

# Skraeling Atching Chronicle



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April, A.S. LIV

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### **To receive the Chronicle:**

There will be a PDF posted on the Baronial web page, <http://www.skraelingalthing.com>, ranging as far back as the May 2010 issue. Any member who wishes can subscribe to receive an e-mail when the latest issue of the Chronicle becomes available. To do so, please send an email to the Chronicler. Issues of the Chronicle can also be found on the [Chronicle Facebook Page](#).

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### **Advertising in the Chronicle:**

Advertising rates are as follows:

- Quarter page: \$15
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These are half the price of the Kingdom newsletter. All payments by cheque, payable to: SCA-Barony of Skraeling Althing. Please note that all advertisement should be SCA-related goods or services, suitable for any audience, and not containing any offensive images or language. Contact the Chronicler for details

# Letter to the Barony

## From the quill of the Baroness and Baron

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Greetings Skraels,

We hope that this Chronicle finds you, and your loved ones, all in good health.

We write this letter on the Saturday we were supposed to be attending IDD's Baronial Investiture Anniversary, so the cancellation of most SCA activities is certainly top of mind. We know that many of you were looking forward to the events on the calendar, and had been working hard on projects for Kingdom A&S. But we also know that these events will resume, and those fun moments will come again. We as a community are resilient, and it is only a matter of time before we all get together again to celebrate. And that will be an epic celebration indeed.

While it's only been a month, Practicum seems like so long ago. The spirit of learning from Practicum continues, with many Skraels taking advantage of the time to work on projects, to do online learning, and to otherwise use the time to learn and share their knowledge. We applaud these efforts, and are doing so ourselves.

At Practicum, we announced the taxes for this year, and encourage you to think about them now if you are looking for things to do while at home.

When new people join the Barony, they don't always know our shared stories. That can leave them feeling left out of the "inside jokes", when we talk about our common memories of events from the past. Why do we keep joking about dioramas? What's the deal with pieces of bunny fur anyway?

Sharing the telling of our stories helps us all share a common history. So taxes this year is to share the stories of Skrael. We would like to see newcomers and long time residents working together to share our stories. You could submit them to the Chronicle, or share them through storytelling and bardic performances (which can easily be done electronically); really anything that helps share those memories.

We are also looking for a volunteer to act as our head Historian for the year, to help connect people and facilitate projects. If you would be interested in helping with this project, please reach out to us.

We close with the same thought we shared via Facebook in an earlier missive. We know that while we may not be getting together as often as planned, we are together in supporting each other. Keep those connections in these challenging times, for it has always been our sense of community that sees us through.

In Service to the people of Skraeling Althing,

Avelyn & Dafydd

# Wassailing the Orchard: A New Year's Tradition

By Todd E. S. Fischer, January 2020

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I stand in the dark, under bare branches, while around me stand figures, cups in one hand, axes in the other. Voices are lifted in song, our billowing breath blowing through the orchard like Yuletide phantoms.

Haunting, no? This year I was a participant in the ancient rite of the apple wassail, held in the orchard of friends who live in Gananoque.

The word *wassail* comes from *waes hael*, meaning “good health” in Anglo-Saxon. The act of wassailing was a wish of prosperity and fertility. The proper response to being wished wassail is *drinc-hael* (“drink well”). People would wassail their neighbours, bee hives, cows, and apple trees.

Wassailing was observed in England since at least 1555, with apple wassailing attested by at least 1585 (in Fordwich, Kent). These are the oldest recorded dates so far found, but the act likely harkens back to traditions practised centuries earlier (at least as far back as 600). Certainly, the apple held deep significance to the ancient Celts who saw it as a symbol of magic.

During the medieval period wassailing was done on any of the twelve days of Christmas but it usually occurred on the Kalends of January (January 1) or 12<sup>th</sup> Night (January 5 or 6). (Our modern date of January 17 is also still observed as a day for wassailing, as it marks when 12<sup>th</sup> Night fell on the old Julian calendar adopted in 1582).

To wassail, one carried a drink (such as apple cider, hot spiced ale, or punch) in bowls which were often decorated with ribbons. These bowls were usually made of wood (ash and maple being popular choices), but some were made of metal (such as silver). When wassailing a neighbour, wassailers might expect their hosts to re-fill their bowl.

There were professional wassailers who would travel about with a wooden bowl (often made of ash) filled with hot ale, apples, spices and sometimes cream or beaten eggs. (The addition of the latter two ingredients created a foamy layer that led to the wassail brew also being known as “lamb’s wool”. These wassailers collected alms (donations for the poor) in exchange for their services.

The traditions associated with wassailing varied from place to place and time to time. With apple wassailing, certain elements always seem to be present. Trees would be threatened or beaten and in later years had (unloaded) firearms shot into their branches. This was done as a symbolic whipping to awaken the trees’ power of fertility and to scare away evil forces. Cider was then poured on the roots and sometimes songs would be sung to the trees. For instance, the following is a wassail song from Buckinghamshire:

*Here’s to thee, old apple tree,  
Whence thou may’st bud and  
whence thou may’st blow.  
And whence thou may’st*

*bear apples enow.*

*Hats full, Caps full, Bushel,  
bushel sacks full,  
And my pockets full too!  
Huzzah!*

In Somerset, England, one tree was chosen to be “The Apple Tree Man” and it was this specific tree that was wassailed. This happened at noon. As well as pouring cider on the roots, cider-soaked bread or cake would be hung from high branches, while the tips of lower branches would be dipped in cider. Sometimes when making their ruckus they might strike or split the bark of the tree to release evil spirits. As well as singing to the tree, they would call “Huzzah!”

