

# The Structures of the SCA

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In many ways the SCA is a cross between an unscripted live theatre group and a role-playing game. It is as if, each time that we walk into an event, someone says “Thank God you are here”. It may seem a all a bit chaotic until you realise that, underneath the surface of what you see, there are a set of structures that provide a framework that everything else hangs on. This is a very brief look at these structures and how they work and how we interact with them. For some people this interaction will seem to be minimal, but they are working away and affecting everything that happens in the SCA, even when we are not consciously thinking about them. What follows is a personal view of these structures and the way that the SCA is put together<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to remember that the SCA is a volunteer group. Volunteers are not paid money to do their jobs, but they will receive rewards in other ways. People work in it out of love (or if you prefer, out of *caritas*), out of a sense of duty, or for many other reasons. Without all of us doing this volunteering, to some degree or another, the game will grow poorer and poorer and eventually fail. None of us can afford to just sit back and expect to be entertained. The more we put in, in the long run, the more we will get back. These structures show some of the ways that people contribute to the SCA. What is more it is an amateur group. Amateur does not mean unskilled. Amateurs, by the very name, are people who do things out of a love of what they do, rather than for monetary reward. Many amateurs are as skilled and competent in their field as the professionals who work in an equivalent paid position.

## The Titles

The most obvious structure that you can see in the SCA are the titles that imply some sort of territorial ownership – in other words when someone is Baron of Such-and-such or Princess of Anotherplace. What you are seeing is the title structure of the SCA that tends to be the focus of the pageantry and romance of the game that we play, in one way or another. The SCA was set up by Romantics (but that is another story) and is full of Pre-Raphaelite ‘visions’. One of these is the title structure. If you try to ignore the title structure then you may as well be in a history discussion group or a fight club. They provide the context that everything else operates in. For example, without a Queen of Grace and Beauty there is less reason for ‘Courtsey’ and ‘Chivalry’, the two core values of the SCA, on the field of combat.

### The Crown

The most important title, in so many respects, is the Crown. The Crown is the collective name that we give to the King and Queen. The Crown is chosen by Right of Arms (remember what I said about Pre-Raphaelite ideas) with either the male or female winning a tourney and the other inspiring their efforts. Being Crown is hard work. It should also be fun, but often the work predominates. The Crown get to smooth relations, make Laws (not real ones, but in-game agreed upon common rules), run Courts and hand out awards and (unfortunately) sometimes punishments. It is their job to sit up front and provide the grand theatre for everyone else. They do have a personal staff to help them in this. Collectively this staff is called their Court or their Retinue. This retinue may include a personal Herald; it should have several Ladies (or Lords) in Waiting and some Guard. It may include a secretary, scribes and even an entertainer. Often the more people that are in the retinue, the easier it is for the Crown and the better the theatre they provide to the populace (in other words everyone else) and the more fun we all have.

In Ynys Rhudd<sup>2</sup> and Ynys Fawr (the western, or Australian, parts of Lochac) we are descended directly, as a Kingdom that is – not literally – from the Kingdom of the West (the Crescent Isles, or NZ, come from the Kingdom of Caid, one more remove away). One of the tenets of the West Kingdom is that the Word of the King is Law. This is a Romantic notion of how feudalism worked and is actually absolutism and only came in to English thought with the Tudors – but that is another story again. However what this means to us, in an implied contract, is that we agree to obey the Crown, and to give them deference and respect, and the Crown agrees to try and make SCA life enjoyable. Sometimes Crowns forget this and think it is all for them and about them and their whims, and then what tends to happen is that people forget to come along to things (or choose not to) for the duration of the reign. Several ‘bad’ reigns will lead to a decline in the numbers in a Kingdom. Lochac has been blessed in not having many ‘bad’ reigns. The actual Crowns worn by the rulers of Caid

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<sup>1</sup> While it is personal, by training I am a sociologist specialising in the areas of leisure and of organisations and have done consultancies on volunteers and, in the SCA, held offices at all levels and in almost all functional areas.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘Red Island’ – what some refer to falsely as the ‘Mainland’.

constantly remind their wearers of their role by having engraved inside them the words: “You rule because they believe”. No Crown is omnipotent.

Many people will be in fealty to the Crown. Exactly what this entails varies greatly (and there is an article on the Baronial website on the subject), but it is usually very important to those who are involved. Some are required to be in fealty due to the job they hold; others because of their own title and yet others give it because they choose to. In Lochac you can usually tell which Peers are in fealty to the Crown as they wear the letters ‘SF’ (standing for the Latin words ‘Semper Fidelis’) near their Peerage medallion.

