

# The A&S Faire and the Equestrian

*From the Spring 2002 Midrealm Equestrian Newsletter*

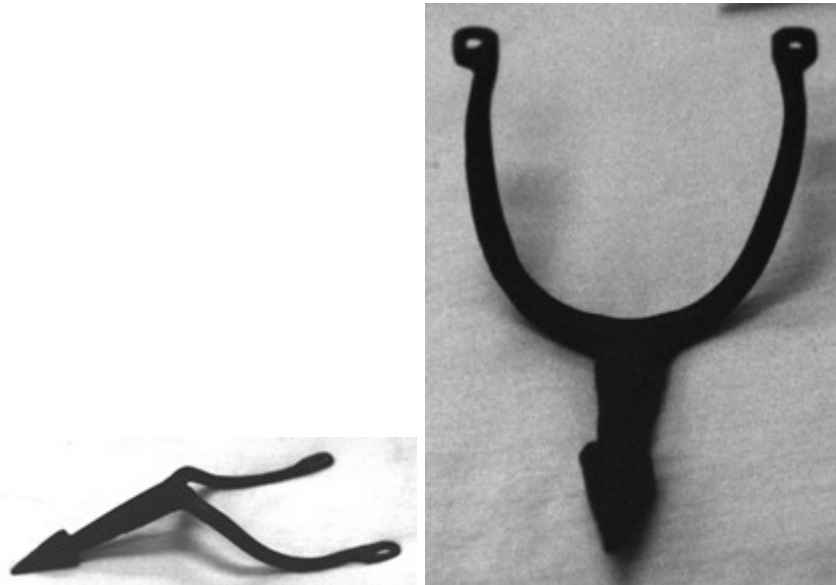
THL Fionnbharr Mac Shane

Spring is the time that we equestrians begin to think about preparing for the tourney season. (Some of us sadly, still wait till the night before the event to actually do anything to prepare for the event, but some thought does begin as early as the spring :-). There is always something that we want to make or add to our weapons, tack, garb, or caparison, particularly if we are interested in participating in one of the more elaborate equestrian tourneys like an Emprise. Spring is also the time when the Middle Kingdom holds their Regional Arts and Sciences Faires throughout the kingdom. Then the entries that scored at least a 1st, or 2nd in their regional faires, are eligible to enter at the Kingdom A&S Faire held at Crown Tourney in the late spring. You may ask why I bring up these apparently unrelated things in the same article? It is because they don't have to be unrelated, or maybe even, they shouldn't be unrelated. If you choose to play in one of these activities in our society, participating in the other could be quite helpful to you in both. Participation in the A&S faires can be a way for us as Middle Kingdom Equestrians to be better integrated into the larger Kingdom, and not seen as just an isolated community. The A&S faires can be just one more way to expose people to what we do as equestrians.

There are a number of things that participating in the A&S faires can do for you to help you enjoy your equestrian activities more. The A&S system can be enjoyable for its own sake, but probably its greatest value to most equestrians is that it can be used to help you make really cool stuff for your horse. The criteria can lead you to a more critical way of thinking, and deeper scholarly research about horses, and horse equipment in our period. It is very satisfying to have done the research, and completed a project, and then have something that really looks good. There are some people who have expressed philosophical differences with how the Arts and Sciences are handled, but there are benefits to using the criteria as an outline for your research even if you never choose to enter an A&S faire.

The A&S faires are judged by a set criteria, where by each piece is judged against the criteria, not the other pieces in the category. So you are basically judged against yourself: how well did you present the research you did for this item, how ambitious was the attempt, how successful was the attempt, does it look and feel period, and is the item strictly a reproduction, or was there some creative interpretation of a period style, etc... The criteria is designed to force you to answer some serious questions about your project so that it can be judged fairly. Some of the questions that it asks you are: How would they have really made this in period? What type of materials would they have used in period? What defines this style in period? There are lots of good questions that the criteria forces you to ask yourself, and of course you have to do some research to get good answers to those questions. But it really is worth it when you have the answers, because then you are better able to make the real cool stuff you want. If you are interested, you can Order a copy of the A&S Faire Judging Criteria from The Middle Kingdom Publications Officer, who is listed in the back of the Pale each month, or you can access it online. Mistress Isabeau also likes to do equestrian projects for the A&S faires, because it gives her a hard deadline, that the project has to be completed by, which happens to be well before the first equestrian

event in the spring. This could mean fewer late nights before an equestrian event scrambling to finish something that you feel, you simply have to have for the tourney the following day.



