

In Persona Historical Storytelling

This essay is a voyage in to how to recount historical events accurately from the viewpoint of your SCA persona.

Michael Tighe, aka Sir Michael of York

Who Am I?

- 13th century knight from York England
- Roughly same lifetime as King Henry III of England
- Been in the SCA for a while
- Want to share what I have learned.
- ... Do the Elephant Story ...

Immediacy

- “No Shit” stories are real
- They energize the teller.
- They connect with the listener emotionally.
- This makes for a wonderful experience for both teller and listener.

Using Actual History

- More challenging
- More rewarding
- Brings the audience into your time period
- Taking care with the story educates your audience (a good thing)
- It's fun!

Goal

Keep the story accurate to known historical information,

make it immediate to you in your persona and

enhance it to make it more compelling for your audience.

Main Elements

- **Start With Something**
 - You need to find something that is the seed for your tale, some place to begin your crafting process.
- **Learn Facts About It**
 - Apply modern science and study and knowledge to gain a deeper understanding *and* work to gain the medieval mindset and opinions and expectations for your “starting point”.
- **Choose Your Role**
 - Pick how your persona fits into the story.
- **Choose Your Story**
 - Pick how the tale unfolds – choose the narrative elements to include.
- **Presentation**
 - Work on making the presentation awesome.

Start With Something

- Starting point
 - Something you like/know about your period.
 - Can be real (e.g., coin) or conceptual (words from a period writer, or a tune from period)
 - It becomes a focus for the creation of your tale – it's a foundation to build on.
- You could think of this as the first volume in your library (or museum) that you are building around your story.
- It **doesn't** even have to **appear** in the story – it merely has to **help** you **create** the story.

Make sure you love it

- You will spend a lot of time with it
 - Fleshing it out, researching it, follow where it leads you
 - Determination to do boring research work.
 - Necessary drive to “get” the story.
- Friends/Family will get bored with your fascination.
- But it’s fun and you get great stories.

Actual Thing

- Actual documents (in translation if necessary) give a lot of depth, etc.
- Artifacts (or pictures of same) give a sense of reality to the experience.
- Even a random snapshot from a movie, or a random quote from a book can help you get started.

Main Elements

- **Start With Something**
 - You need to find something that is the seed for your tale, some place to begin your crafting process.
- **Learn Facts About It**
 - Apply modern science and study and knowledge to gain a deeper understanding *and* work to gain the medieval mindset and opinions and expectations for your “starting point”.
- **Choose Your Role**
 - Pick how your persona fits into the story.
- **Choose Your Story**
 - Pick how the tale unfolds – choose the narrative elements to include.
- **Presentation**
 - Work on making the presentation awesome.

Learn Facts About It

- Goal is to get same familiarity with it that you have for everyday things.
- E.g., man in tux, lady in white, in the park with nicely dressed friends. You *know*
- Want the same intense internal knowledge about the medieval environment around your starting point.

Modern Facts

- Collect what we know today. Provides you the teller with relevant knowledge.
- We understand genetics the way that farmers understand breeding cattle.
- You teach if you frame your tale with modern insights/knowledge.
- You want to bring the “Ah Ha!” moment to your audience...

Examples

- Coin....
 - Who, when? What's it made of? How did you get it? How does it reflect your experiences....
- Existing actual event....
 - What do we know? What do we think was the story (in hindsight)? What do we see that they didn't know?
- Research what they knew – how did they say they thought about it? What prejudice world-model did they hold?

Knowledge Makes A Story Stronger

- Background knowledge improves your own understanding and sense of reality.
- Detailed knowledge allows visualization and adds strength to your words. (You don't have to say it's heavy, but if you mime holding it and it's heavy – it looks different to your audience than if it's light.)
- Modern knowledge allows you to rephrase things for the modern audience.

