

Principality Discussion held Sunday 24th January 2021 at Canterbury Faire

Discussion facilitated, and these notes written up, by Adrienne Furet (Amy Wilson)

The intention behind this gathering was to go over the informal survey results and discuss what the next steps might be from here. No formal decisions regarding the principality were made, and any further actions arising from this meeting were ones which would progress more discussions and communications.

The meeting was recorded, and these written notes are a summary of the points raised. If you have any questions or feedback about these notes, please contact Adrienne Furet directly at darkferret@gmail.com

Of the approximately 30 people in attendance, around 17 of them were active vocal participants with another 5 offering occasional comments. This was a very active discussion and my thanks to everyone for keeping it constructive and on track.

Analysis of the discussion shows five main areas of discussion which are outlined below:

1. Demographics – this included discussion of group makeup, group activities, and dominance of Southron Gaard within the Crescent Isles
2. Group sustainability – this covered sub-topics of group members, officers, recruitment, retention, inclusivity & diversity, and supporting each other & other groups
3. Communications – in particular about ensuring comprehensive, consistent and equitable communications regarding the Principality, but also included elements of communications within & between groups and some coverage of SG dominance again
4. Timelines & urgency – a specific topic regarding a prospective timeline approach to going Principality
5. General Principality discussion – this covered sub-topics of selection methods, mechanisms, reasons to go Principality

Breaking these five main areas of discussion down further, the following observations and conclusions could be made.

Demographics

This was one of the first topics raised, in particular regarding demographics of participation styles in the SCA e.g. heavies, rapier, etc. Conversation showed that the demographics of the groups (e.g. number of young vs. old members, number of families with small children) tended to set the demographics of the various participation styles.

“As some groups are gaining more young members, they have more chances of having more heavies. Whereas some groups that have had a low, new young membership uptake over recent years are getting to the point where they have no heavy at all.”

There was a brief discussion regarding Principality being the next natural step based on the growth of the SCA within New Zealand.

Later there was discussion around the metric of active SCANZ members, and whether the three-year membership should go back to the one-year membership. There was very strong objection to this suggestion, however. Analysis has already been done that determined the three-year membership did not make a noticeable difference in SCANZ members as compared to the one-year membership.

Group Sustainability

Group Sustainability, and all it entails, was the most widely discussed topic. One of the biggest, and most valuable, takeaways from the discussion came under this heading – the concept of **non-regretful actions**. With many thanks here to Bernard for introducing us to the concept:

“...you can do stuff that, even if you don’t do the big thing, is still worth doing in and of itself. And looking at how we could support ourselves better is really, well each other better, is a really non-regretful action. If we do a bunch of work and do that, and then don’t go Principality, it’s like “oh no, what if we built a better world?”

In order for a group to be sustainable it ideally needs to:

- Have group participation in all aspects of the group – noted that there is a significant difference between members on paper, event attendees, and those stepping up to help. (Also noted this issue is not unique to the SCA)
- Be inclusive and diverse – the SCA needs to continue to change with the times and focus on a culture of accessibility
- Support officers, in particular to prevent burnout – it was noted that a good Principality has the potential to help in this area, with more support of local officers
- Focus on recruitment and retention – but noting that a ‘one size fits all approach’ isn’t necessarily suitable as each group has different demographics and cultures

There was significant interest in the various groups working together to support each other, their events, and the various recruitment & retention activities around New Zealand.

Additional observations:

- Currently there does not appear to be a strong habit of the various groups supporting each other’s efforts in New Zealand
- Officer recruitment and burnout – the experience between groups is very different:
 - SG is doing well
 - Darton is okay due to pragmatic approach of only filling necessary roles and those where someone is passionate
 - Ildhafn – mixed views – one step left?
 - Wildmoor – initial stages at least were very stressful
 - Cluain struggles to get new people to fill officer positions

Communications

Approximately 30 people attended the session overall. At the beginning of the session a rough break down of attendees by group was tallied (only approx. 25 people were present at this point) and this broke down as:

- Ildhafn 2
- Cluain 1
- Sherwater 0
- Darton 5
- Southron Gaard 14
- Other 3

Differing perceptions of the discussion depended on where you lived and how involved you were with the various streams of media. And when discussion has been going on for a while and others aren't part of it, or join late, it can feel like the conversation has happened very quickly. This also contributes to feeling like certain people or groups are taking over (e.g. concern around the dominance of Southron Gaard).

With regards to the survey feedback regarding SG dominance & toxicity – an invitation was made for those who may such feedback to please get in touch with Elena dei Medici (either directly at feedback@sableraven.com or via someone else to retain anonymity) as Southron Gaard would like to do all possible to address this.

It will take time to ensure communication occurs equitably. It needs to be happening around the country via many different channels. It also needs to be thorough in all directions – not just down specific rabbit holes.

This discussion session is definitely not the only one to be had – working groups are being formed as the Next Step.

Timelines & Urgency

This was a specific discussion regarding prospective timelines and a sense of urgency some around New Zealand are experiencing. Because the formation of a Principality is a relatively rare occurrence, there is not a benchmark. Between 2-5 years seems standard, but the timeline will be very much up to us if we chose to do proceed, so it could be shorter or longer.

Also noting that there is no intention for us to proceed at pace with forming a Principality. Enthusiasm and motivation may be coming across as/contributing to a sense of urgency. However, without there being a collective majority and agreement, a Principality would not proceed.

General Principality discussion

There was quite a bit of discussion regarding selection methods, the main points of which were:

- The discussion of selection method is heavily intertwined with the discussion of whether to go Principality
- Elections/Venetian voting – some element of lottery with some degree of filtering (a selection process)
- Two mechanisms to change selection process – societal change, or superseding corpora
- No success in changing selection method in the past BUT no one has asked these sorts of hard questions for a while so it is time to do it again!

Why would people stay with heavy? Answers included: tradition; ease of determining winner; loss of exclusivity. Losing exclusivity. Also the US are the majority of people in the SCA game, and they have the power to define the general rules. This then influences how we in New Zealand play. There were observations made that this tells members who don't fit certain criteria that they are not welcome, which is definitely not what we want.

“...for me, it is important not that I become Crown but that I have a chance of becoming Crown.”

By working towards a Principality (i.e. doing non-regretful actions), we could be building the structures first, after which a Principality may well follow.

“So as a newcomer, it seems like the conversation is not whether or not something should be done, but how we’re going to do it?”

It is harder to manage communication across the whole Kingdom these days, which is seen as a pro for going Principality i.e moving into smaller, more local units.

Four working groups were introduced and participants encouraged to join up:

- Name & Heraldry – specific Herald responsibilities and interests
- Laws – structure and framework we might use that is distinct from Kingdom laws
- P&P Selection – how we might go about selecting our coronets
- General – managing the process, lining up the ducks, paperwork, managing the discussion

Next step

More discussion! Check out the new Principality website <https://principality.sca.org.nz/> and sign up for the Principality Working Groups.