Details of a finished spur made for A&S competition. It is a forged iron 13th Century prick spur, with a blackened finish, which Theophilus suggests is appropriate for a cleric to wear.

On the other side of things, being an equestrian you can bring a unique perspective to equestrian projects that you might attempt for an A&S faire. Musicians know their instruments, fighters know armour, and equestrians know horses. You know how these things work, (or don't as the case maybe:-) or will by the time your project is done. Your familiarity with your subject will help you to write better documentation that conveys to the judges the how's and why's that went into a project. Also being a knowledgeable modern horseperson, you will have a more humane perspective on some things that were done in period. There were many things that were done in period that we might now consider inhumane. Some of the more elaborate spanish bits, or some of the sharper spurs, most modern horsepeople would never ride in, but if you can forget the potential pain that they could cause your horse, and evaluate them on purely aesthetic grounds they can be very attractive. So there are some projects that you might choose to do an exact reproduction of for display purposes only, or you might choose to change the design of something that you consider to be unsafe or inhumane. All of this expertise can be incorporated into your documentation, and will lead to better scores in the A&S competition.

I know that this newsletter will be published after some, if not all, of the Regional A&S Faires this spring, so it is likely too late to enter anything this year. But I would encourage you if you have the opportunity, to go through the Kingdom A&S Faire at Crown Tourney. Seeing what is being produced, and how it is being judged could inspire you. You might find that you have a great idea for a bit of leather barding that you have wanted to make for your horse anyway, and you could enter it in Leather Armour, Division III, or Animal Accouterments, Division V. And the questions that the criteria requires you to ask yourself could help you to make barding that looks very medieval. If you can do some

indepth research you might not have to "re-invent the wheel" so to speak, the period sources and examples will show you how to build your project. For A&S purposes your project need not be limited to physical objects. Equestrians also have the opportunity to do Riding Performance: Equestrian, Division I; and Animal Husbandry, Division V projects. With nearly a year till the next A&S faire you will have plenty of time to do the proper research, and complete your project.

To learn more about the Arts & Sciences, or just to ask for help in researching topics that interest you can talk to your local group's Minister of Arts & Sciences, or a local Master or Mistress of the Laurel. The order of the Laurel are Peers of the realm that are recognised for mastery in one or more arts and sciences. They can be a great resource to you. Part of their duty to the crown is to teach, often times they will be able to help guide your research, recommending better sources to start with, and which ones to avoid. There is a webpage that lists the members of the order of the Laurel, and their interests on the web.

The web can be a good place to start your research, there are search engines that can find content orientated web pages, as well as sites for museums, libraries, and bookstores. Ebay and other online merchants sell period artefacts that are the best source possible for research. There are also themed online discussion groups, about a number of topics that might be of interest to an equestrian interested in learning more about medieval crafts. The Leather Working list, and Animal Husbandry list, spring to mind as something that might be of interest to an equestrian.

There are also special interest newsletters such as Artes Draconis: The Arts & Sciences Journal of the Middle Kingdom. The 2002 spring issue 30, was dedicated to the A&S Faires and how to participate in them. It has published equestrian themed articles in the past, and I feel confident that they will continue to do so in the future. It is published quarterly. For a subscription to, or back issues of Artes Draconis please send, your complete contact information (mundane name, address, city, state, zip code, email, and a phone# incase the editor would need to contact you for some reason), and a check or moneyorder made out to: SCA, Inc. - Artes Draconis to the editor.

There is a lot of information out there, if you are only interested and take the time to look. The information that you are looking for can sometimes be extremely hard to find, however it can be well worth the effort. It is rewarding to research how they would have done something in period, and to complete something that looks like it came from the middle ages, and then enjoy it with the people who share a dream that is our society. Where the penants fly, caparisons billow as the horses charge down the list, the rider's crest bounces to the rhythm of the horses gait, and for a moment we can forget that we live in the present, and not a more romantic past.



Details from the construction of the Middle Kingdom Equestrian Champion's Lance, a close up of the cornel point, and the shaft of the lance on the bench where the drawknife was used to shape it.