

Overview of Medieval and SCA Favors

~ Lady Diane de Arden

Period Favors:

Types of Favors/Tokens

In period there are two types of favors apparent through examination of the literature. Love favors, as the name suggests, were given to signify the relationship between the two gentles exchanging these tokens. Despite what we see in the SCA, love tokens were not very common until the sixteenth century. References to love favors/tokens can be found as far back as the twelfth century so they did occur. Largesse, on the other hand, is the giving of practical gifts to someone admired by the giver. It's similar to modern corporate sponsorship.

What did women give to men?

Love tokens given to men by women were often rings, sleeves, belts, banners, broaches, veils, gloves, hankchiefs, and the occasional shift. The hankchieff, glove, and sleeve remain popular well into the the Renaissance.

Largess was commonly in the form of weapons, armor, and horses.

What did men give to women?

There is a clear list in "The Art of Courtly Love" by Andreas Capellanus that details what a woman may accept from her lover. Included in the list are a hankchieff, a fillet for the hair, a breastpin, a mirror, a girdle, a purse, a tassel, sleeves, gloves, a ring, little dishes, a flag. Or as a more general rule, any small gift which is useful for personal care or is pleasing to look at.

SCA Favors:

The different types of favors:

In the Modern Middle Ages there are many more types of favors. You don't see the more common medieval form, largess, but the use of favors has expanded to cover many many different types of relationships. They can be used to signify a relationship between a group of people such as households, fighting units, or guilds. Favors are also given and exchanged as signs of friendship with no romantic connotations.

Fighters, be they heavy weapons or fencers, will carry favors for the person whose honor they represent on the field. Sometimes it is a love relationship and sometimes the two people are friends who wish to honor each other. These favors may be given for just the tourney, the day, a specified time period, or indefinitely but the time period should be agreed upon by the people involved.

Then there are Loyalty favors given by, usually, a lady of some rank to people who have done or are going to do her a service. They are often given to, but not limited to, fighters entering the field of battle.

The last is a lesser know type of favor called by some a "for the nonce" favor. These are given by a lady to a fighter she may have met just that day for the duration of a tourney. See the attached article for a very good description.

What do they look like?

There is the standard SCA favor that is often referred to as the "fingertip favor". This is a decorated rectangle of cloth that is worn on the belt. At the moment that may be one of the more common types of favors because it is easily recognized as such. I have seen them painted, printed, embroidered, woven, beaded, appliqued, tatted... and the list goes on and on. I have made probably four or five of the "fingertip" favors myself as well as a more period one of an embroidered handkerchief.

Medieval and renaissance style favors are also used as well as odder bits of things. I have seen sleeves, rings, brooches, ribbons, and fingerloop braids used.

Expectations and Obligations in the SCA

"No matter what a favor is made of or what it represents, there are responsibilities that go with the giving and receiving of a favor. When you carry someone's favor it is an outward symbol that you are representing that individual's (or group's) honor - fighter or not. Your actions can and will reflect upon the person (or group) whose favor you carry. If you display honor and chivalry, this will carry over to the person you represent. The opposite is also true, in that poor behavior will reflect badly on the person you represent. If someone is carrying your favor, there are responsibilities on your part as well. If the person carrying your favor is a fighter, he or she is fighting for you. Pay attention while he/she fights. Does this person represent you well on the field? (And this has NOTHING to do with the fighter being a hot stick - it has everything to do with courtesy, chivalry and honor.) What about off of the field? Does this individual represent you in a positive way? What about your own behavior? Are you worthy of this person - do you conduct yourself with courtesy, chivalry and honor? Do you represent him/her in a positive way? What can you do to help the person representing you to do this to the best of his/her ability? All of this applies to a non-fighter as well - perhaps someone represents you on the "field" of the Arts and Sciences or on the "field" of service." **Lady Margarete of Stirlingshire,**
<http://www.angelfire.com/realm/rimsholt/articles/9803b.htm>

Favor Vs. Token

In some kingdoms, favors are specifically for romantic gifts and anything else is called a token. Please be aware of the difference in terminology.

Resources:

- <http://www.florilegium.org/files/ACCESS/p-favors-art.html>
- <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/3734/mrfavor.htm>
- <http://www.angelfire.com/realm/rimsholt/articles/9803b.htm>
- http://members.aol.com/ht_a/noramunro/Tokens/
- <http://www.florilegium.org/files/ACCESS/On-Favors-art.html>

Attached Article

This article is based on my own experience and understanding of the subject. I publish it here in the hope of educating and informing, to further and enhance the gallant and courteous practice of the various uses of favors. If you like what you see here and wish to reprint it, you have my full permission to do so. I ask only that if you reprint it, you do so in its entirety.

