

## ***Wearing the Tabard***

A herald's tabard is a garment of state and gravitas. Its weight should remind you of the weight of your office. When wearing your tabard you will stand a little straighter, speak a little clearer, act with more decorum. Wearing your tabard lends import to your words and actions.

When wearing your tabard, you are the official and personal representative of your Lord or Lady. Certainly you should never do anything when wearing your tabard that would reflect badly on them.

Only wear your tabard when you are on duty as a herald. Don't lounge around in it. Don't eat lunch in it. Treat it with respect - it bears the arms of the ones you serve, after all.

## ***Constructing the tabard***

A herald's tabard is a piece of "statement dressing" that never goes out of fashion! Properly cared for, it should last for many years. Some of the tabards in use by the English College of Arms are over a hundred years old.

Proper construction of a herald's tabard is a time consuming process, done largely by hand. Although there are a few places where you can cut corners using machine stitching, mostly you will be working by hand.

## ***Materials***

A herald's tabard consists of three basic layers:

- Outer fashion fabric
- Inner-lining for stiffness or body
- Inside fashion fabric for lining

Choose the best materials you can afford. Consider velvet, damask or satin for the outer layer of fashion fabric. From the fifteenth century onward in England the materials were dictated by sumptuary laws (the Tudors were big on rules). During the reign of Elizabeth I, Kings of Arms wore velvet, Heralds wore damask and Pursuivants wore satin.

[One thing to take into consideration, which earlier heralds did not have to worry about, is the flash-photo effect. If the background of your tabard is a light color, you may want to avoid a shiny satin. You will be in the photos of many ceremonies and you don't want to be the blob of reflected light that ruins the photo.]

[A note on silk velvet: modern silk velvets use less silk fiber than period velvets. The pile is thin and easily crushed. A good quality rayon velvet may be a better choice than a poor quality silk one.]

For an English-style tabard, the inner-lining will add stiffness. My preferred inner-lining is horse-hair canvas (made from the combings of horse tails - no animals were harmed). This is the inner-lining that is used in good quality men's suits. Usually it is available only in narrow widths - about 24 inches. You will need something wider. There are resources on-line for wider canvas; here's one:

<http://www.fabricschicago.com/index.php/interfacing/canvas/horsehair-canvas-66.html>

(I haven't ordered from them so I can't speak for the quality.) If you need to piece together narrower canvas, cut off the selvages, then overlap two pieces and sew them together with two rows of parallel stitching about 3/8 inch apart. Whatever you do, don't use iron-on interfacing of any type.

For a Continental-style tabard, the inner-lining will add body, but does not need to be heavy or stiff. I haven't made a tabard in this style, but I would choose a light weight wool flannel for the inner-lining.

For the fashion fabric lining, choose a smooth fabric that won't stick to your clothes, but rather move freely. I like satin for this purpose.

### ***The Design***

If the arms on your tabard have a major field division (per fess, per pale, quarterly) you should piece the outer fashion fabric together in the necessary colors. To avoid unintended consequences, such as puckering and sagging, be sure to choose fabrics of like weight and flexibility, if not the same type of fabric.

If the arms have a large ordinary, such as a pale, fess, chevron or chief, you can piece them as per a field division (above), or you can add them as an appliqué.

Other charges can be applied to the tabard using appliqué techniques. Choose beautiful fabrics for your charges - you won't need very much! If you choose to embroider your charges, embroider them first on a ground fabric of plain linen, then cut them out and appliqué them to the tabard. Some tabards have fabric appliqués that are embellished with embroidery. You will want to do all the embroidery before you attach the charge to the tabard.

### ***Putting it together***

Work with your materials as flat as possible. Start by laying them out on a table. Work flat on this table whenever you can. Even better, attach your uncut canvas to a large frame, such as a quilting frame, then attach your outer layer fabric to that. Cut away the excess canvas when done.