One of the most fun things for the Crown (and indeed any of the Landed Titles) is giving out awards to those who deserve them. Awards are a recognising of people. They are not a reward as such, but recognising what the person has achieved. These, and other forms of thanks, are given out in Court. This is one of the reasons that it is important to attend Court. Without the whole audience taking part the thanks of the populace (expressed through acclaim) are much less meaningful. In the same way, the Crown cannot be everywhere or see everything. Nowhere on the label does it say the Crown is omniscient or omnipresent. This means that, in order for them to hand out rewards, the populace need to tell them of those who are deserving of this recognition. Because the Crown is reasonably remote from most of us, there are other layers of titles to assist them in their tasks.

### Baron and Baroness

In their own Barony the Baron and Baroness are much like the Crown. They cannot make Laws, but they can set local customs and practices and do serve as the local examples of courtesy. Most importantly they are the titular heads of the local theatre. In this role, they are also the direct representatives of the Crown at the local level and are the most frequently seen titled nobility. This means that, regardless of what you personally think of a particular set, they are vitally important to the way the game is played and deserve the utmost courtesy from the populace. It does not mean that you have to give blind and unquestioning obedience to them, but it does mean that you should not disrespect them.

Of course, like the Crown, a Baron and Baroness will have their own retinue to help them and, being the most local of the titled nobles, they should have the active help of the entire local populace and, when it is needed, their counsel and advice. Because of the length of time that a Baron and Baroness hold their place, and because they are closer to the problems that exist, and the hardest in which to hide their feet of clay, this is the hardest of the titled jobs to perform well.

A Baron and Baroness must be in fealty to the Crown. Some Barons and Baronesses will allow fealty to be given to them (unlike the Crown, none can require it). In some cases this is just a lovely piece of theatre and in others it is regarded as a direct link in the chain of fealty going up to the Crown. In other cases it may be somewhere between these. Barons and Baronesses are chosen in many ways and this will differ from place to place and reign to reign. In Lochac the Law states that ‘The Crown shall appoint as Baron and/or Baroness those individual(s) deemed most fit to represent the Royal presence in the Barony. The Crown shall give consideration to the wishes of the populace of the Barony and the advice of the reigning Baron and/or Baroness before making such an appointment.’ Because of the direct effect a Baron and Baroness have on those around them, this choice is one of the most important decisions a Crown has to make during their reign and one of the ones that most affects the happiness of Their subjects.

### Prince and Princess

In some Kingdoms there is a level of title between the Crown (who may not be seen in an isolated area during a reign) and the local level Barons and Baronesses (who are seen all of the time). This is the Prince and Princess, often called the Coronet. In a Principality they are a ‘scaled-down’ Crown. Their Principality is still a part of the Kingdom and so none of their actions may conflict, in any way, with the Laws of the Kingdom. Similarly they are in direct fealty to the Crown and may accept the fealty of others on behalf of the Crown. They have a Court, they present awards and they often provide a training ground for future Crowns. There is less pressure (and cost) involved with this role than with being the King or the Queen.

Sometimes, instead of a full Principality, there may be a Crown Principality. This was a concept that Lochac invented on the way to becoming a full Principality. We lacked, in many ways, the experience of ruling ourselves and needed ‘training wheels’ to find out what to do and how to do it. One of the ways that this was seen is that there was some concern over whether we had enough fighters to do justice to the office of Coronet. When an area is a Crown Principality, whoever wins Crown tourney is not only becoming King (or Queen), but they automatically also win the title of Prince (or Princess) of the Crown Principality. There is a separate

tourney to determine who will be their Viceroy and Vicereign, their representatives. They have a far more limited role than a Coronet and are mainly ceremonial. While they may have some delegated authority, they need to check with their Coronet (in this case they are also the Crown) before making any major decisions.

### Other titles

There are many other titles that are used in the SCA. None of these are 'landed'. In other words, whilst there are titles, they are given and used as a courtesy only and have no actual functions attached to them. They exist only to add to the theatre.

The SCA follows the Byzantine path, where the titles of Dux, Megadux and Comitatus (Duke, Grand Duke and Count) were given to people to honour them. Sometimes these people had further offices or other titles (such as Strategos – which can mean either Admiral or General) as well. In Western Europe these sorts of titles ended up being attached to bits of land, but in Constantinople, and in the SCA they are simply courtesy titles. The SCA confuses things by having Court Baronial titles (something that has no parallel in history), which are also courtesy titles<sup>3</sup>. Because of this layer of titles you have both landed and un-landed Barons and Baronesses. They are addressed similarly as 'Your Excellency', although landed ones can also be addressed by the name of their Barony. The main thing about these courtesy titles is just that. They are given as a courtesy only. While the holders may hold other functional or ceremonial posts, they have no part in the actual structure of the SCA.

