

The following articles relate to the article *In the downtime – ‘A would-be knight’s tale’* that appeared in the Winter edition of *defence family matters*.

It’s not all about fighting

By Michelmas the Merchant

The knights’ side of the SCA is clearly the most spectacular aspect of the group’s activities, except that it’s only one small part of the fun. The aim of the SCA is to enjoy period activities from the 600 Common Era to 1600 Common Era range. Some take enjoyment out of preparing and making costumes from the era, while others concentrate on period specific cooking.

One master I talked with - ‘master’ is the name given to a laurel who masters a period craft or trade - discussed his passion for 14th century Italian cooking. This meant no new world foods - that is, anything from the Americas, such as tomatoes and potatoes - but using period recipes, and, even more challenging, cooking in accordance with the techniques available during that period, which includes such things as open fire cooking and using preserved as opposed to refrigerated foods. This particular laurel had even managed to find a specialist butcher in Brisbane who prepared a particular kind of bacon that could last up to two weeks without chilling. Needless to say, I was impressed, especially when he discussed a mouth watering dish that involved prunes cooked in beef marrow and doused with custard.

SCA members stressed, however, that the level of detail or adherence to the way it was done in the period range was strictly up to the individual. SCA members ranged from people like myself who wore a ye olde top over modern clothes, to those who made their clothing from materials that only existed back in the period. (Although it should be noted that almost everyone stuck to modern footwear for comfort and safety purposes). Camping equipment ranged from dome tents and the larger family sized modern affairs, through to lovingly recreated tents of yore that took hundreds of hours to complete.

Basically, you got out whatever you put in to the experience. However, the group certainly encouraged - almost by almost sheer osmosis – you to pick up a wide variety of useful skills. Those skills included metalwork for the warriors through the preparation and maintenance of armour, woodwork for those making period furniture, tent making skills, seamstress or tailoring, cooking, leatherwork and jewellery – you name it. If it happened between 600 and 1600 you could find an SCA member trying to recreate that craft. The osmosis happened because SCA members gathered and examined what each member had brought to the table. Skills and techniques are freely shared and tents at the festival were dedicated to craft activities. A lot of the SCA members said that their reaction to seeing a cool looking item was, ‘I wonder if I could do that?’ That led them to download patterns, source material and the like.

A common theme in movies and books is that we are approaching the end of the world as we know it. In recent history, events such as the Cold War, Y2K, the fear of pandemics, or the concept of Peak Oil and so forth have been touched on in popular culture from the reality side, through to aliens and zombie plagues on the fictional side. The irony is that SCA folk are probably better prepared for the end of civilisation as we know it, given the skills they have developed! So I know if the zombie meteor, time-travelling dinosaur plague thing happens, the first thing I am doing is going around to an SCA member’s house to start the civilisation rebuilding.

Sense of community

By Michelmas the Merchant

As can be seen in Darren’s interview with Lady Indriani, the SCA has a real sense of community to it. The members I talked to explained how they particularly valued the friendships and networks that sprung up through the group. Obviously, it attracts the like-minded. Most members have gone through further education and are drawn to the group through an appreciation of history and the like, which helps greatly in breaking down barriers when first joining the organisation.

The networking was very impressive. Members frequently stayed with each other when visiting other cities or even countries. A number of SCA people I talked to said that they hadn't had to pay for accommodation on trips overseas, thanks to the generosity of SCA members in the countries they visited. During the Canberra bushfires, affected members were put up by Sydney SCAers, and in the US following Hurricane Katrina, SCA members helped each other out, including organising donations to various appeals.

SCA members said that the network was especially useful if they moved towns, with ready-made potential, or already established, friends in a locality to help them out with the more annoying aspects of moving. In Darren's Autumn interview, Lord Hugh De Beaufort talks about how the SCA members in Adelaide pulled out the stops to help his family when housing issues cropped up, which included putting them up whilst their house was sorted out.

As far as social interaction is concerned, I particularly enjoyed the fact that men were referred to as 'm'Lord' and women as 'm'Lady' – thanks to the nice baker at Rowany who explained the greetings system to me! It took some getting used to at first, but in the end I was 'm'Lording' and 'm'Ladying' with the best of them. This greeting served as a kind of bedrock of politeness, which permeated the festival. No angry words were to be heard, and even those who moments before had creamed each other with great big sticks, would simply acknowledge the skill of each other's arms post-battle. The concept of sledging, for example, was completely alien to the SCA experience.

Shouting encouragement and general cheering was likewise encouraged. Instead of 'hooray', the cheer was a lusty 'huzzah!' I have to admit having to get used to this, as I'm the sort of person who lurks at the back of the pack when it comes to the communal happy birthday singing experience. But Darren went off like a firecracker! I know this because his decibel strained, completely unexpected 'huzzah!' nearly blew me off the haystack in front of him during a particularly splendid melee!

Be someone different!

By Michelmas the Merchant

The sci-fi classic movie *Total Recall* featured a company that sold holiday experiences with a twist – the customer becoming someone else for their holiday, such as a spy or adventuring hero. SCA members are encouraged to have a SCA persona, a SCA specific name and a background for the character they have adopted. For example, Lord Hugh De Beaufort's story was that he was a 13th century minor noble with a Norman father and a Saxon mother who possessed a small land holding staffed by serfs.



Myself? I decided to be Michelmas the Merchant, though in truth from the attached photo, I have to confess I looked like an off-season Santa working at Baker's Delight. Personas can be as generic or as meticulously crafted as you like. The beautiful thing is that the persona, which is linked to a place and time within the 600 to 1600 AD period allows you to seek out costumes or clothing specific to that locality if you wish. At Rowany it was

interesting to see the melange of period and localities with Belgian maids of the 12th century happily chatting with 14th century Flemish wool merchants or 13th century German knights.