

New Member's Guide



photos by Ron Lutz

to the SCA



Welcome to the Society for Creative Anachronism, also known as the Society or the SCA. Prepare yourself to step into a world of chivalry, art, and camaraderie – a world shared by over 50,000 others who seek the same dream you do. Armored knights are locked in combat on the list field, artisans under brightly-colored pavilions are painting illuminated manuscripts, and friends nearby put the finishing touches on their newest gowns, all with Renaissance music playing softly in the background.

What is the SCA?

The SCA is incorporated in the US as a 501(c)3, not-for-profit educational organization. It is part of the “living history” movement, which means that SCA members have a “hands-on” approach to history, engaging in activities that help them to explore the culture, arts, and sciences of ages past. The SCA **period** encompasses pre-17th-century Western Europe, with an emphasis on the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

We encourage research and study of the time period and provide venues and publications in which our knowledge can be shared with others. Almost every local SCA group holds informal practices, classes, and craft meetings for honing new skills. The things we learn and research are put into practice when we hold our regular activities, re-creating what we can about the era.

The Society’s major venue for re-creation is the **event**, which is a general term for a gathering at which everyone dresses in clothing based on styles worn in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Participants come together at a **site** (a rented hall or camping ground) to share what they have learned and to have a good time with friends. SCA events have many different formats: a martial-arts tournament (sword-fighting, for example), a display of artistic skill, a medieval feast, a royal court, or a combination of all of these. Most events encompass several areas of interest to involve more of the general populace. Events can run from just one afternoon to a long war at which members set up camp for a week or more. Most events are one day or one weekend in duration.

The most visible focus of many SCA events is our martial activities. Many SCA members re-create the armored chivalric combat of the High Middle Ages, wearing replica armor and using rattan weapons that have the balance and handling properties, but not the lethal effect, of the originals. In most regions, there are also those who strive to re-create Renaissance fencing using various styles of rapiers, like epees or schlagers.



Some meet to test their skills with the bow, either by shooting directly against armored combatants with padded arrows or by shooting at targets on an archery field. Others practice against targets with thrown weapons, including knives, axes, and spears. In addition, the thunder of hooves may announce the successful completion of an equestrian obstacle course or tilting at rings. Simulated rocks and missile weapons may fly through the air in tests of siege weaponry.



Combatants of all types follow a system of rules and extensive training that permit a realistic and energetic sport while maintaining a sterling safety record. Fighters are on their honor to call their blows, meaning they must admit whether the blow received would have wounded or incapacitated them had it been a “real” weapon.

Less immediately obvious to new members are all the other period activities people do in the SCA. The range of arts and sciences, everyday skills, and technical knowledge is enormous. Period activities range from **bardic** performances (poems, songs, music, or stories) to **arts and sciences** (cooking, glass work, armor making, dancing, needle work, herbalism,

calligraphy, brewing, and vintning, among many others). In addition, there are a variety of technical and social skills that help establish the ambiance of life in a pre-17th-century royal court, including dance and heraldry. Finally, it is important for those new amongst us to realize that what makes a group strong, and an event successful, is the voluntary service of individual members. The SCA is not a show for outsiders to watch, but a living play into which new people can insert themselves.



In terms of its own history, the SCA was incorporated in 1968, but the Society counts its years from its first tournament, which was held on May 1, 1966. The SCA divides its **Known World** into geographic regions called **Kingdoms**. The Known World currently includes the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and parts of Asia and Africa. There are 19 Kingdoms, each with its own King and Queen chosen on the field of armored combat. Within each of the Kingdoms are local chapters known as **cantons, shires, baronies, provinces, or principalities** depending on their size and location. You can find a link to maps of the Known World at <http://sca.org/geography/welcome.html>.



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All the kingdoms build their laws and customs on a framework called the **Corpora**, which sets overall rules for the non-modern side of the Society. A copy of the governing documents may be purchased from the Stock Clerk at the corporate office, or may be found linked to the official SCA web page, www.sca.org. The laws and practices of the individual kingdoms may be obtained within that kingdom or may often be found on individual Kingdom web sites.

Getting Started

Finding Your First Local Meeting/Event

Most people, by the time that they join the SCA, have found their way into the group nearest their home. However, those who have not may find their local group by visiting <http://sca.org/geography/welcome.html> for a list of SCA kingdoms and their individual web sites along with links to local groups.

