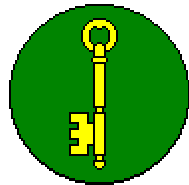


Ealdormere Chatelaine's Handbook



How to Welcome Newcomers and
Enhance the SCA Participation Experience for All

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Welcome

Welcome to the office of chatelaine. Hopefully, since you've agreed to do the job you already know that the chatelaine is the SCA officer responsible for seeing to the needs of newcomers in our fair society. But unless you've been in a group with an active and visible chatelaine before you, you might not have a good idea what exactly the job entails.

Fear not. We'll talk about what the job is supposed to do, and try to give you a few hints and tips about how to do it. We'll also tell you about where you fit into the SCA hierarchy, and how to go about reporting. In return, we hope that you'll tell us what was helpful in this pamphlet, and what wasn't, so we can improve it for the next kind soul who volunteers to take the office.

Philosophical Considerations

The SCA has existed for over thirty years now as a society that recruits most of its members. This means that for all but a few, who grew up in the SCA, we were all newcomers once. Try to remember what it was like when you were new, and you'll have a good start in understanding the barriers to a newcomer just getting started.

To join us, generally, first you have to find out about us, then you have to come along to a meeting or event, and then you have to prepare your kit and learn our customs. The chatelaine can help with all three of these areas.

But sadly, all too often, these things serve as an insurmountable barrier. SCA groups are hard to find, even if you know there's a group in your area, because they don't publicize their existence. Trying to find out about the meetings is difficult, because you can't get the phone number of the person who knows, or the meeting-time and place keeps moving around. Getting garb for a first event can be daunting. And let's not even mention all those charming SCA customs and titles (just what exactly *is* an Excellency?) that, when you don't know them, can stand as a barrier to belonging.

So as a chatelaine, it becomes your business to do what you can to help lower those barriers for people who wish to join our fair company. But never think you have to do it alone. In fact, when a group allows one person to take on their shoulders the whole job of helping out new people while everyone else ignores them, that group will be perceived as a very unwelcoming group indeed. Besides, no one's going to want to succeed you as chatelaine if they think it's that much work. Finding new people, and then helping them fit in, is a job for everyone. As the chatelaine, it becomes your business to help experienced members welcome newcomers, so that everyone wins in the end.

Practical Considerations

Lovely ideas, aren't they? But how do they work in practice? There are at least as many ways to help newcomers as there are groups in the SCA, or people in those groups to help out. Find the style of working that suits you best.

If you're outgoing, you might want to do high-energy, fun programs that bring newcomers right into the thick of things. Or, if you're more scholarly minded, you might want to keep a set of books and pamphlets to give to newcomers to read. If you've got a lot of people who want to help, you can try a mentoring program, pairing each newcomer off with an established member of similar interests. If your group is very small, you might not be able to get much programming going past keeping a look out for newcomers and making sure they're introduced to everyone. If your group is dramatically minded, you could act out familiar SCA social situations such as being called up to court, or being offered a cloven fruit. The possibilities are endless, and limited only by your imagination.

Whatever you and your group choose to do, you want to make sure that you are doing something for newcomers in each of these three key areas:

Helping Newcomers Find Us

Over and over again, newcomers report that they know about the SCA for ages, but they only found us by accident after years of looking. We owe it to these prospective members to make it as easy as possible for them to find us. To do this we have to put the word out to our surrounding communities about how to find us.

There are two basic ways to do this type of publicity. One is active, the other passive. Either we actively make ourselves visible in the community by going out of our way to advertise or we passively make sure that contact information is available to anyone who is willing to look for it. In an ideal world, groups will use both ways to help newcomers find them, practically speaking, the techniques your group uses will depend on the resources you have available to you.

The passive methods are the easiest for a group to do, so you shouldn't overlook them. They consist of leaving local SCA contact information in places where people go looking for them. These places include, but aren't limited to, community information banks, local libraries, local comics, and SF shops, local newspapers (especially if you've had some coverage lately), university student centers, and the like. The information might just be a name and telephone number, or might be an eye-catching poster, depending on the venue. At least one group in Ealdormere has paid money to have a member's phone number listed as "Richard Lionheart" in the local phone book, so that the group can be easily found.

Your group should agree whose names and numbers will be used for contacts. It should be someone who will not be changing phone numbers a lot, for instance, if you're a student who moves twice a year, you may not be the ideal person to post as a contact on a list that's only updated every year or two. Whoever is listed, they should be someone who is easy to reach by phone, and who is able to patiently and accurately answer a lot of questions from people with more enthusiasm than information.