Many of the awards given out to the populace come under this heading of courtesy titles (some awards give no title). Whether or not they give a title, they are there as a means of thanking people and adding to the pageantry and Romantic nature of what is happening. While a Court Baron or Baroness can sometimes be used by the Crown to fill in for an absent landed noble (and they then temporarily adopt the title of Vicar-Baron) or they can be used if the Crown wants to hold a Court in an area for some reason and neither of them can actually be there, in these roles the Court Baron or Baroness is merely acting as the agent of the Crown and they have no independent role. The only courtesy titles with some degree of function in the normal running of the SCA are the various Peerages (Knight, Laurel and Pelican). As a part of their induction ceremony these three, otherwise ceremonial, titles swear (among the other things) to hold the confidences of the Crown and to advise them. Thus the landed titles often use the members of the peerage, who are usually very experienced in the SCA, as a resource to listen to them and to advise them.

### The Populace

The populace – in other words everyone else – have a role in all of this as well. It is everyone's job to make the theatre of the SCA more enjoyable for everyone else. The SCA is one of those experiences that will give you more the more you put into it. Putting it another way, it is up to us, to place a premium on courtesy and chivalry and to make the whole experience of our hobby more pleasant for all, others will do the same, and so forth. Nowadays this is often called a 'positive feedback loop'<sup>4</sup>.

We all need to think about what we can do for the titled nobles (for instance helping in a Court) or to help run things as a part of the next set of structures that I will talk about. There is no such thing as being too inexperienced to start. We all started with no experience and had to learn on the job. Today there are many people around who have made the mistakes (and sometimes still make them) to help us as mentors. Some of these people, the Peers, will sometimes formalise this mentoring role by taking a person as a student – a protégé, a squire or an apprentice. I will talk more about this under my last topic.

## The Officers

The second structure of the SCA is that of the officers. These are the people who actually do the day to day running of the group. Whilst they have medieval sounding titles (such as Seneschal or Chirurgeon), they perform jobs that will be familiar to any person who has ever been a part of any recreational group. In the examples given they are the local President (or Chair) and the First Aid Officer. Each officer reports to the person in the 'layer' of the SCA that is above them and can also take reports from those who may be working under them. Whilst their appointment must be approved of by their local landed titled nobility, their primary reporting is to the person who is their superior in their office.

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<sup>3</sup> In Byzantium the courtesy title that would be given to what we call a 'Court Baron' is 'Comitatus'. In the SCA this title (as 'Count') is used for someone who has held Crown once and the title of Dux (Duke) is given to someone who has successfully held Crown two or more times.

<sup>4</sup> The reverse course, a negative feedback loop, occurs if we are not courteous, chivalrous and helpful, even if we have to grit our teeth sometimes to be this way. Negative loops lead to the death of groups.

The Seneschal has a dual role in that they not only oversee the whole group, particularly during meetings, which they should be Chairing, but they also co-ordinate the other officers at their level. Under the rules that the SCA is run by, each of the local officers, however, ultimately owe their primary responsibility 'up the chain of command' of their line and not formally to their local seneschal. There should hopefully be no conflict between these two reporting roles for an officer, but it has been known to happen.

Some officers have subordinates. This is because their role is otherwise too onerous or the sub-officers require a special level of expertise. Thus a Marshall may have sub-officers responsible for archery, fencing and equestrian arts. A group Herald may have a staff that will look after ceremonies, the local order of precedence, heraldic submissions or even a web-site.

Each titled level has a corresponding level of officers. In the Kingdom of Lochac there are eleven Baronies as well as thirteen Shires or incipient Shires as well as eleven Colleges and eight Cantons or incipient Cantons<sup>5</sup>. A Shire is usually a smaller group than a Barony. It has no ceremonial titled head and its members have no-one to represent them to the Crown or to hand out awards to them (except for the Crown). A Canton is like a Shire, but it is within a Barony and its members look to that Baron and Baroness. Colleges are usually regarded as being a part of a Barony for the purposes of ceremony, except that, for legal reasons, they are legally a club within their University and so the officers usually report through the SCA out of courtesy, but their primary responsibility is to the Societies Council, or its equivalent. Canton and College reports pass through, and are consolidated into, the reports for their local Barony. Shires do not need a full slate of officers and Cantons and Colleges need even fewer. Their Seneschals get to fill in where there are unfilled roles and, due to the smaller size, there will be less that needs doing. For Cantons and Colleges, there is also a Baronial officer to help out as well.

