

The Swan Song

THE STAFFORD NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 19, MAY 2004

PARROT TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT



(Left) The Parrot at today's conference, assisted by her personal aide and left-hand man, Donald Canard.

(Above) The Parrot plans her election strategy from her office in New York.

By Yankee Doodle Dandy

The world press corps were stunned today by the news that Buckingham's Parrot would be running against both Democrat and Republican nominees in this year's US presidential elections.

At an impromptu press conference, held at the New York city zoo aviary, The Parrot revealed that she had been involved in US politics for some time. 'I have felt for some time that things have not been going according to plan,' she said. 'Although Georgie has been doing fine with my help, I feel that it is

time I took control to enable me to better carry the fight to more of America's enemies overseas.' She stunned observers by stating that her first target would be Turkey, although this was later thought to be a poor attempt at a joke.

Reaction from the president's camp has been muted, although it has been reported by a White House source that the president was marinating nicely. He is also said to be 'sitting staring at a cupboard,' muttering 'parrot, parrot' over and over again.

Political analysts have pointed out that The Parrot should have no problem appealing to US voters, especially the ones in Rhode Island and Kentucky.

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WHITE COMPANY REUNION?

There are moves afoot to stage a White Company reunion in 2005, the year of its 20th anniversary. Planning is in the early stages at the moment, but there is talk of hiring Tretower Court (possibly) – a place that hold more than a few White Company memories.

Now, all this won't mean a lot to most of you, but the White Company (now disbanded) was one of the original 15th century reenactment groups, and the group from which the Stafford Household split. Most of us (myself included) are too young to have been full members of the White Company, although the name was used for the Warwick University group that many of us joined under Mark Hinsley.

There are, however, amongst us, people who remember the days of leggings and pixie boots ... If you are interested, please e-mail jo_strumpet@hotmail.com, or let me (David) know, and I will pass your details on.

DUKE HARRY'S DIARY

Where have we been eating so far this season?

FRIDAY NIGHT 'CLASSICS'

The time has come again for my retinue to gather and celebrate the previous season's campaigning with and the now-traditional eating, drinking, cavorting and (apparently) cross-dressing.

This year, we descended onto the hunting lodge belonging to one of my predecessors to the English throne (which as everyone knows is mine by rights). A similar format for the first evening's celebrations was taken as to previous years, and as such many strange and exotic costumes were donned including three gladiatrixs, as well as slaves and deities (Medusas). Combat skills using the traditional Greek length of insulation were pitted in the Games and the battle of Thermocouple. Special comment must be

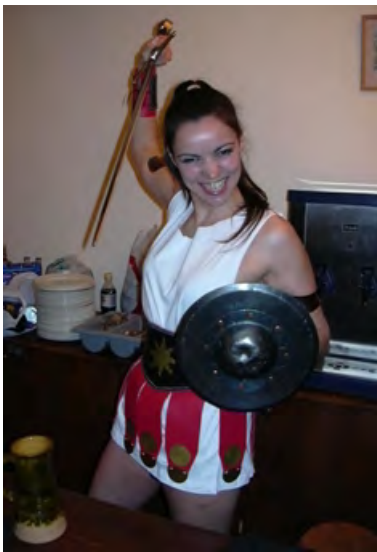


The Wrecking Crew At Party

St Briavels:
THE FEAST
26-27 March
2004

Photo credits: Duke Harry extends his grateful thanks to the photographers who made this diary possible: Tony Roe, Jayne Everingham and David Hemsley (and anyone who used their cameras).

made about one of my soldiers who did his best and went down fighting, Master Dean. I hope his ankle will be fully recovered in time for the new season's campaigning.