Active methods are more work for a group, but they are also more fun, and one good way to give everyone in your group a part in recruitment. Whether

you are getting a newspaper reporter to don garb and come to your event, or whether you are putting on a full-scale demo, the group needs to do some advanced planning to have the best result.

Newspaper press, whether university or the local paper, needs to be fairly carefully managed, both so that the reporter can make the best use of his time, and so that the group comes off in the best light possible. Make sure that it's somebody's job to meet the reporter and introduce him/her around. If he/she's at an event, politely provide them with loaner garb. Since the most outrageous statement of the day will be quoted in the first paragraph, try to make sure that the press talks to the saner members of your group. Having the fighting photographed usually works out well, but expect all the fighters to be called "Sir Whosit;" reporters don't know or care about our award system. Make sure that the reporter leaves with contact names and phone numbers, and double check with the desk at the newspaper that they got them, because that's how new members will find you.

Demos are the most common public contact that most groups present. Demos can range in intensity from a fighter practice in the local park complete with people ready to answer questions, or school demos where we talk to school kids about medieval history and crafts, through to major public demos in conjunction with local municipal festivals. The more major the demo, especially if you're not getting any help from a public event, the more advanced the publicity needed, including posters, newspaper, and radio public service announcements. You will also need lots of fliers on hand with your contact information.

Whichever type of demo your group chooses to do, it's important to remember that the demo needs to be centered on the audience. Reach out to people and draw them in. Whatever theatrical skills your group possesses are put to good use in a demo; the fighter's dramatic death, the stage presence of your "Royalty" holding court (whether actual SCA nobles or manufactured for the purpose of the demo), the joy and enthusiasm of the dancers encouraging the crowd to join in, all these things are important in presenting a good face to the public. And do leave SCA jargon (i.e. "mundanes") at home for the day.

Remember to spread the work around. A demo needs a coordinator to make sure you have enough fighters, artists, dancers, or whatever you need, but it doesn't always have to be you coordinating. And beware of over committing your group. If you want to hold a fighting demo, but your group only has three fighters and two of them aren't sure if they're free that day, maybe you should reconsider doing the demo. There will always be another day.

Newcomers at Meetings and Events

Once some newcomers arrive, whether they first show up at a local group meeting or an event, they need to be welcomed, and helped to discover if the SCA is for them. This is an often-overlooked point. This SCA is not for everyone, no matter how much we love it ourselves and many chatelaines

become discouraged when people don't stick after a few weeks or months. But we can't force people to stay. All we can do is show newcomers our very best, and let them make the decision whether this hobby is for them.

Often, a newcomer's first contact with the SCA is an event, often as a guest of a member. Many people report feeling left out at their first event, because no one talked to them and they didn't know what they were supposed to do. It's our job to help newcomers feel included and give them someone to ask their questions to.

As the chatelaine, you should be keeping an eye out for new people at events. Talk to them, introduce them to other people, and answer any questions they might have. Ask them what they need or what they'd like to know, and listen carefully to the answers, because they'll tell you a lot about how to do your job. You should also touch bases with newcomers more than once in the course of an event, at critical times such as set up for court or take down of dinner, to make sure they know what to do next, and so they don't feel like they talked to someone at the very beginning of the event who then disappeared to socialize with their friends and was never seen again.

But another, and perhaps more important part of your job, is to foster a newcomer-friendly atmosphere in your events. Newcomers come into our society with tons of energy, lots of interests, and sometimes even a lot of knowledge about medieval history. A group that sees this as a resource to be shared by all rather than a burden to be borne by the chatelaine will be more open to making contacts with newcomers. You need to talk up and remind others of the need, so they'll be willing to be among those first event contacts that make such a difference.

If your events are fairly far apart, chances are you'll see newcomers for the first time at a meeting. They might come in ones and twos. Or if you've just done a big demo, or they might come in a flood. You will need different strategies depending on how many newcomers you have at a time, but the basic problem is the same. You want to make them feel welcome, and give them the information they need to become productive members of the SCA.

First, the same as at an event, you want to give newcomers and old-timers a chance get to meet each other. Nothing breaks down barriers like being able to put a name to a face. If you have a lot of newcomers, you could put everyone in a circle and start by sharing names (though the established members should only give one name at a time for now, one of the barriers to newcomers is the two names they have to learn for everyone they meet!). Or if there's only one new person, introductions can be made one at a time.

