We admit this day to the most noble Order of the Laurel & as a Peer of the Realm new created he shall bear these arms by Letters Patent: Vert, a bat winged boar salient argent. Done by Our hand in Bhakail at Our Celebration of Twelfth night the iv January as xxvi.

The glossing says:

Hey dudes, is to be words of King & Queen: Is someone say Poor Howard write pretty with pictures for Vezel-lords. Is to be Lord High Mucky-muck. When pig fly. Is said, is done, is truth, pthhh.

Design notes:

The inspiration for initial letter can be found at:

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-eb69-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

It is highly adapted--quartered with wandering scroll.



In choosing to do Harold's scroll, I could have worked from his persona, but that would not reflect the Harold I know.

By adapting the initial letter and having the scroll wander through the torturous life of creation and presentation, I captured our shared love of the craft and humor at the part of the process we can't control.

By choosing the hand I did and adding the glossing, I poke fun at authenticity, while still working within the bounds of authenticity--and I shouldn't have to explain, to fellow scribes, the joy of working with a hand both beautiful and almost unreadable. It gave him a puzzle to figure out. The glossing both pokes fun at the somewhat bombastic wording of scrolls and acknowledges our common friends at the time, the Malagentians, and includes a reference to his folk singing (Poor Howard).

Master Harold was an early adapter of diapering, so, of course, I had to add diapers into the scroll.

All these things combined, reflect the Harold I know; the Harold that has a flying pig for a device, which itself is both an example of authentic, simple heraldry and "in your face" humor.

--Now, if I had only figured out how to incorporate references to Santa Claus and trains...

Laurel Scroll for Alisoun MacCoul of Elphane

NELMSATUR LIVES
 MUNDI COGNITA NOS, RAPIDALEM
 & KATERIAM, RESEM & REGIAM
 ORIENTALIS AGNOSCEPTES CONTRIBUTOPTES
 FACTAM SOCIETATA A O EQUITE
 Alisoun MacCoul of Elphane
 COLISISTEITIBUS EX EUIS
 QUESTIGATIONIBUS ERUDITIONIBUSQUE
 U DISCIPLINA STIGIANDI ET EUIS
 URBANO PARTIENDO HANC SCIENTIAM
 CUM ALIS ATQUE RESPONDEPTES CUPIDITATIBUS
 SOCIORUM EUIS, ERGO EAM COMITEM LAURI SALUTARE
 HOC DECRETUM EST HAC ANTE DIEM UNDECIMUM
 CALENDAS FEBRUARIAS ANNO SOCIETATIS UICESIMO
 TERTIO DUODECIMA NOCTE U MUNICIPIO NOSTRO
 F U IE LEA ILS.

Randal Katherine
Regina

The text is in Latin awarding a Laurel for work and research in Heraldry. The scroll was given at a Twelfth Night event. The glossing reads:

Is everybody listen to King and Queen. Is done wicked good Bambi. Is to study pictures so ignorant peasants and noble barbarians is to not have to read names. Is now being Laurel. Is given, is done, is time to party! Is really twenty eighth night.

Design notes:

Designing a laurel scroll for a linguist (and Latin scholar), historian, and paleographer can be something of a challenge. This scroll owes its final form to a chance encounter. A group of us were jamming (Hammered dulcimer, violin, and a couple of recorders) in the hallway at an event in the Barony of Bergental. During a break, a young lady, appreciating our ability to anticipate each other, asked how long we had been playing together.

“15 minutes.”

“You all must be professional musicians.”

“Nope: Knight, Seamstress, Cook, and Calligrapher.”

Her eyes lit upon hearing calligrapher. No one ever picks the calligrapher, so I asked her about her background. She was a Latin Major at Mount Holyoke College. After answering her questions about calligraphy, I asked if she would be willing to translate the wording for a scroll in to Latin. She was thrilled at the chance. I sent her the wording and a week later, received the translation, with notes about possible substitutions based on idiom and context. She had drafted her Latin professor, and the two of them had evidently had a wonderful time, making the translation.

The style of the scroll fit the period of the recipient, the Latin for the Latin scholar, the authentic alphabet and letter forms for the historian and paleographer, and the glossing in a made-up alphabet in a made-up language was for the paleographer and for the whimsical side of her nature.



