

Heralds as Courtiers

Patric Dickinson

20 October 2003

As Mary Hollingsworth (Seminar Secretary) pointed out in her introductory remarks, this was a rare example of a seminar speaker giving a paper on a subject about which he had personal experience. Now Richmond Herald and Secretary both to the Earl Marshal and to the Order of the Garter, Patric Dickinson has been an official of the College of Arms for the past twenty-five years. He began by explaining that each Christmas he visits the Chapel Royal to claim his allowance for 'attending' the Queen, even although Her Majesty is never present and all he has to do is to appear on the day. The only reason he does so is to perpetuate a tradition dating back to the fourteenth century. This neatly illustrated one of his main themes which was that, although the modern English heralds are still nominally part of the Royal Household, their duties rarely bring them into contact with the Royal Family. This is in contrast to their role in earlier centuries. The early sixteenth century was the heyday of the heralds as courtiers and he cited Sir Thomas Wriothesley as the pre-eminent example of a Tudor courtier-herald. These earlier heralds were particularly important as chroniclers and record-keepers. To illustrate this, a number of the more important manuscripts held by the College of Arms were discussed. Today heralds take part in only the very grandest royal events, such as coronations, state funerals, the reading of proclamations and the State Opening of Parliament. The speaker concluded by saying that he regarded the Golden Jubilee service at St. Paul's Cathedral in June 2003 as the highlight of his career and that, as he expects to be retired long before there is another coronation, it is likely to remain so. **AB**