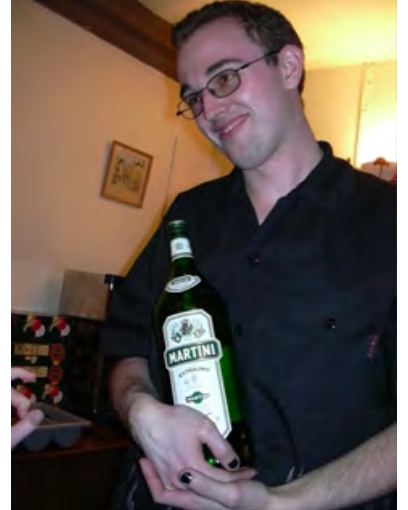


Duke Harry's Diary

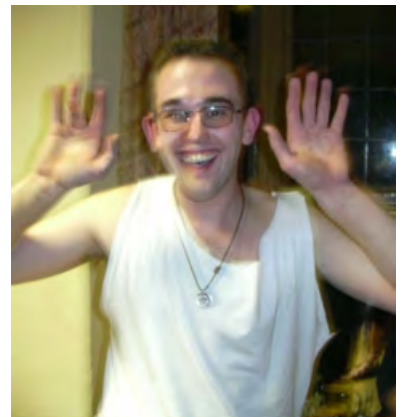


AN EVENING WITH NEVILLE

Or How to pass out in style



9:30 PM: be mine ...



11:30 PM: wheeee!!

SATURDAY

Saturday saw many of my retinue supporting various 'rugby' teams while other members were occupied in the kitchen, preparing many delicious dishes for the evening's feasting. Many thanks to Mistresses Beazley and Mather who without a doubt 'made' the feast what it was – fantastic!

Master Clegg was a suitable choice for Lord of Misrule, who kept everyone to a suitable level of drunken disorderliness. Five courses were dished up, with various breaks for musicians to charm our ears with their playing, and awards to be handed out.

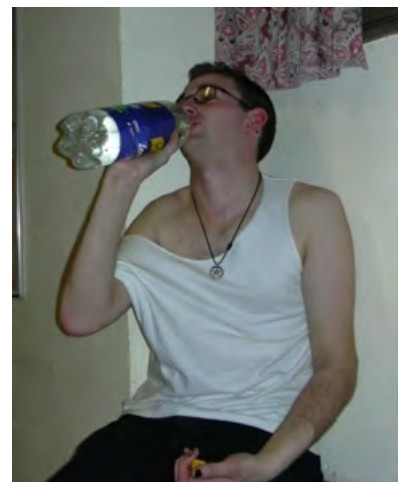
This year, the lucky recipients were roundly insulted by my Captain, continuing a proud retinue tradition, especially those given the Order of the Plastic Shield.

In order, the people singled out for acclaim and fame (and thus expected to sink subsequently into alcoholism and destitution whose only proud possession will be a bent plastic sword, which they will bring out at regular intervals to wave at passers-by from their bundle of rags in a shop doorway, until

MAY PIN-UP



Our pin-up this month is Simon, aged 234, Dark Lord of the Froth. He also rides bikes.



00:30 AM: gnughhhh

Duke Harry's Diary

the police take them away, or am I raving?):

Buy some bloody armour award - Mark Hewitt, Dean.

Wear some bloody armour award - Paul Hadfield

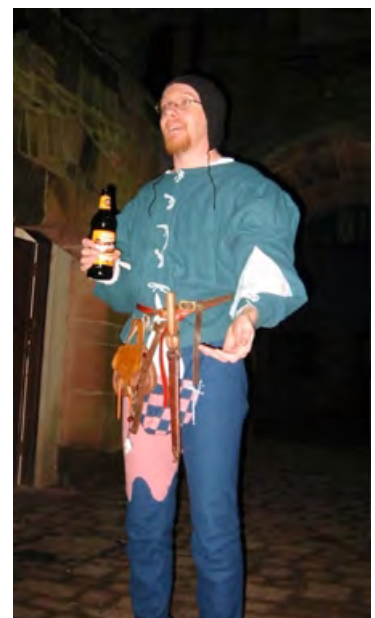
Best hit given and received - Allan Harley

Best returner - Rhian Crimmins

Captains Award - Adam "Neville" Potter

Special thanks to Dave Hemsley for feast and entertainment organisation.