Ex: Henry's Elephant

- In one paragraph of his Chronicles, Matthew Paris describes an elephant being given to the King of England (Henry III) by the King of France (Louis IX).
- How did it get there?
- How did Louis IX have an elephant?
- Why did Louis give it to Henry?
- Did you know that the Queens were sisters and this happened at a Christmas visitation in France?
- Everyone else knew this – so you should also!

Main Elements

- **Start With Something**
 - You need to find something that is the seed for your tale, some place to begin your crafting process.
- **Learn Facts About It**
 - Apply modern science and study and knowledge to gain a deeper understanding *and* work to gain the medieval mindset and opinions and expectations for your “starting point”.
- **Choose Your Role**
 - Pick how your persona fits into the story.
- **Choose Your Story**
 - Pick how the tale unfolds – choose the narrative elements to include.
- **Presentation**
 - Work on making the presentation awesome.

Choose Your Role

- Who are you in the story?
 - You were “there”.
 - You “heard it”.
 - You are just presenting it.
- How it changes what you do:
 - If you were there – make it immediate – intense, full of detail and personal insight.
 - If you heard it – you get to retell it any way you want but add your personal “take” on the details of the story.
 - If you are just presenting (e.g., a sonnet, a song, something like that) then make sure to add your own take – to make it personal.

Remember

- For personal tales, remember that wind-blown castle you visited, or that walk on a stormy seashore – bring that realism to the story.
- You have an opinion about the events of the story – let it color your telling.
- For persona tales – make sure the details of your persona are consistent (how did you “know” this data?)

Main Elements

- **Start With Something**
 - You need to find something that is the seed for your tale, some place to begin your crafting process.
- **Learn Facts About It**
 - Apply modern science and study and knowledge to gain a deeper understanding *and* work to gain the medieval mindset and opinions and expectations for your “starting point”.
- **Choose Your Role**
 - Pick how your persona fits into the story.
- **Choose Your Story**
 - Pick how the tale unfolds – choose the narrative elements to include.
- **Presentation**
 - Work on making the presentation awesome.

Choose Your Story

- Bring all your skills – this is where the magic happens.
- My list:
 - Pick a beginning.
 - Pick an end.
 - Pick someplace to go.
 - Focus on key moments in the tale.
 - Stay focused – no side trips.
 - Provide context for your audience.

Main Elements

- **Start With Something**
 - You need to find something that is the seed for your tale, some place to begin your crafting process.
- **Learn Facts About It**
 - Apply modern science and study and knowledge to gain a deeper understanding *and* work to gain the medieval mindset and opinions and expectations for your “starting point”.
- **Choose Your Role**
 - Pick how your persona fits into the story.
- **Choose Your Story**
 - Pick how the tale unfolds – choose the narrative elements to include.
- **Presentation**
 - Work on making the presentation awesome.

Presentation

- Make no apologies. No setting it up. No prologue.
 - Audience wants your tale.
 - If tale is rich and vivid – audience is with you.
 - Just get started.
- Match presentation with material.
 - “Immediate” stories aren’t linear – they jump around.
 - “Retelling” a tale is usually linear.

Presentation, continued

- Remove things that don't add value
 - Backstory is boring. Makes it take forever to get to the tale.
 - If you need setup – make it short and sweet and minimal.
- Leave yourself *out* of the story
 - Persona History is not a story.
 - Moments in Persona History is a story.
 - If it actually happened, you weren't actually there.
 - You can't play a big role.

Presentation, continued

- If your tale is about you, then go for it.
 - Stay focused on the story.
 - Keep to the turning points in the tale.
 - Make it feel personal (ruminate, be intimate).
 - Remember to bring in time-appropriate details.
- Use language and idioms of the period
 - Read multiple translations if possible.
 - Read them again.
 - Use the original words if possible.
 - Thrymskvida is 32 sentences.

Summary

- Starting point
- From present and past point of view
- Stay focused on the key elements
- Bring in your knowledge as supporting material
- Revel in the emotional content.
- Support your audience – educate them.

Thanks

- Thanks for coming.
- Make tales that you enjoy and bring that joy to your audience.
- That way everyone has a good time.
- Good Luck!