Before attending an SCA meeting, it is wise to contact the local **seneschal** (business manager/chapter president) to verify the time and place. You can also determine whether participants wear period clothes to the meeting, and who to contact to borrow some, if you don't have any yet.



photo by Tara Derrington

When you arrive at your first meeting, don't hesitate to mingle or to approach someone and introduce yourself. Explain that you are new and ask who you can talk to about learning more about the group. If someone is working on a project, ask about it. In addition to the general or business meetings, there are also local guild meetings where people who practice a particular art gather to share information and help each other. Additionally there are fighter practices where there is commonly extra gear that you can use to try out SCA combat for yourself.

Some groups have a special person (known as a **Chatelaine** or **Hospitaller**) whose job it is to assist newcomers. Some groups also have special meetings for newcomers to help them learn what they need to know to feel a part of the group. Above all...get involved! Volunteer to help out with one of the group's activities. Although they won't let you run an event yourself at first, they will be quite happy to have you help out with the myriad tasks involved in holding a successful event.

Once you have attended a local meeting, you may want to try your hand at an event. To find local or regional Society events, look in your kingdom's newsletter, visit the calendar on your kingdom's web site or check out <http://www.sca.org/activities/events.html#kingdom>.

What to Wear

The Society is a living history organization, intended for participants rather than spectators. Everyone who attends an event is expected to wear at least an attempt at pre-17th-century clothing (or **garb** as it is sometimes called). Clothing need not be fancy. Some groups have **loaner clothes** for first-time attendees. Call your local Seneschal to see if loaner garb will be available. Society members usually make their own clothes, although sometimes you can commission someone to make you simple clothes. For women, a plain-colored long skirt and a peasant-type blouse will serve as beginning clothing. For men, try plain trousers (not jeans), and a peasant-style shirt that is not tucked in. A cloak, even one made of a blanket, can hide modern clothes. For shoes, choose leather boots, simple slippers, or moccasins without fringe. For accessories, wear a pouch or drawstring purse on your belt.



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If you want to try for a more accurate reproduction of what was worn, there are a number of sources that tell you how to make simple clothes. Visit <http://sca.org/officers/chatelain/newcomers.html> or <http://moas.atlantia.sca.org/wsnlinks/>.

What to Bring

You will usually need food for the day; a feast is often available for Saturday evening. For camping events, modern tents and camping equipment are perfectly acceptable, though it is customary to bring cloth to cover up coolers that are left in the open. At outdoor events, you will want to bring a chair to sit in, as well as something to drink. You may also wish to bring a wide brimmed hat for protection from the sun. If you will be eating at the feast, bring or arrange to borrow **feast gear** - a period-looking cup, plate, bowl, flatware, and napkin. You can also bring accessories like tablecloths, pitchers and candles for light.

What to Do

When you arrive on the event site, the first thing to do is check in at the **gate** (sometimes called “Troll”). Here you can pay the **site fee** and buy the feast. In many cases, feasts must be reserved well in advance of the event. Contact the person listed in the newsletter or your kingdom’s web site calendar who is in charge of the event (the **autocrat** or **event steward**) to make a reservation. You may also find a list of the planned activities and their start times. At camping events, there will often be a morning **court** to explain the activities of the day.

During the event, there will be a variety of competitions and/or classes. For armored or rapier combat, you have to be **authorized** before participating in the contest. However, for other activities, such as target archery, you may be able to participate if loaner gear is available and if the rules of that particular shoot allow. Feel free to attend any of the classes offered that might interest you. Learn a dance. Carry water to fighters or the crowd. Serve at a feast (a very fast way to get to know people). Attend court with someone who can explain what is going on to you. Approach groups of singers, and join in or listen. Taste someone’s mead (if you’re of legal age). Most importantly, do not hesitate to involve yourself with other people at the event. Ask about what they are doing. Approach and offer help. One of the things that make the SCA special is the relationships that form between people and the willingness of our members to share knowledge.

When the event is over, make sure to leave the site as neat as when you arrived. Pack up and say goodbye to your new friends, knowing that you will get to see them again at the next event.

Who to Be: Names and Personae

Some Society members have chosen only a name and nationality, while others have fully developed **personae** (histories) and can talk to you in detail about their “lives”. Even our modern cities have **period** names: Dallas is The Steppes, San Francisco is Cloondara, and London is Thamesreach. This helps create the atmosphere that we are in a pre-17th-century community.

If you have not yet chosen a name to use in the Society, you can use your modern one until you decide. Some people choose a first name that interests them, and then include their group’s name, for example, Morgan of Glaslyn. Most local groups have a resident **herald** who can help you with name selection or kingdom heralds may hold consultations at large events. To start looking for a period name, consider visiting <http://heraldry.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/names.html> or www.s-gabriel.org/names/.