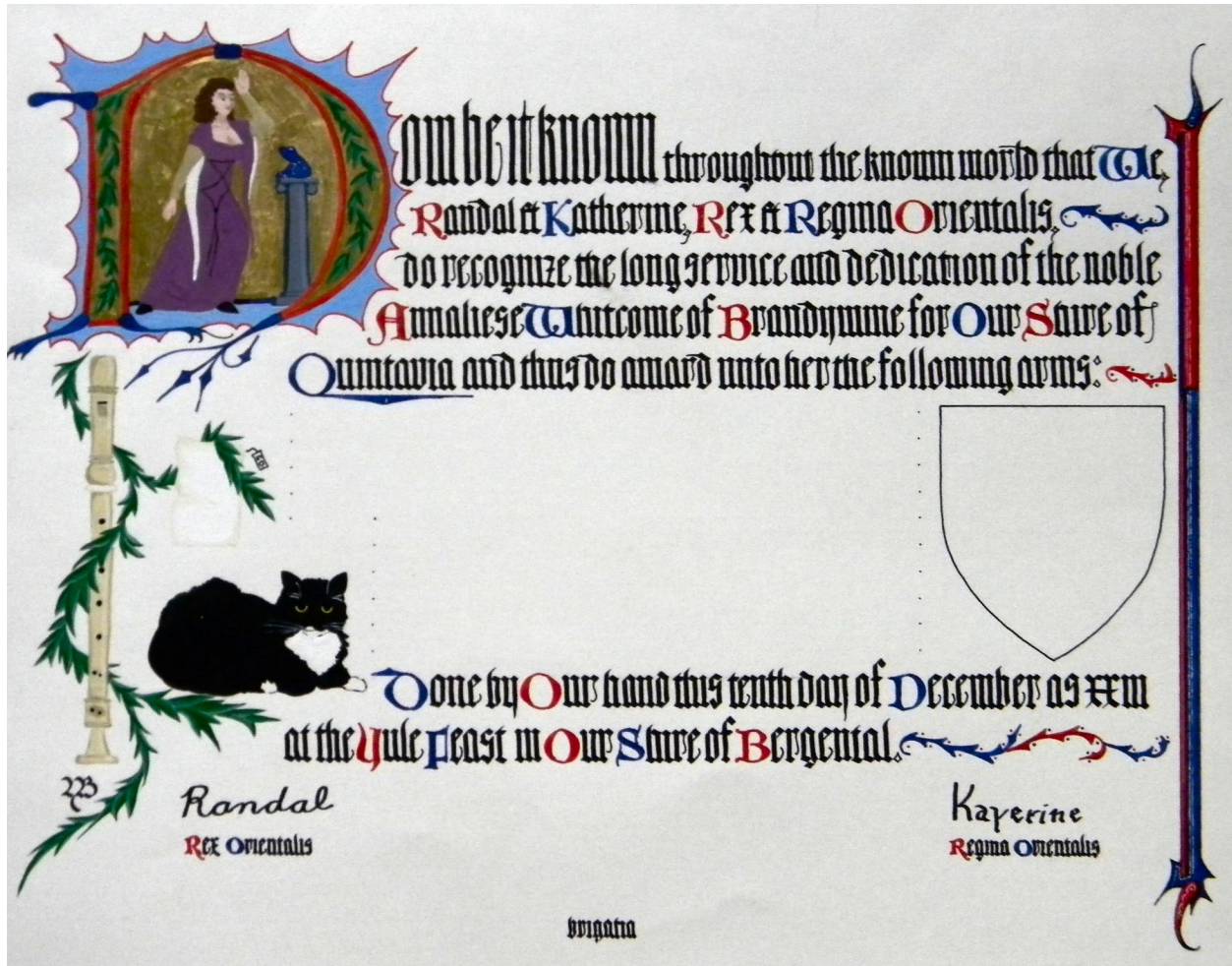
I always try to work in some bit of whimsy, such as the letter A drawing the following letters.

The comment in the glossing about 28th night—the event was a Twelfth Night celebration—held 28 days after Christmas.



This also shows what I believe is the first use of my makers mark, a combination of a Medieval “r” (red) with a “W” and the “B”.

Award of Arms for Annaliese Whitcome of Brandywine



Research of background information for one's wife is relatively easy: Her favorite cat, her recorder (sopranino), the infamous \$60 down pillow—which I never go to rest my greasy head upon—which she picked up for much less than \$60, the Blue Frog (Peter Paul and Mary song) on a pedestal, and her showing great alarm.

Design notes:

A simple scroll using the 30-Minute gothic letters based on Durer's gothic with Lombardic caps in alternating Red and Blue. This also demonstrates a simple, easy to learn hand can be used to produce an elegant scroll.

Silver Crescent for Randal of the Dark



Research before the Internet was a bit more difficult. However, after many hours of phone calls, I discovered that Randal had not yet registered his arms. So:

Design notes:

Randal had won crown three times, thus the sword through three crowns.

As I remember, he had achieved the rank of Bowman, thus two arrows.



An empty shield with a monkish figure pointed at it with a raised eyebrow. How often does a scribe get to criticize a royal peer?

Glossing:

Is to be big help.

Is people to notice.

Is given the Moon on Crown.

Is said, is done, is truth. Pthhhh!

The Torn Scroll

I had a scroll to do for a friend and apprentice. It did not go well. There was no inspiration. I redid the calligraphy over five times during the weeks leading up to the event. As evening fell Friday night, I started again. I worked all night, and, in the morning, I had a scroll with no life to it. At that point my wife came downstairs and said something provocative, like, “Good morning, dear.”

The frustration was just too much. I grabbed the scroll at the top and tore it in half.

My wife said, “I’ll go make breakfast, then.”

I now had no scroll for my good friend, and we had to leave in four hours. So, I looked at the scroll and decided to make the best of a bad situation. I repaired the scroll by using paper and glue on the back to reconnect the two pieces. Then, my sense of humor kicked in and I drew stitch marks the length of the tear and connected the drawn thread to the needle being held by a figure of “St. Robert”. Then I added Veasels (Malagentian, of course) pointing, smirking, and essentially looking amused.

We arrived in time to deliver the scroll.

The Clerk Signet, a close friend, Army pal, and my first student, never gave me another assignment.

The king and queen were upset.

My apprentice, the recipient, threatened me with bodily harm if I ever attempted to replace the scroll. To her, it represented all the pain that exists, in scribal work. If her softspoken, optimistic master could lose it while making a scroll, then the frustration of creation is normal, and all is right with the world.

For me, the opinion of the Clerk Signet and the Royalty was not as important as the opinion of the recipient—and frustration is normal.