On Favors
- Donal Mac Ruiseart

"My Lords," intones the herald, "Salute the Crowns of Atlantia" The fighters and the herald bow towards the thrones.

"My Lords, salute the one who inspires you this day!" The fighters turn. One bows to his wife, standing on one side of the Lists, the other raises his sword to a lady he met only an hour before, sitting on the opposite side. The wife blows a kiss; the other lady stands and nods her head.

"Salute your worthy opponent!" The fighters face each other and raise their swords in salute. The herald steps aside and the marshal delivers his charges to the fighters. At his call of "Lay on!" the Lists resound with the impact of swords on shields.

As they fight, you see that both are wearing favors. The one worn by the fighter who saluted his wife is hung over his belt. It is richly embroidered with his initials and hers in a decorative border, a symbol of their formal and ongoing devotion to each other. The other wears a ribbon tied around his arm, which the lady had pulled from her hair not long before the Lists opened. The favors differ as much as the connections between the fighters and the ladies, and are examples of two of the many forms that both can take.

The origin of the custom of favors or tokens is obscure, but there are many references to them in the literature of the Middle Ages. A lady might give a scarf, a sleeve (they were easily detached), a jewel, or some other such personal item to a knight who was riding off to battle or to a tournament. In some cases the battle or tournament was to be fought for the lady's own sake, as in the case of a judicial duel.

In the Current Middle Ages, the custom has developed of making special objects specifically called "favors" that

are given to a fighter or fighters for several reasons. Though it is usually a lady who gives a favor to a lord, it can be done the other way around, especially if a lady fighter has a non-fighting lord. But there are cases of a lord and a lady wearing each other's favors in lists or battlefield. For ease of expression, though, I will use the case of the ladies being the ones giving the favors and the lords being those who receive them.

Favors take many forms, not only in their physical construction but in their significance. The general classifications of significance can be explained as follows.

"Romantic" favors are given by a lady to a fighter with whom she has an ongoing relationship, that is, her husband or lover. These are often very elaborate.

"Friendship" favors are given by a lady to one or more lords who are her friends, often members of the same household.

"Loyalty" favors are given by a lady of rank, as a Baroness, Princess, or Queen, to those fighters who enter the field of battle in the service of her Barony, Principality, or Kingdom. These tend to be simple, since they must be made in large quantities. Fighters can often be seen lining up to receive such favors in the time before a battle.

The "Premiere Lady" of some households gives favors to all the fighters of the household, being a custom somewhere between "Friendship" and "Loyalty" favors.

Finally but not least is the most misunderstood of favors, which one might call a "for the nonce" favor. Such a favor is bestowed by a lady on a fighter she may have met only that day, and which should be returned when the tourney is over, or in any case by the end of the event. In a way, this can be the most romantic of favors, in the literary sort of sense, and is the one whose etiquette I will discuss at some length later in this article.

What form do these favors take? It is limited only by the imagination and skill of the bestower, but most commonly a favor takes the form of a rectangle of fabric with some decoration identifying the bestower, and sometimes, especially in the case of "Romantic" favors, the one wearing it as well. Usually worn tucked into a belt or strap, they will often have a loop at the top for extra security. It is no fun to lose one. I once combed the field where a Pennsic battle was fought, thinking I had lost my Lady's favor there. It later turned up in camp, to my relief and the amusement of many others - including my Lady! Favors given by Queens on the eve of battle are

often no more than strips of ribbon printed with the Queen's badge. I have worn favors in the form of knots or braids of yarn or cord, and one that was a small square of leather stamped with the cognizance of a Crown Princess of the East. Lacking a prepared favor, a lady might improvise. She might give the fighter a bit of ribbon from her hair or a sleeve (not a whole sleeve, please, ladies, the chance of damage is too great!), a scarf, or some other thing that would not itself be at risk or place the wearer at risk. For that reason, a piece of jewelry is not a good choice.

As I noted earlier, the least understood of favors is the "for the nonce" favor. The meaning of long-term favors is easily understood, as is the meaning of "loyalty" favors. However, if a fighter seeks to honor a lady by asking to carry her favor in the Lists (though in fact it is she who honors him), he must realize that what he is doing is paying her a formalized compliment, and that by bestowing such a favor the lady is paying him a similar and greater compliment, and nothing more. Bestowing a favor on a fighter for the day's tourney or battle does not obligate the lady to anything. She need not sit with him at the feast, or accompany him to a post-revel, or anything of the kind ... In fact, she is not even obligated to allow him to wear the favor for the duration of the day, for if he displeases her in some way during the day she has every right to demand its return. And a fighter who loses a favor that way ought indeed to be ashamed.