Some things to remember when choosing a name: you may not take the name of any historical or legendary person, nor may you use the full name of a person in fictional literature. Also, everyone in the Society has a unique name; there are not even two John Smiths! Finally, you come into the Society as a person of noble birth, but you have not yet earned a title. Titles such as Sir, Duke, Count, Earl, Lord, Lady, Master, or Mistress must be earned.

Many members go on to create a **persona**, the person they “could have been” had they lived in pre-17th-century Europe. Some go even further at events. They dress and act as if they were their persona. This makes an event seem more like a gathering of a Middle Ages or Renaissance court. In developing a persona, keep the following questions in mind: What is your name? What period are you from? When were you born? Where are you from? Have you traveled? Where? What were the circumstances? What is your station in life? What do you wear? Detailed information on how to develop an in-depth persona can be explored on <http://www.sca.org/officers/chatelain/newcomers.html>.



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Who's Who in the SCA

Much like pre-17th-century Europe, the kingdoms have a similar system of hierarchy and rank: kings, queens, dukes, duchesses, barons, baronesses, lords and ladies. Everyone is presumed to be minor nobility to start, but any noble titles or honors used in the SCA must be earned by knowledge, skill, and deed. It is often difficult for a newcomer to tell if the person with whom he is conversing is someone of rank. If you are in doubt, be courteous and polite, and address the person as “my lord” or “my lady.” These terms are widely used and acceptable to persons of all ranks.

People who wear crowns or coronets have high rank in the SCA. In many cases they are, or were, royalty. They won the right to wear a fancy circlet on their heads. It can be difficult to tell someone's rank, since a person of a lesser rank might choose to wear a fancier circlet than someone of higher rank; it depends on their personal style. If you're ever unsure how to address someone, just ask them.

The Hierarchy within the SCA



King and Queen: Chosen by tournament combat every 4-6 months. These are the rulers of your entire Kingdom. They are addressed as “Your Majesty.” People customarily bow or curtsy each time they walk past the King or Queen, or when the King or Queen walks past them.

Prince and Princess: A Crown Prince and Princess are heirs to the kingdom, chosen by combat in the Crown Tourney. They hold these titles until their coronation as King and Queen. They are addressed as “Your Royal Highness.”

Royal Peers: Those who have ruled a Kingdom. Those who have been King or Queen once are **Counts and Countesses** and are addressed as “Your Excellency”. Those who have been King or Queen more than once are **Dukes and Duchesses** and are addressed as “Your Grace”.

Peers of the Realm: The rank of Peer comes with elevation to one of the three Society Peerage Orders—Chivalry, Laurel, or Pelican. The Order of Chivalry of the SCA consists of two equal sub-divisions, Knighthood and Mastery of Arms.

Members of the **Chivalry** are outstanding fighters who have received recognition for their fighting skills, together with their non-martial abilities and courtliness. They strive to be the very models of courtesy and chivalry. Only a Knight is permitted to wear a solid white belt, unadorned gold chain, and spurs. Knights are required to swear fealty to the Crown at the time they are admitted to the Order. They are addressed as “Sir” or “Dame”. Members of this Order who choose not to swear fealty to the Crown are known as **Masters at Arms** and wear a white baldric. They are addressed as “Master” or “Mistress.”

Members of the Order of the **Laurel** are recognized for great skill in the Arts or Sciences, as well as for sharing their skills for the betterment of the Society. They wear laurel wreath medallions and are usually addressed as “Master” or “Mistress.”

Members of the Order of the **Pelican** are renowned for their selfless and long-standing service to the Society and to the Kingdom. They are usually addressed as “Master” or “Mistress” and their insignia is a medallion of a “pelican in her piety,” a pelican piercing her breast to feed her young with her own blood.

Baron and Baroness: There are two types of Barons and Baronesses—Territorial and Court. A Territorial Baron and Baroness rule a barony and are appointed to office. A Baron or Baroness of the Court is simply granted that rank by the Crown and does not rule any territory. Both types of are addressed as “Your Excellency.”

There are a number of different awards recognizing different levels of skill in the arts or sciences, fighting, hard work on the behalf of the kingdom or a local group, or other skills. To learn more about your kingdom's awards, contact your local herald or other officer.

The term “my lord” or “my lady” may refer to anyone in the Society if you do not know their rank, but the title “Lord” or “Lady” is reserved for those who have received an **Award of Arms** (AoA) from the crown. This is often the first award granted to a person. It recognizes achievement in the kingdom or a local group and entitles the person to have the title “Lord” or “Lady” placed before their name.