The traditional panto rounded off the evening, which for one year, had actually been practised prior to the feast. It must be said that all the performers did a fantastic job, despite much drinking beforehand, but the Parrot (Mistress Ribbins) really did steal



Duke Harry's Diary



(Above and below) The fanfare, which was used to open the feast, announce every course, tell the time, carry spirits over unto the dead lands, keep Monmouth awake ... wasn't appreciated by everyone (left)



Musicians aplenty. I'm not sure all the notes were there, but it sounded good to take part. The feast had another first – possibly the first time the group has been led in a two-part round version of *Rose Rose*. Next year ... four ...



Duke Harry's Diary



Note the decorations in the form of flags, banners and paintings (nicely done by Amanda). Other decorations thanks to Guy and Jenn (new banners), Andy (Stanley and other banners), and everyone who worked to put them up

the show. Dancing skills were demonstrated aptly by Masters Harley, Hemsley and Potter by dressing in black dresses for one number and in shorts and hats for another. I think I can safely say we will all carry the scars from those performances for any months yet!



All in all a good round up to last season, and a good start for the next.....

Harre Bokingham



"Where has everyone gone? ..."

The end of another good meal.

Food was crafted and prepared by Louise and Rachel, and a jolly good job they did too.

We can't thank them enough for their hard work!



Duke Harry's Diary



(Above) Buckingham confronts the Parrot. An unequal contest methinks.



Duke Harry's Diary

RUSSELL IN RUDE GESTURE SHOCKER!

By our Russell correspondent

Kate watchers were stunned earlier today when Miss Russell, aged 12, of Stone, Staffordshire, refrained from making a rude gesture for at least 1 hour. Kate is seen, far right, celebrating this feat of endurance. And just for sending us these pictures, it seems only fair that *SwanSong* publish this other picture of Andy in Wang mode.



The recent *Mary Rose* trip discovered the worrying effects of the governments cuts in Britain's armed forces.

Although it now seems ages ago, Neville indicates (right) the fighting strength of HM Royal Navy as at summer, 2003.



'FLOATY MAILLE' TESTS END IN TRAGEDY



By our Australasian correspondent

Tragedy struck the remote community of Newcastle in New South Wales, when the test of a revolutionary new form of floating maille went horribly wrong. Retinue associate, Heath Barlin, a self-confessed Viking warrior of limited means and popular contributor to the group's lively discussion forum, was swept out to sea and swallowed by a plesiosaur, previously thought to be extinct.

HOLLYWOOD STARLET MEMBER OF RE-ENACTMENT GROUP?



Hollywood bombshell, Keira Knightley



Buckingham's Retinue trainee wench, Kate Brent

By our makeshift wardrobe

Has anyone else noticed the similarities between *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Love Actually* star,

Kate Brent, and Buckingham's Retinue's very own Keira Knightley? Are they in fact the same person. I think we should be told.

Once Upon A Time In The Staffords & York City Levys



More achive pictures of the murky pasts of members of the current retinue, and many of our friends in the last ten years.

(Top left) Staffords and York City Levy outside a pub in Chester (13/5/95); the photos with the US flag in the background were taken at Guy Cuthbert's house in Bourne (February 1996); Catherine and Keith Meech were in a tree at Lincoln in 1998 (8/8/98).

Finally, the picture below ... let's ask Simon???



BREAKING ALL THE RULES – THOUGHTS ON WEAPON FIGHTING

By Allan Harley

At the base of any group involved in historical weapon fighting is a set of core rules. These rules vary greatly depending on the group's goals and knowledge base. But rules can be a source of many great problems. As long as safety is ensured, rules should always be scrutinized, amended, and alternatives considered. Of course, any rule-system is highly dependent on the fighting tools used. Fighting weapon construction and armour have perhaps the biggest influence on rules for safety. But again, it is the group's goals and approach that determines the fighting tools to be used. The following thoughts about fighting rules are from the viewpoint of a student learning actual fighting techniques.