Whether your group is large or small, each newcomer should get a copy of your phone list at their first meeting, and you should get their phone numbers right away, so they can be contacted in case of a meeting change or a special event.

Work with the group to make sure that some of your meetings are geared towards the needs of newcomers. Try teaching beginner dances every month or two, or have arts and sciences nights on basic garb, or have etiquette sessions before events aimed at how to address titled nobility and what to do when called

up into court. You're bound to have enough new people to make repeats of these topics necessary every year. And if the old-timers are getting bored with the repetition, enlist them in the teaching.

If your group socializes after meetings, make sure that newcomers are specifically invited, or they may assume it's a private gathering and feel left out. And do invite them. They may not be friends today, but if they stick with the group, they will be friends this time next year.

If the meeting day or time changes, make sure each newcomer is contacted beforehand, even if this is a regular and scheduled change. Your whole group may know that you stop meeting at the university campus at the end of April, or that you meet in the park during July and August, but newcomers won't. And just because they missed a few meetings doesn't mean they aren't coming back.

Again, as for events, remember that you don't have to do it all yourself. In fact, the more you can encourage others in your group to do, the more welcoming your group will seem and the more fun everyone will have with the job.

Helping Them Get It Together

In order to attend an SCA event and do many of our activities, an SCA member needs a kit. A kit consists of all the stuff you haul around to an event, which includes (though isn't limited to) garb, feast gear, armor, archer equipment, camping equipment, musical instruments, etc., etc. It often comes as a surprise to newcomers what they need to take to an event, rather like going to restaurant and finding out they should have brought their own dishes. Therefore the group will need to teach them.

The most obvious thing they need is garb. There are many different ways to make sure a newcomer has garb, and they each have their pros and cons. Some groups have a Gold Key, who may or may not be the chatelaine, who loans out garb on an individual basis. But, it means someone has to haul the garb box around to events, and it puts the newcomer in the position of having little or no power over what they wear. Many groups have also had trouble getting back loaned-out garb; especially if the newcomer only shows up to the one event and are never heard from again.

If you group loans out garb on a regular basis, you might want to consider getting a small deposit for it, such as a dollar per item of garb, refundable when the garb comes back. Even though the amount of money is small, people are more likely to bring the garb back for the sake of a dollar.

Another way of getting garb to newcomers is to help them make it. This can be done one on one, where an experienced sewer teaches the newcomers. Or, it can be fun to bring together a lot of sewing machines, a lot of experienced sewers, and a big pot of spaghetti (or whatever your group likes to eat), and make a day of it. Whichever method you use, the experienced sewers should resist the temptation to just do it for a newcomer who seems all thumbs. The

point isn't just to make garb, it's to teach the SCA value of doing it for yourself, and to give them skills to do it themselves the next time.

By the same token, your group or individuals within it may have a loaner collection of feast gear, camping gear, and the like. The same warnings go for these as for garb. You need a reliable method for making sure you get them back, and everyone will benefit if you help the newcomers get their own kit instead of having to borrow every time. Perhaps your group could keep a list of local stores where key items of their kit, such as wooden bowls and platters, could be picked up inexpensively. Helping newcomers to get their own things will allow them to become independent and contributing members much faster than if they come to see the SCA as the medieval equivalent to a lending library.

Borrowing fighting, fencing, or archery equipment is another special case of the same problem. Armor is expensive, and many groups realistically cannot maintain a stock of loaner armor, weapons, or bows so that newcomers can try before they invest heavily in equipment. This is an area you should be working with your local marshals to figure out what works best for your own local situation. Whatever you decide, make sure that your newcomers, both male and female, know what arrangements have been made for them to try marshal activities if that's what they would like to do.

Administrative Consideration

In order to hold this office officially, you must be a member of the SCA Inc., with a copy of Kingdom Newsletter arriving where you live. If this doesn't describe you, you will need to become a member before you can be warranted.