What all this means is that a Kingdom uses a lot of officers within it. For example, a Kingdom officer in Lochac will receive 24 reports and have 24 groups to directly deal with (out of the 43 groups that exist). This is somewhat scary for many volunteers and makes them reluctant to jump from a Baronial office directly to a Kingdom level one. That is one of the reasons that many people want to see Lochac start to develop Principalities. Instead of 24 groups, the Kingdom officer would then only have to directly handle the officers of, for example, five Principalities and a couple of groups that may not belong to a Principality<sup>6</sup>. Although a Principality uses more officers, it breaks the roles down to a more manageable size and will make it easier to find people to fill the jobs. Holding a Principality office will then also serve to train people for a Kingdom job.

Above each Kingdom officer there is also a Society-wide superior. It is their role to co-ordinate the officers of the Kingdoms and to make sure that, as far as is possible, we are all playing the same game. By doing this you can go from Ynys Fawr to Insulae Draconis (England) and still see something that is recognisably the same thing that you did at home and still be recognised for what you have achieved. The same principles of honour, courtesy and respect apply throughout and the 'game' remains the same.

There are some officers who may only exist temporarily, to cover a need. The role of a Chancellor (legal officer for the Kingdom or Principality) is one of these. The person who holds the job may not actually be a lawyer, but they will be an expert on the laws and traditions (in other words the club rules) of the SCA.

People can often hold several offices at different levels at the same time. Thus a person can be (for example) an officer at Kingdom, Baronial and Canton level as long as they are not their own superior (in other words a Baronial Herald<sup>7</sup> cannot also be the chief Kingdom Herald<sup>8</sup> and, for various reasons, a person also cannot be both Seneschal and Reeve in the same branch simultaneously. The level of activity that calls for holding many offices should be avoided, if this is possible, but it is not always feasible to do this.

In addition to the normal officers that are part of a group such as a Barony, several of the functional areas (especially Marshals and Heralds) have a separate structure of people who are active in the area, but usually have no official responsibility. Marshals at large are a vital part of running tourneys and keeping the official marshal sane and anyone can volunteer to become one. Anyone may also become an at-large herald, but some heralds have a permanent rank (provided they remain active) because they have either passed an exam or because they have previously held a high heraldic office satisfactorily. These ranks are (in ascending order)

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<sup>5</sup> The word 'incipient' means that the group is still getting organised. It may not even have a name yet and is not formally regarded as a full group – for instance they need another group to sponsor any events they hold.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the southern Principality will start off with around six groups in it. Once it forms, this will reduce the number of reporting groups from 24 to 19. NZ has four groups and so on.

<sup>7</sup> In Ynys Fawr this person holds the title of 'Dromond Herald'.

<sup>8</sup> In Lochac this person is called 'Crux Australis'. For the SCA as a whole they are called 'Laurel King (or Queen) of Arms'.

Macer, Pursuivant or Herald – and yes they all mean something. Although in some ways they can be regarded as an honorary title, these at-large marshals and heralds are expected to stay active and to work to help the officers in their chosen field. The advantage for them is that they rarely have reports to fill out, unless they are in charge of an event.

## **The mundane structure**

What I have described so far is the visible part of the SCA from the point of view of the players. As far as the outside real world (often called the ‘mundane’ world within the SCA) is concerned this is all almost invisible. As far as the real world is concerned there is a series of legal incorporated bodies which run things. In Australia this is the SCAA (the Society for Creative Anachronism Australia). In the Crescent Isles this is the SCANZ. The BOD (the Board of Directors) of the SCA in the USA have no real legal power over the SCAA or SCANZ, except for the Agreement between the two bodies where the SCAA and the SCANZ voluntarily give precedence to the decisions of the BOD except where there would be a breach of local law (real law – not SCA law of the Kingdom – which are really just Club rules).

These legal bodies, except where the Kingdom has a legal obligation, have no direct power over the Kingdom, although technically they own all of the money and anything bought with it. Thus an SCAA board member cannot tell a local Baron what to do in their Barony<sup>9</sup>. For a variety of legal reasons, mostly to do with insurance, but sometimes just to be able to function, several Kingdoms and sometimes even smaller groups (from time to time even a city) have their own Incorporations with different affiliation agreements affecting them. Be pleased that all of this is invisible to most people. It can get complex.

Seneschals get another role here. As well as belonging to the Kingdom structure, they are also legally the agents of the SCAA in the local area, even though the SCAA has nothing to do with appointing them. They are the ones who have the power of the President of a local group, not the local Baron or Baroness and not even the Crown. This is one of the reasons that an event must be approved by the local Seneschal before it can be entered on the calendar.