Safety rules

Foremost in any set of rules for simulated weapon fighting is the need for safety. This involves the problem in defining what 'safe' is. Each individual has their own idea about what is acceptable risk. There are those that are not willing to feel the slightest pain. Others willingly receive many bruises and risk serious damage. When the rules are written to the 'lowest common denominator' anyone can participate. But this only works when your main goal is to have the largest group of participants. Many students are willing to accept higher levels of risk for greater realism and learning.

Risk can be defined as the product of the probability of an incident and the severity of the incident ($\text{Risk} = \text{probability} * \text{severity}$). An increase in the probability *or* the severity results in higher risk. The risk of some rule systems can be high because the injuries are frequent but minor (i.e. lots of bruises in full contact padded weapon fighting). But the risk of a rule system can also be high because of a rare yet crippling injury or death (i.e. a broken weapon penetrating a helmet or jack). When examining fighting rules, be aware of those that are there just for preventing high-probability low-severity injuries.

It is important to consider the amount of time you spend fighting at any risk level. Generally, the longer you have participated in an activity the safer you become; but you are also more likely to have had a prior in-

jury. The chance of crashing in one plane trip is low. Do it a thousand times and the chance of having crashed is roughly one thousand times higher. For the serious student, I recommend training at different levels of risk to gain lots of hours at fighting safely and then also some riskier hours for realism. With a trusted partner occasionally increase the speed of your blows, include more target areas, or allow for more techniques. Some of my best practices where I have learned the most resulted in bruises the size of plates on my thighs, knees, and shoulders. My opponent and I were able to fight closer to our full potential. Pain is a great motivator and reminder.

Another important concept of risk is voluntary vs. involuntary risk. A good example would be those people who actively lobby against air pollution but also smoke cigarettes. At first this may seem ridiculous but it involves the principle of voluntary risk. People do not 'directly' have control over or benefit from the pollution that industrial plants emit. But they have control over and benefit from their own smoking habits. The same is true for weapon fighting. It has aspects of voluntary and involuntary risk. We elect to participate in a set of fighting rules with a known group of people. We voluntarily accept that risk. We do not have control over any single opponent. If we find that an individual lacks control, fights at a higher level of risk, or is generally unsafe in action, we can elect not to fight that individual. Unfortunately, I have seen individuals and even groups recommend that the best way to deal with unsafe individuals is to 'knock their block off' so they get the message. This retaliatory reaction can escalate and become dangerous. It is your responsibility to inform the opponent that they are being too unsafe for you. They can tone it down or not spar with you anymore.

My favourite type of fighting is when I just informally fight an opponent taking a very brief moment acknowledging what happened and what the results might have been. Even without a rule system to determine a winner, both opponents walk away with a good understanding of their abilities relative to those of their opponent. Without being centred on winning or losing each person can concentrate on learning, experimenting, and

observing their abilities. In this scenario both individuals have the ability to gain or 'win'. Both can be happy with their accomplishments and grow as a result. As a note, you do have to be careful at keeping your acknowledgments from turning into long debates on the forensics of possible body injuries and thereby lose valuable fighting time. If you are unsure as to what happened on a hit or what the results might have been, then fine. Acknowledge that and keep fighting

Historically accurate combat techniques

The face of battlefield combat/fighting has changed. No longer do our opponents stand in long single lines, but at least try to form into approximations of fighting units. Units had depth for specific reasons in the period we are trying to create, and we have amply demonstrated on numerous fields why that is so.

In conclusion, the serious student of historical fighting should:

- Keep safety first, learning second, and all else a distant third
- Continually question all the rules that they are using
- Discard non-safety rules that inhibit learning proper techniques
- Never train entirely in only one rule/fighting system
- Train at different levels of risk

In conclusion

The techniques used during the fifteenth century were developed as the most efficient way of using the troops and technology of the period. They worked then and they work now as long as they are used correctly.

RUNNING THE GROUP IN 2004

After the AGM at the feast, the committee structure has been put in place for 2004. Please note that Andy Howes, originally voted onto the committee, stepped down as secretary soon after the meeting. As there is no precedent to follow for this, his position was offered to the only other person to stand for election, Andy Horsfield. The following is from Chris.