Local SCA Administrative Officers

Bureaucracy, the engine which provides for the smooth running of things, abounded in period as well as in the modern world. The SCA is no different! If you have a question or do not know where to turn, start with the local officers. Visit your kingdom's web site to find your local group and from there, the names of the local officers. The titles of the officers (at both kingdom and local levels) are as follows:

The Seneschal is the representative for the local group to the outside world. He or she acts as the chief administrative officer and is responsible for coordinating the activities of the local group and overseeing the other officers. **The Herald** helps people research their names and heraldic devices, makes announcements at events and lends their voice to court. **The Knight**

Marshal is in charge of armored fighter training, safety on the combat field, and enforcing the armor rules and regulations. **The Chancellor of the Exchequer** is in charge of the financial affairs of the group and is sometimes known as the **Treasurer** or **Reeve**. **The Minister of Arts & Sciences** coordinates the study and practice of pre-17th-century arts and sciences. This officer can help you get started with an art in which you may be interested. **The Chronicler** publishes the group's newsletter, which can range from a simple schedule of upcoming events to a booklet containing articles by local members.

In some branches, there are other officers. These may include a **Rapier Marshal** who is in charge of rapier fighter training; a **Hospitaller** or **Chatelaine** who is responsible for welcoming new members and introducing them to the SCA; a **Chirurgion** who is certified in modern first aid and is available at events to provide help for minor injuries; and a **Minister of Children** who oversees the affairs of our youngest and our most valued assets, our children.

Activities in the SCA

Combat in the SCA

Combat is probably one of the most visible aspects of the SCA. It is commonly referred to simply as "fighting". This activity attracts much attention and many new members have joined the Society after having seen a demonstration of period martial arts. There are two basic types of SCA fights: single combat and group or team combat, also known as melees.



In general, combat is open to anyone who has reached the age of 18. Some activities are available to younger participants. Both men and women actively participate in combat. Should you decide to pursue this activity, your local Marshal can provide you with information concerning armor regulations and the rules of combat, as well as answering any questions you may have concerning fighting. Most local groups offer some form of fighter training.

Before fighters are allowed to enter their first **list** (tournament), they must be **authorized** and be sufficiently skilled so that they are not a

danger to themselves or others. In addition, the fighters are expected to know the **Rules of the List** prior to fighting in any tournament or war. Again, your local marshal can assist in explaining the steps necessary to become authorized. Such procedures are established to reduce the risk of injury to participants.

SCA fighting is not staged or choreographed. All fights are "live;" the outcome of a list or battle is never pre-determined. The champion of an engagement is decided when one opponent acknowledges that the blow landed by his opponent was of sufficient force to have caused death. Each fighter is on his honor to determine whether or not a hit is considered a killing blow. Marshals are on hand, not as referees, but to ensure adherence to the safety regulations.





In the majority of Kingdoms, two types of fighting exist: armored combat and rapier combat. Armored combat evolved from what happened when two armed knights were unhorsed and had to fight on the ground. It resembles medieval foot tournaments and usually involves rattan swords, shields, and metal or leather armor. Rapier combat, sometimes referred to as light weapons fighting, uses modified fencing equipment to simulate fighting techniques of the Renaissance period. Fighters are responsible for obtaining their own armor and weapons. Some people make most of their armor; others buy pieces, either new or used. Before making any armor, check with your local marshal for additional information, equipment requirements, and the safety standards and regulations.

For more information on SCA Combat try the following websites:

www.florilegium.org/files/COMBAT/idxcombat.html

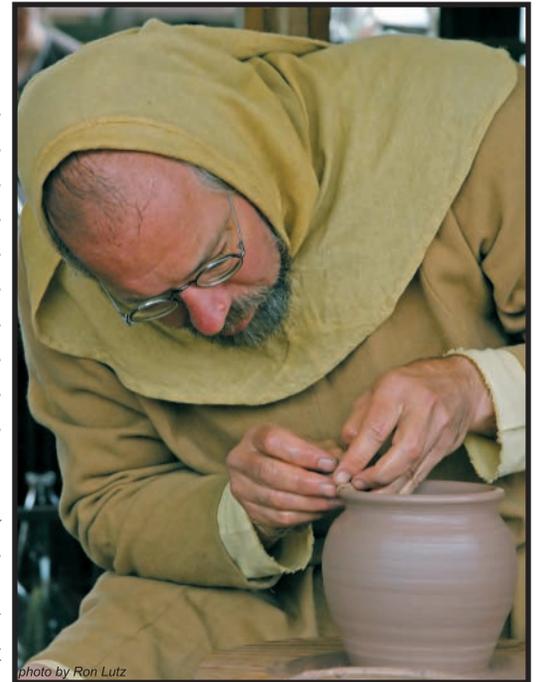
www.florilegium.org/files/COMBAT-RAPIER/idxcombat-r.html

<http://www.sca.org/activities/chivarts.html> .