Each of the pieces - front, back and two sleeves - will be constructed separately. For the English style tabard, each piece will be finished off separately, then held together with hooks and ribbon ties. For the Continental style, the finished pieces should be butted-up against each other and hand stitched edge-to-edge.

Transfer your design to the outer fabric. Depending on the complexity of the design, you may be able to get away with marking just a few key points for positioning the appliqués.

Attach the fashion fabric to the inner-lining by hand basting around the edges (be sure to have everything laid out flat and smooth first).

### ***Appliqué Basics***

Position the appliqués on the tabard piece. You may be using fabrics that show every pin mark, so use fine gauge pins and pin right up on the edges.

After everything is pinned in place, stand back and take a look to make sure everything is in the right place and straight. Loosely hand baste the appliqués in place. [Do not skip this step, especially if your outer layer fabric is velvet - you have been warned!]

Stand back again and make sure that everything is still in the right place and straight. When every piece is secured to the tabard, you can begin hand stitching the appliqués to the tabard.

Most of the time you will be able to work just through the appliqué and the outer fabric layer. Every inch or so, you will need to go through all of the layers to secure the outer layer to the inner-lining.

When the appliqués are done, you may want to add definition to the edges of the charges by couching down decorative cord or braid.

### ***Machine Appliqué Shortcut***

Modern machine appliqué is made with a machine satin stitch (wide, very short zig zag stitch). The stitching line is drawn or traced on the appliqué fabric, and the shape is cut out leaving about a 1/2" margin all around. After the appliqué is stitched to the fabric, the margin is carefully cut away very close to the stitching.

This is **not** a recommended technique for your tabard, as the machine stitching is quite obvious.

An less obvious shortcut is to attach the appliqué to the outer fabric with a narrow short zig zag stitch (be sure to hand baste the shape first to insure proper placement). Then hand couch decorative cord or braid around the edges, being careful to cover up the machine stitching.

### ***Attaching the Lining***

After the right side of the piece is completed, you will attach the lining to the wrong side. On your work table, layout a couple of wide towels. Place the finished piece right side down on the towels. Then position the lining right side up on the finished piece.

Using an iron set to the warmest setting the your materials will allow, firmly press the pieces together, so that the lining is firm and smooth against the inner lining.

Being careful not to shift the fabric, first pin all the way around the edges, then hand baste them together.

### ***Finishing the Edges***

The edges are finished with bias binding or ribbon. Ribbon is easier, but bias binding goes around the curves smoother and more easily. Do not be tempted into using commercial cotton bias tape! It will look sad next to the beautiful fabrics of the tabard.

Making your own matching or contrasting bias tape is easy. If you've used satin for the lining, you can use the same satin for the bias tape. You can even make bias tape out of velvet. Don't use damask for your bias tape, as the pattern will make it difficult to create a smooth tape. There are many tutorials on-line for making bias tape and a handy little tool you can buy that will help.

Attach the bias tape or ribbon to all of the edges, first on the right side, then the wrong side. Ease around the curves and miter the corners. If you are using bias tape, you may sew the bias tape to the right side by machine, then fold it over and sew the wrong side by hand.

If you like, you can add decorative cord or braid around the edges.

### ***Putting It All Together***

After you have made the front, back and both sleeves they have to be attached together. For an English style tabard, use wide ribbon, two or three on each shoulder to hold together the front and back. Use sturdy hooks and eyes at several places to attach the sleeves to the body.

For a Continental style tabard, butt the edges together at the shoulder and sew them together by hand, then repeat for the sleeves. Some English style tabards appear to be held together this way, but in this case only attach the curve at the top each sleeve to the body.

### ***Storing Your Tabard***

An important feature of the English style tabard is its stiffness. Each piece should almost stand up by itself. The front and back of the tabard can be hung up together, but the sleeves should be removed and stored separately, preferably flat or hung upside down. If you hang it, be careful that clips don't leave marks on the tabard.