Let us assume that there is a fighter at a tourney who has no lady, or perhaps whose lady is not at the event. (As I said earlier, this can work either way. My lords, keep in mind that a lady fighter may approach you in this way someday!) Wishing to keep in the spirit of things, he looks about him for a lady to compliment by asking her for a favor. He ought to look for a lady who appears to have no lord there. He goes to her and salutes her.

"Good day to you, m'lady," he might say, "I am Marco diGiardino."

"And a good day to you, m'lord," she may reply, "I am Anne De La Marche." If she extends her hand, he ought to bow over it and kiss it (hand kissing is a gentle thing. He ought barely to brush her hand with his lips.).

At this point he ought to kneel. "Lady Anne, it is my intent to fight in this day's tourney, and I wonder if you would honor me by allowing me to carry your favor in the Lists this day."

Now, she may decline to give a favor, and she may or may not tell him why. It matters not, though. If a lady declines to give you a favor, always assume that it is

because she has a lord, or that she just doesn't give "for the nonce" favors, or she just doesn't understand, or maybe she doesn't like to watch tourneys or has plans to do something else during the tourney. Do not haggle or cajole. If you do, you've spoiled the gallantry of it! Simply rise, bow, and say something to the effect of "As you wish, m'lady," then bow again and take your leave. Even if your feelings are hurt, keep a lid on it!

Her answer may be that she will be delighted to be so honored (Note that each one maintains that the other is the one doing the honoring ... of such is courtesy made), and if she has a favor prepared, she would hand it to him. If she is so inclined but has no prepared favor, she may improvise with ribbon, yarn, or any other suitable item. If you approach a lady in this way and she is at a loss as to what to offer, my lords, be prepared to suggest something. If she does bestow the favor, he should take it and tuck it with great care into his belt, or some other suitable place if he is already in armor. Then he should rise and say something to the effect that he will make every effort to be worthy of the honor she has bestowed upon him. He might ask her where she is most likely to be during the tourney, that he may know where to salute. Then he should rise, bow, and take his leave of her.

At the beginning of each match in which he fights, he should make an effort to locate her so that when the call to "salute the one who inspires you this day" is given, he will know which way to bow. The lady should pay attention and respond with a wave, a nod, some indication that she is interested (whether she really is or not!). After each match he should go to her and say something to the effect that he hopes he has pleased her with his performance.

Now, this does not hinge on whether he won or lost! Did he conduct himself with courtesy? Did he carry himself with grace? Did he look good out there? If he lost, did he take it in stride? If so, then by all means she ought to be pleased! If on the other hand he acted like a churl, used foul language, was disrespectful of the Crown or the marshal or his opponent or suchlike, she should tell him of that. If he is contrite and promises to amend his ways, she might give him another chance. Everyone has lapses. It is a serious thing to demand that a favor be returned before the wearer is done fighting. She should do that only if he has done something really bad or continues whatever displeases her after she has told him of it.

I hate to have to address this, but if a lady does demand the early return of a favor and the fighter refuses, this is a very serious breach of courtesy. She should take her complaint to the Baroness, Princess, or Queen; or if none of those are present, to the Marshal in charge of the

event. In my opinion, such a one ought to be removed from the Lists, but it is the option of the one in charge to act on it.

Assuming all goes well, when the fighting is over, he should return to the lady, kneel, and offer to return the favor, again with the hope that he has been worthy of it. If it is an elimination tourney and the fighter is eliminated, he ought to offer to return the favor at that point. If there is to be more fighting, and he wishes to continue to wear the favor, he should ask her permission to do so. He should kneel and hand the favor back to her, repeating his hope that he has pleased her by wearing it. Chances are it might have been stained or damaged, but there is no dishonor in that! If there is damage, the lady might say something to the effect that though the fabric of the favor was damaged or stained, there was no stain to its honor.

It ends there. The fighter, having returned the favor at the end of the day's fighting, has no more claim on the lady's time. This does not prevent him from inviting her to sit with him at the feast, or continuing to flirt with her, nor does it prevent her from inviting him to stay and chat with her . . . but I repeat very strongly, that bestowing a favor for the nonce does not obligate a lady to anything else! I have heard of cases where a fighter assumes that receiving a lady's favor implies that he will receive her favors. That is not so! One who is chivalrous never makes such assumptions.

The giving and receiving of favors can add a wonderful aura of romance and gallantry to the Current Middle Ages. Many a lady has recounted how wonderful it was to have a fighter kneel to her and ask for her favor. And it is very much in keeping with the admonition all who were at the Coronation of Stephan and Niobe saw:

"Love ladies and maidens
And serve and honor them
In thought, word, and deed . . .
>From ladies comes prowess,
Honors and dignities . . ."
Edward III