These legal bodies have the role of looking after insurance, looking after tax issues and generally making sure that the SCA continues to run smoothly and thus to let the rest of us play the game that we want to play without having to worry about these other legal complications. People who belong to these legal bodies get no titles and often get little recognition from the Kingdoms. They do this work out of love of the game. These bodies even have their own volunteer staffs, who are usually even more invisible than the directors are.

On a world level there are only a few legal co-ordinating bodies. Legally these are all organs of the SCA (the one incorporated in the USA). The most usually seen one of these is the Grand Council. It is a think-tank charged with a permanent role of looking at ways for the SCA to change and adapt as society changes around us. Its members are drawn from every Kingdom. Each Kingdom has a right to appoint a person to it and there are a variable number of other members (who are called ‘at-large’ Councillors). A member of this body, or of the other BOD committees, has no role in the Kingdom structure at all, but they should seek counsel with their Crown, or advise them, if a matter comes up that may affect their Kingdom. This can be a very intense job. At one stage when I had one of these roles I had to deal with over 200 emails in a one day (and not just delete them). The consolation of belonging to this body is that you do get a very cool honorary title of Grand Councillor while you are on it, but unfortunately you rarely get to use it.

## **Households and Guilds**

The last set of structures within the SCA has no legal status whatsoever. In fact, there is a specific part of the Corpora that says that they have no legal status in the SCA. They cannot hold an office or an event and sometimes they are not even mentioned in the laws of a Kingdom, although several Kingdoms have awards that are specifically for them. One of these last set of structures is the household. A household can be as small as two people in a Canton or as large as the Great Dark Horde and cover most of the Knowne World. A person can sometimes belong to more than one of these at once. Households are a whole talk all on their own, and there is an article about them on the Baronial website if you want more on that subject. Suffice it to say that locally, apart from the temporary one (the retinue) that is based around the Baron and Baroness, most households are fairly low-key and are based around a Peer or Peers.

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<sup>9</sup> That is unless they are acting, as an example, under direction of the SCAA as a whole in pursuit of a legal grievance procedure or similar – and even then the matter should be passed down through the Kingdom rather than directly.

Households have no legal power within the SCA but often, due to the work that they do or their focus, they may become very visible to the rest of the group and important within it. If they are visible, it is best for the whole group if they are a creative and positive force within their group and not a force of division, which unfortunately often occurs. Belonging to, or having an internal rank within, a household on its own will give no title or role within the SCA as a whole that is acknowledged by SCA 'law', although some households (such as the Horde) are so large that its leaders are often better known to everyone by their household rank than anything else that they may do.

A student of a Peer, an apprentice, protégé or squire, has no separate title. This role can be one household rank and has nothing to do with what happens with the rest of the SCA. Often these people wear some badge or belt from their Peer to acknowledge this link, but the link confers no precedence within the group as a whole. A person can ask a Peer if they can become a student, or the Peer may approach the person. Either is acceptable. There is no compulsion for either party to say 'yes' to this relationship. A Peer should still teach anyone who needs it, but they will have a much closer mentoring relationship with their students.

The second of these last set of structures that I wish to talk about is the Guild. Guilds are similar to a household, in that they can cover a lot of geographical area and cut across group boundaries, but they are devoted to a single issue or type of activity, such as the Guild of Scribes or the Guild of Entertainers. Although sometimes they will actually teach, they are more an information-sharing and encouragement club than the type of mentoring arrangement that applies in a household. A Guild can be formed around any activity where there is sufficient interest to gain enough members, even Icelandic Fish-skin Tanning. Guilds are usually recognised by their Kingdom and the heads of each Guild are usually accorded recognition, sometimes in the Laws, as a courtesy in recognition for the work that they put in furthering their area of interest and in teaching about it to the populace. Some Guilds, such as the Guild of Scribes, can be very visible in what they do.

## **Conclusion**

As you can see, the way that the SCA is run is fairly complex. Luckily most people can just keep what I have said in the back of their head and ignore it most of the time. If you need to be reminded, ask someone or have a look at this article on our website. Generally speaking, unless you gain a landed title or have to deal with things as an officer it is all unimportant. The plethora of titles, ranks and officers will merely be there as a background to add colour and theatre to the game. However it is extremely important to remember that, regardless of the rank or title that people hold in SCA, or what job they do, all participants should be treated with equal courtesy and chivalry by all of the other people who are around them. After all, this is a voluntary society and is kept going only by the efforts of all of us.