The Arts & Sciences

Agriculture, Archery, Armoring, Bardic Recitation, Basketry, Bead Making, Book Binding, Bow Making, Brewing, Calligraphy, Candle Making, Cooking, Costuming and Accessories, Dancing, Drama and Comedy, Drawing, Dyeing, Embroidery, Equestrian, Falconry, Fighting, Gaming, Glass Blowing, Heraldry, Herbalism, Horn Working, Horsemanship, Horticulture, Husbandry, Illumination, Instrumental Music, Jewelry, Juggling, Lace-making, Lapidary, Leather Working, Languages, Masonry, Masquing and Mime, Mathematics, Medicine, Merchanting, Metal Working, Musical Composition, Musical Instrument Making, Needlework, Painting, Paper Making, Pavilion Making, Period Fencing, Philosophy, Poetry, Pottery, Research Papers, Riddles, Rug Making, Scribing, Sculpture, Spinning, Stained Glass, Tanning, Tool Making, Toy Making, Tumbling, Vintning, Vocal Music, Weapon Smithing, Weaving, Woodworking!

These are just some of the many skills and crafts that can be learned in the SCA. As a newcomer, you may be overwhelmed and bewildered by the variety of things people work on, and especially by the skill of many of the people you meet. Observe others and ask questions. If there are guilds or special interest groups that meet in your area, attend some to get to know the people and see what they do. Perhaps you have a skill in the modern world or an interest that can be translated into the SCA world. If you do not know where to start, talk with your local Minister of Arts and Sciences to inquire about persons in your area or region who share your interest in a particular skill or craft. For more information, try www.pbm.com/~lindahl/arts_and_sciences.html or www.sca.org/officers/arts/index.html .



Children in the SCA

What you do in the SCA is largely independent of age, except for combat activities. In general, those under 18 do not compete in armored or rapier combat directly against adults. However, some kingdoms offer both armored and padded sword competition programs for youths and teens as well as youth rapier combat for teens. Youth may also participate in equestrian activities and archery, though there is generally a requirement that a parent be present during these and the other youth activities. In addition, most events offer various educational children's activities.



Where to Find Your SCA Equipment



Most of us live on a shoestring budget, and even those who don't, enjoy saving a dollar or two. Listed below are a few places to begin your search for your gear.

Merchants at Events: At most of the larger events, and some of the smaller ones, you will find an awe-inspiring array of merchants who sell articles specially made for use in the Society. Their goods are often handcrafted and can include armor, garb, feast gear, jewelry, and other necessities of life.

Flea Markets/Antique Shops/Garage Sales: Generally these are excellent places to begin looking. You can often find feast gear items, material

and trim for costumes, jewelry, and other useful items. Let your imagination flow while holding the reins of your purse strings. And don't forget to haggle! Look at budget/thrift/charity stores. These places generally offer great bargains. Anything imaginable might be displayed for sale: feast gear items, material, trim, leather belts, camping gear, and sometimes clothing which can be altered to make SCA clothing. Shop these places often as their inventory changes frequently.

Classified Newspaper Ads: People sell used items at much lower than new prices. Items include everything from camping gear to fabric. Check the listings, especially on weekends.

Online: This is by far the easiest place to find SCA wares. E-bay often lists items of interest to members of the SCA. You can also find merchants who sell SCA-type wares online at <http://www.sca.org/links/shopping.html> .



Recommended Reading

There are a number of publications available through the Office of the Stock Clerk at <https://stockclerk.sca.org/> . There you may wish to purchase a copy of *The Known World Handbook*, which contains numerous articles on various aspects of the Society and Society life or booklets from *The Compleat Anachronist* series containing information pertaining to a particular subject or field of study. Also consider visiting <http://scatoday.net> or www.florilegium.org .

Final Thoughts

We look forward to getting to know you at our local events and creating with you the world that is the Society. Interested in learning more about the SCA? We recommend you visit www.sca.org or www.scademo.com . You may also contact the Society Chatelaine directly at info@sca.org.

Local Contact Information: