



Surviving Your First Feast

Background

Most of the people you will meet are members of a world-wide group called the Society for Creative Anachronism (or the SCA). The SCA recreates the atmosphere of the society and culture of the period 600 AD to 1600 AD – as it should have been.

Local groups are usually Shires or Baronies and are part of a Principality, which in turn is part of a Kingdom. Sydney is the Barony of Rowany in the Kingdom of Lochac (Australia – pronounced LOK-ark).

Two terms that you will hear frequently are mundane (meaning anything post 1600 – especially 20th century things) and period (meaning ‘of the period 600 to 1600’). Avoiding mundanity wherever possible makes a tremendous difference to the atmosphere of an event. If you’re thinking ‘But I don’t know what to do/say/wear ...’, then read on.

What food do I eat?

Often feasts will be pot-luck – this means that everyone attending brings a dish large enough to serve 4 to 6 people (although things like bread and cordial are normally provided). Providing a dish is not as hard as it sounds as many modern dishes are easily adapted (eg. pies, soups and pastries), though its lots of fun trying out authentic recipes (some medieval favourites do seem strange to modern palates). Vegetarians are generally well catered for. We can accommodate other dietary requirements, if you let us know beforehand.

We also have catered feasts, and as the name implies all food is provided – of course, these are more expensive.

A point to note: in medieval times, the ‘look’ of the dish was very important - and often disguised to look like something else (known as a soteltie – you work out the modern equivalent!). So don’t be surprised if your soup looks like fish swimming in a blue sea - it will still taste like soup.

What happens at feasts?

Not surprisingly, eating is a major part of any feast. The food should be something that could have been eaten at a pre-1600 European court (this means ‘new world’ foods like potatoes, tomatoes, corn and pineapple should be avoided). There is usually a large number of dishes, served in ‘removes’ (ie. groups of dishes served one after another), with a gap between each remove.

Between removes (and also after all the food is served) is the time for entertainment. There maybe people singing or doing medieval dances (to either taped music or live musicians – there is usually someone available to teach dancing) or playing games (chess, dice and cards were all popular pastimes). You may even hear people talking ‘forsoothly’. But the best fun is seeing a hall decorated with heraldic banners and, by the flickering candlelight, all the people in ‘period’ garb. Done well, it is almost magical – you feel transported into a lost age of honour and chivalry.

How do I act?

Courtesy and chivalric behaviour are cornerstones of the SCA – one example being the various forms of address used (and it can be difficult to remember which one to use when!) If someone is wearing a crown (affectionately known as the ‘pointy hat brigade’), they are almost certainly royalty (or represent royalty) maybe the Princess, or the Baron or even (gulp) the King – each of whom has a specific form of address. However, you can use the terms ‘My lord’ or ‘My lady’ for anyone (even if you don’t know their name or are unsure of their ‘rank’).

If someone is performing, it is polite to cease your conversation until they’re finished. Even more importantly, don’t talk during the herald’s announcements (heralds wear green tabards with crossed golden trumpets). Not only could you miss out on important information but, as heralds are the voice of the King, any insult to the heralds is an insult to the King (definitely not a good move!)

Table manners are much easier. All you have to do is get the food to your mouth without being so offensive that your neighbour challenges you to a duel! Use a spoon or a knife/feasting dagger or your hands (though probably not a fork). Avoid spreading food all over the hall – it may be how it was done in medieval times but at least they had servants to clean up the mess afterwards!

Dancing

This ranges from the very easy, can-be-picked-up-on-the-spot (such as the pavanne) to showpieces of dexterity that are fun (and sometimes frustrating!) to do (such as the troika). Whichever you prefer, dancing provides great pageantry and theatre (it's good exercise too!) Speaking of which ...

Entertainment

Entertainment is often impromptu – be it singing, playing an instrument, reciting poetry, juggling or performing in a play. Anything that you can do that is period and interesting is always welcome.

Persona

At events, each of us uses an appropriate period name (ensuring that our chosen name does not belong to a historical figure eg. Richard the Lionheart). Many people go much further and know when, where and how their persona lived (try asking some of the Politarchopolan's to tell you their life history). Don't worry if you can't find a name or period that you like straight away – it's best to wait until you have something you're happy with. You can change your persona but, if it happens too frequently, your friends will never be sure who you are!

What will I need?

Garb: At events, you must wear period garb (mundane clothing really spoils the atmosphere we are trying to create). What you wear can range from the very simple (eg. T-Tunics) to the very complicated (eg. Elizabethan). If you do not have garb, contact (well before the event!) either the person running the event or the contacts listed below and they will put you in touch with the Hospitaller (a person who helps newcomers) and the Chandler (a person who has garb that can be borrowed). Alternatively, you can make your own garb or get someone to help you with it. A first costume (such as a T-Tunic) is both easy and fairly cheap to make.

Feasting gear: You will need a bowl or platter (medieval people put both savoury and sweet foods in the same plate but, if this bothers you, bring along two), a knife (or feasting dagger), a goblet, a spoon, candles and a candle holder. Try to make these look as medieval as possible - please, no plastic! Again, you can arrange (well before the event!) to borrow feasting gear via the Hospitaller or directly from the Chandler.

Food and/or Drink: You will be surprised at how much food you can eat at a feast (the unofficial Politarchopolan motto is 'Eat, Eat, you're too thin!') If the feast is pot-luck, then the rule of thumb is to bring enough for 4 to 6 people. Newcomers can 'get away' with bringing fruit, cheese, BBQ chicken etc – although, if you want something easy to cook, try pastries or stuffed loaves. If you prefer, we can arrange to get authentic medieval recipes to you. The most appropriate drinks are apple juice, cider (alcoholic or otherwise), mead, beer and cordials. It is also handy to bring along a jug as most modern bottles look out of our place on a medieval table.

Good feasting!!!

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