Chairman: Chris Howell

To chair and organise meetings. To suggest long term aims for the group and to determine ways to achieve them. To ensure that the tasks required to run the group are completed and to help and assist the other members of the committee in their work on behalf of the group.

Secretary: Andy Horsfield

To send out warning orders for all events. To maintain the groups website. To post the Swansong and any other information on the website as required. To send out correspondence as required. To minute meetings. To organise events from time to time.

Treasurer: Darren Brown

Account for the groups finances. Collect monies from members as required for membership and food and any other reasons as required. To collect money from employers.

Event Booking Officer: Emma Atkinson

To book events for each season. To include a siege, a murder mystery, a Tudor event and a new site each year. One northern and one southern event to be included.

Event Organiser: Allan Harley

To ensure that a nominated member of the group is available to organize each event and to take on responsibility for organising some events.

Non-Committee Roles

All non-committee roles have specific tasks to complete and common responsibilities. They will be called upon for regular updates

regarding their roles. They can be asked to attend committee meetings as required. These roles may be combined and may be combined with committee roles.

Health and Safety Officer (TBC)

To complete risk assessments for all activities. To complete an audit of each event to ensure that risks are minimised and record the results. To complete training records for all combatants, archers, and gunners. To develop a health and safety policy for the group.

Recruitment (TBC)

To compile a list of new recruits and ensure they gain a briefing pack about the group and events and to report on a yearly basis.

Event organisers: reporting to the committee post of the same name

Several may be required. The aim is to organise one or more events in a year. Event organisation will include:

- Warning orders
- Event scenario
- Liaison with other groups and employer as appropriate
- Ensuring someone will drive the van
- Ensuring someone will cook
- Ensuring there are people to load and unload
- Briefing key people at each event as to their responsibilities

Liaison with Umbrella groups (Separate roles Fed and L&M)

Attending meetings and feeding back to the committee.

Publisher

To complete at least five issues of the group newsletter each year.

Group kit

To ensure that kit is repaired and available at events for use by new members.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

You need to keep learning and being involved in the running of a re-enactment group is certainly one way to do that. The typical re-enactor is probably an ex-student, may have strong political beliefs, certainly has strong opinions about everything else and is often keen to share them. All of these attributes make us what we are and allow us to have fun but they do not always help us to move the group forwards.

We have largely succeeded in our aims to become the biggest fifteenth century group with the best kit, best skills, best events and most fun. The question is where do we go from here? How do we continue to make events interesting and how do we develop, grow and retain the current membership? All of these questions are difficult to answer and cannot be answered by one person.

We have always had a very political committee structure in the group and that is probably because we didn't know any better. The committee and membership generally enjoy power but fear and refuse responsibility. Meetings are for talk and not action. No-one has a clear understanding of their responsibilities. We do not have a vision for the future and we have no objectives for the next 3-5 years. Is it hardly any surprise we are not going forwards today, we have no vision of the future no plan of how to get there.

I suggest a business and not a political model for the running of the group. The chairman suggests the vision and plan for the future, the committee refines it and the group discusses, refines further and finally endorses it. The committee breaks down the tasks required to fulfill the plan and move it forwards. We all agree to the work that has to be done and complete it. The chairman mentors the committee and meetings are a forum to feedback on progress.

The advantages of this approach are clear:

- The group has a clear direction and vision for the future.
- We agree what the group is here to achieve and all work towards it.
- The effort that Buckingham's Retinue needs is spread evenly.
- Ownership is pushed down to the membership.
- Committee meeting are short and have a point.
- Enjoyment is maximized.

These are just some thoughts on the subject, or the ravings of a madman, you choose which. The key point is that we need to keep moving forwards and need to constantly improve how we do what we do. I will work with the committee to determine how we move forwards, how we reinvigorate ourselves and how we maximise the enjoyment of all. *Chris Howell.*

Group News & Views

LETTERS

SwanSong received a couple of letters of thanks from three of our guests at the feast. Thanks to them both – we look forward to seeing more of you next year, and good luck with your own group and plans.