In Devon and Cornwall, among other places, all the men of the party would bow three times to the oldest tree, an act said to encourage a large crop. In other places a small boy would sit in the tree-top, representing a bird, and be fed cake and cheese.

In the West Country, if it was oxen being wassailed, the wassailers would go into the stalls and drink from the wassail bowl. They would then take a cake from a basket decorated with greenery and place the cake on an ox’s horn. If the ox remained quiet it was thought to be good luck. In Hereford they also stuck cake on an ox’s horn, the task falling to the oldest person present who would chant the following:

*Here’s to thy pretty face, and to thy white horn,  
God send they master a good crop of corn,  
Both wheat, rye and barley, of grains of all sort,  
And next year if we live we’ll drink to thee again.*

At some point wassailing began to incorporate the art of morris dancing (an English folk dance incorporating bells, ribboned shirts, and costumes).

Wassailing found itself abandoned during the 1640s and 1650s in England when Christmas celebrations (considered by the Church to be too rowdy) were quashed. Puritan leaders in America likewise tried to curtail the Old World’s winter celebrations. In both cases these attempts failed, and versions of wassailing survived. It is uncertain when wassailing came to Canada, but it is interesting to note that Canadian wassailers will also wassail maple trees (in hopes that they will produce much syrup). Today, wassailers in Canada, the USA, the UK and Australia still congregate on winter days and nights, to wish each other well, and to reach back into the past and carry on a tradition that our ancestors engaged in for generations.

To all of you, I wish you *waes hael!*



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# Official mailing lists and pages

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Want to keep up-to-date with our current mailing lists, Facebook pages, and web pages? You can find us at:

## **Baronial**

- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2334791875/>
- Web page: <http://skraelingalthing.com/wp/>
- Chronicle Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Skraeling-Althing-Chronicle-322326026435>

## **Cantons**

- Facebook pages:
  - Caldriðig: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/caldriðig/>
  - Greyfells: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/225292100927968/>
- Web pages:
  - Caldriðig: <http://skraelingalthing.com/wp/caldriðig/>
  - Tor Brant: <http://skraelingalthing.com/wp/torbrant/>
  - Greyfells: <http://skraelingalthing.com/wp/greyfells/>



# Officers of the Barony

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Landed Baroness:

Her Excellency, Avelyn

[baroness@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:baroness@skraelingalthing.com)

Seneschal:

Baroness Gina Dragoni

[seneschal@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:seneschal@skraelingalthing.com)

Signet (awards): THL Elsebeth Farberyn

[signet@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:signet@skraelingalthing.com)

Exchequer:

Lord Giovanni Orseolo

[exchequer@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:exchequer@skraelingalthing.com)

Marshal:

Sir Ælfwyn of Longwood

[marshal@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:marshal@skraelingalthing.com)

Web Minister:

Ricardo Columbo

[web.minister@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:web.minister@skraelingalthing.com)

Landed Baron:

His Excellency, Dafydd

[baron@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:baron@skraelingalthing.com)

## **Canton Seneschal Contacts:**

Caldrithig: The Honourable Lady

Constance of Caldritig

[caldrithig@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:caldrithig@skraelingalthing.com)

Herald: Lord Eoin MacAlpin

[herald@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:herald@skraelingalthing.com)

Chronicler:

Lady Aoibheann MacEwan

[chronicler@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:chronicler@skraelingalthing.com)

Minister of the Arts and Sciences,

Empty

[moas@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:moas@skraelingalthing.com)

Chatelaine:

Lord Dalin Caulder

[chatelaine@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:chatelaine@skraelingalthing.com)

Scribe to the Baronial Council:

Empty

[scribe@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:scribe@skraelingalthing.com)

## **Stronghold Seneschal Contacts:**

Tor Brant: Vargo of Tor Brant

[tor.brant@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:tor.brant@skraelingalthing.com)

Greyfells: Kniaginia Xristina Viacheslavova

[greyfells@skraelingalthing.com](mailto:greyfells@skraelingalthing.com)





# Events Around the Kingdom

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For details on Baronial events see the Barony of Skraeling Althing web page at <http://skraelingalthing.com/wp/>



For details on Kingdom events see the Kingdom of Ealdormere web page at <http://www.ealdormere.ca/>

# Baronial Gatherings

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## Practices and Meetings

Please contact the local group to confirm details for specific scheduled gatherings.

Please note that at this time all in person meetings are postponed due to the current state of emergency. Please contact the local group seneschal for information on when meetings may resume.

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### **Caldrithig**

#### **Canton Meetings**

Second Sunday of the month at 4 pm

#### **Dance Practice:**

On Hiatus - Restart TBD

#### **Armoured Combat Practice**

On Hiatus - Restart TBD

#### **Rapier Practice**

On Hiatus - Restart TBD

#### **Instrumental Practices**

On Hiatus – Restart TBD

#### **Choir Practice**

On Hiatus – Restart TBD

#### **Scribal Nights**

Varies from month to month

Subscribe to Facebook Group [Skrael Scribes](#)  
for up to the minute details

#### **Cooking Group**

Monthly

Subscribe to Facebook Group [Skrael Culinary Group](#)

### **Greyfells**

#### **Canton Meetings**

Contact the seneschal for further information.

### **Tor Brant**

#### **Rapier/Armoured Combat Practice**

Tuesdays at 6:30pm Sept-June

Gatherings vary from month to month.

Please contact the group to confirm the next scheduled activity.