You are a deputy of your local seneschal, and a deputy of the Kingdom Chatelaine, through the Baronial Chatelaine. The Kingdom Chatelaine is a deputy of the Kingdom Seneschal, meaning you are also a deputy of the Kingdom Seneschal. To make reporting more efficient, you are required to report directly to the Baronial Chatelaine. If you live in a shire, you report directly to the Kingdom Chatelaine. The Baronial Chatelaines will incorporate your report into their own, and will send their report to the Kingdom Chatelaine, who then makes an overall report to the Kingdom Seneschal. You should prepare three copies of your report, one for your files, one for your local seneschal, and one for the Baronial Chatelaine/or Kingdom Chatelaine if you are in a shire. (Canton Chatelaine's do not send a report directly to the Kingdom Chatelaine.

Much is said about SCA reporting, but rarely does anyone explain what it is supposed to accomplish. The purposes of your reports are these:

- A. To make sure your address is still current, and you are still the local chatelaine.
- B. To let your kingdom superiors know about any great ideas you've had and want to pass on.
- C. To let your local and Kingdom superiors know about any problems you have had before they erupt into full-scale conflagrations.

- D. To let the Society officer know what efforts are occurring to fulfil the SCA's mandate regarding educating and teaching aspects of the Middle Ages. Our Non-profit status depends on this part of the SCA.

That's it. If B and C don't really apply to you, it's still important, for the sake of A, to put your name address and phone number on a postcard and mail it off. So that your Kingdom Chatelaine doesn't waste money sending information packets into the gaping postal maw of a dead address. As a special bonus, you could add how many newcomers your office helped out since the last report.

A post card is all that is needed and much better than no communication at all, but it's always nice to hear more. The two things that Kingdom Chatelaine especially likes to hear about are grand successes and ongoing problems. Not only does it warm our hearts to hear that you're doing well, but often your ideas can be passed on to other people, who might find that they work just as well for them. If you're having problems of whatever sort, whether getting help with the newcomers, communicating with other officers in your group, or getting your own workload done, it's very helpful to your Kingdom chatelaine to know as soon as possible, so that you can get some support if you really need it. Or if you tried a new idea that really bombed, the news can be passed on to other chatelaines.

Reporting Schedule

Currently, the chatelaine's office reports June 1st and December 1st of each year, so that the information can be included in the seneschal's report due a month later. This schedule is subject to change. Check your copy of The Kingdom newsletter each month for this and other information from the Kingdom Chatelaine.

Appendix 1

Here are more suggestions for things that your group might want to try. There's no obligation, and this list is not intended to lay out requirements of the office. Not only that, but it's not complete. If your group has better ideas put it in a letter or reports and send it to your Kingdom Chatelaine, and just maybe it will find its way into a future edition of the Handbook.

Demos

- Approach a local mall for a fighting or crafts demo.
- Approach a local municipal festival or Canada Day fete.
- Make a trade with a school, library or church, a demo for reduced-fee event space
- Approach a local library with a medieval-crafts demo.
- Help a local church, restaurant, or service club with a medieval theme dinner.
- Have your summer meetings in a local park.

Theme Meetings

- Have a panel discussion on selected topics about the SCA (ask the newcomers what they want to know).
- Act out key social situations, such as being called up into court, or being offered cloved fruit. Do good and bad examples, and ham it up. Let everyone comment after.
- Have A&S days on newcomer topics, such as beginner garb, chain mail, calligraphy, or whatever your newcomers want. (Note: Many old-timers might like these classes too!)
- Invite newcomers to an event pre-cook.
- Invite newcomers to an event planning meetings, and ask them what they want to do to help.
- Have you local pursuivant do regular name and device consulting at meetings.
- If you have several people what want to fight, band together to buy materials and rent tools, and make a regular day to get together until the armor is done.
- Get your best craftspeople to bring out their first piece of work, and a recent piece for comparison.

Other Ideas

- Start a newcomer household to which everyone belongs for a year and a day once they arrive.
- Help each newcomer find a mentor with whom they associate for six months or a year.
- Make sure each newcomer has a small task at each local event, such as serving or setup. There's nothing that encourages belonging like having a job to do.
- If newcomers are going to be borrowing garb, bring it to a meeting beforehand so they can find something that fits.
- For newcomers who want to fight, find them a fighting mentor who will teach them the basics and make sure they have some armor to try out.
- Prepare local handouts for demos and for newcomers, and have them available by the hundreds if necessary. Make sure you have lots of phone lists, too.
- Ask newcomers what they need to know. Then give it to them. Don't just say, "You can call Dame High-above-it all," that's a very intimidating call for a newcomer to make. Introduce them in person instead.

Thank you for agreeing to serve, and we hope you enjoy your term as group Chatelaine.