From Sarah Hinsley:

Dear Buckingham's Retinue

I would like to thank all of the Buckingham's retinue for inviting 'The Coventry Levy' (Mark & Sarah Hinsley, Matthew McVeigh) to your feast. We all had a great time and I hope everyone in the Buckingham's retinue did as well. Everyone was so friendly and it didn't take long to feel at home with you all (or perhaps this was catalysed by a few tankards of wine/cider/beer/port!). The venue was amazing – a proper castle with nice beds and showers in, with great views all around. Most of all, the greatest thanks must be reserved for the cooks and helpers in the kitchen, who not only worked incredibly hard preparing the food for the feast itself, but then cooked breakfast the next morning as well, while the rest of us were far too busy sleeping off hangovers.

Hopefully, we'll see each other again at some events this summer and we're looking forward to getting to know you all better then.

From Matt McVeigh:

It has taken me twelve years or so to be brave enough to consider re-enactment again, so approached your annual banquet with much trepidation, especially as an ex Stafford, not knowing how things would go. I would just like to express my sincerest thanks at the tremendous welcome I received from you all. Rest assured I have now opened my wallet and will be taking up the hobby in earnest again!! This is largely due to the fantastic time I have at the event and to the friendly way in which I was received. It was great to see old friends again and I was extremely impressed by the Bucks as a group. As an old campaigner the ratio of men to women in the hobby has had a positive impact (now don't be naughty – you KNOW what I mean!), and the whole feel of the group was so much better than before. Thanks again from Mark, Sarah and myself. I look forward to seeing you all at events over the year and hope that our group can work well alongside the Bucks.

Event reports, photos, stories, research, findings, jokes, etc, always needed. Send them to Dave Hemsley:
473 Lower Somercotes
Somercotes
Alfreton
Derbyshire DE55 4NS
Next issue: June

FINANCIAL REPORT

I've been asked to write a report on our current financial position. So before you fall asleep, I'll get right down to the point. Last year we made very little money going to events. Cost of running events (this excludes any purchases) were £1270 with a lose of £230 on food and we got £1740 (Kenilworth £131, Tutbury £200, Stafford £300, Dartmouth £800 and Federation £309). So our operating profit was £235. It was only thanks to the Ship Filming, on which we made £930 profit, that we had an okay season. In total we ended last year £930 down on the start of the year.

On the plus side, due to the method of putting money aside we now have £1560 for replacement / purchase of large items (i.e. if the cannon was to explode, we can replace it).

One last comment on last year, we lost £275 on the feast, which is not bad (we lost £250 last year), seeing as there were more people and more good food.

This year prospects are not good, I've estimated that the cost of running a van to all the events will be £1840 and we are getting about £1500 (Castle Rising £600, Stafford £300, Tutbury ~£200 and Federation ~£400). So I predict that we will have less money again at the end of the year compared to the beginning.

To conclude, please make sure you pay your membership of £10 on time (this year there will be no leniency) and food for events will still be £2.50 per day regardless of how much you eat.

Darren Brown, treasurer

AUSTRALIAN SWORD BAN?

Greetings from the Antipodes, or more stereotypically, G'day.

My name is Heath and I am your honorary representative (and sometimes dead owner of Castle Rising) here in Newcastle, Australia.

After six years of Dark Ages and 17th C, I have ventured in the period of tight trousers in order to show off my chicken legs.

The introduction of our little crew brings more life to a little explored area over here.

2004 and promises to be an interesting year for medieval re-enactment in Oz, with an increasing focus on archery, combat including historical fencing manuals and, not least, the possibility of our Victorian cousins losing their swords under a proposed ban on swords in that southern state, which does not bode well for the 2005 Australasian Medieval Conference.

I'll keep you posted.

Cheers, Heath Barlin

For those who are interested, some information on the weapons ban can be found on Heath's website, at:

<http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/fireandsteel/sos.htm>

The ban has already excited considerable comment on the group forum (see below). Hopefully, Heath will be able to let us know what happens.

Forum address

Don't forget the Bucks' Web Forum; everyone is welcome to join in:

<http://www.1485.org/bucksboard.html>

