

Writing Award Letters
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Introduction

Much of the information here is very basic and geared toward newer members of the SCA. However, I hope that longer-term members find benefit as well. It's easy to forget everything that should be mentioned in a letter, or even to forget to write a letter at all. SCA members who are new to Caid will hopefully benefit from the list of Caidan awards and other information specific to our fair Kingdom.

About Awards

Awards are an important part of the SCA. We are a volunteer organization, and the way we are "paid" is by the positive feeling we get by contributing to the SCA, whether at the local level, in the kitchen, as a Kingdom Officer, etc. Awards are a public thank you or acknowledgement of accomplishments. (They don't take the place of a personal, individual word or note—so don't forget to say "Great event!" to an event steward or send a "Loved your feast" e-mail to a cook!). Awards are also an encouragement to a person to continue in the same vein or direction.

Awards are given at the pleasure of the Crown, but the Crown can't be everywhere or see the contributions of every member of the populace. The only way They know if a gentle is worthy is if They receive recommendations for that person—recommendations from people such as you.

Types of Awards

At the lowest level and recognized throughout the Known World, there's the Award of Arms. People typically get one within 1 to 4 years of joining the SCA, when they've shown reasonable interest, become active and contributing members, and look like they're sticking around.

At the highest level, there are the Peerages—Knight, Laurel, Pelican—which are also Known World-wide. They represent the three main areas of awards: Fighting, Arts & Sciences, and Service, respectively, and carry a Patent of Arms.

All Kingdoms have specific awards that fall in between the AoA and the Peerages. Usually the first level awards give an AoA if the person doesn't already have one. About half of the Kingdoms, including Caid, also have a series of grant-level awards, giving a Grant of Arms with the specific award. All Kingdoms also have a provision for giving a GoA that's not attached to another award.

Some Kingdoms break up A&S into two awards, and some break up fighting between heavy, rapier, and/or archery.

Finally, all Kingdoms have non-armigerous awards: those that don't have attached an AoA, a GoA, or a Patent of Arms.

Caidan Awards

A list of Caidan awards can be found in Appendix A.

Information to be Included in a Recommendation Letter

The following information is necessary when you are recommending someone for an award:

Info about the person making the recommendation:

Your name
Your e-mail or contact information

Info about the person you are recommending:

SCA Name
Whether the name spelled correctly (or if you're not sure of the spelling)
Mundane Name
Gender (if not obvious)
Group where the person resides

Award you are recommending

How many years the person has been in the SCA

Why you think this person is deserving of this award (be as detailed as possible)

Upcoming events that you know or at least believe this person will attend

What Else?

Be as specific as possible about what the candidate has done to deserve the award. For a service award, list offices held, events run, extra efforts made, etc. For an A&S award, discuss what the person has made, how his/her work has developed, attention to period detail, classes taught or workshops run, etc. For a fighting award, mention their dedication, practices attended, helpfulness in teaching others, period fighting equipment/garb/amour.

In all cases, mention examples of how that person has upheld the ideals of chivalry, honor, and courtesy. I like to add that I believe the person will continue to be an asset to the SCA, or something along those lines.

Remember: You can recommend anyone for any award, whether or not you have it yourself, but if you do have the award, mention that in your letter.

If you hold an office that relates to the award, that's also worth mentioning. For example, if you are the MoAS for your local group and you're recommending someone for an A&S award, you can mention how they've helped you by teaching classes.

How to Send a Recommendation

Currently in Caid, award recommendations should be addressed to Their Majesties, with Peerage recommendations being also copied to the Secretary of the Order. (Depending on those on the thrones or what Kingdom you're in, recommendations may be sent to the Royal Chamberlain or Chief Lady-in-Waiting, and/or Peerage recommendations are sent the Secretaries of the Orders. It's always best to double-check before you send the letter.)

Recommendations may be sent in one of two ways:

1. Send an e-mail. Their Majesties' e-mail address is crown@sca-caid.org.

2. If you don't have Internet access or you feel safer about sending a postal letter, that's just fine. The address for the current set of Royalty can be found in each issue of the *Crown Prints*.
If you choose this route, use a normal font, not a calligraphy font. While beautiful, the fancy fonts are hard to read, and you want your letter to be read.

Do *not* approach Their Majesties at an event and verbally suggest that They give So-and-So an award. Their Majesties need to have a paper trail—They need, for example, to see if They have several recommendations for a particular person. Additionally, if They want to give an award at a particular event, They want to have at least a promissory scroll to give out (if not the real thing). In other words, They need lead time to prepare *before* the event.

The only time to speak to Their Majesties about an award recommendation is if They ask you for your advice.

By the same token, don't hand your letter to Their Majesties at an event. It's far too easy to lose paperwork in the shuffle of an event. It really is safer to send your comments via e-mail or postal mail.

Who Has What Award?

Once you've decided that you'd like to write a recommendation letter about So-and-So, you'll need to find out what awards s/he already has. Obviously, you don't want to recommend him or her for an award already received. (In large Kingdoms, I've seen this happen—and the award actually does get given twice, much to everyone's embarrassment.)

Obviously, you can't waltz up to the person and ask if s/he has the award. But pay attention: Does s/he wear a pendant or emblem of the award? Are there scrolls hung in his/her house? If the Order is called in Court, does s/he go up?

Some people don't wear their pendants/tokens and don't hang their scrolls (or are waiting for a commissioned scroll), so these are just a first step.

The easiest way to find out if someone has an award is to check the Kingdom Order of Precedence, which can be downloaded from <http://www.sca-caid.org/herald/op.html>. The OP lists awards given in Caïd as well as other Kingdoms (if the person has forwarded that information to the Keeper of Precedence). If you know where the person in question lived previously, you can always check that Kingdom's OP as well.

If you want to check for awards potentially given after the date of the latest OP, or if you want additional help or information, you can contact the Keeper of the Order of Precedence, whose information is in the back of the *Crown Prints*.

A third way to track down the information is to ask the person's partner and his/her friends if the person has the award. Surely somebody close to the person will know—and will be happy you think the person is deserving.

Additionally, if the person lives in a Barony or Principality, the Coronets may also know what awards the person has.

Baronial and Principality Awards

Most baronies and principalities also have a system of awards for service, A&S, and/or fighting done within the local area. (With rare exceptions, shires do not have awards, because they have no titled heads.) These awards do not give precedence. If you're unsure what awards your local group has in place, ask around.

Gyldenholt does have a local award, the Foret d'Or, "which is given by Their Excellencies to those whom the populace has recommended". You can see a list of who has received this award at <http://www.gyldenholt.org/foretdor.html>. You can recommend the award by writing to Their Excellencies at gyldenholt@socal.rr.com or to their postal address, found elsewhere in the *Gyldenholt Press*.

Campaigning and Petitions

Petitions: The Royals consider each letter to be one single letter, no matter how many signatures are on it. You're far better off suggesting or encouraging others to write letters, rather than asking them to sign a single letter.

Even then, suggesting that others write letters is a delicate thing. There's a fine line between mentioning the idea to a few folks, and "campaigning", which is actively working to get somebody an award and considered to be in poor form.

It's easier to give examples of campaigning, so let's start with that.

Lancelot decides that Bedevere deserves a Crescent Sword for his fighting. So Lancelot says to mutual friends, "Bedevere should have a Crescent Sword, and we're going to make sure he gets it." He sends an e-mail to everyone he knows: "You must write a letter so Bedevere gets a Crescent Sword at the Arthurian Tourney next month." Perhaps he goes so far as to write a sample letter himself and mail it to everyone, encouraging them to forward it on with their own signatures on it.

So, what's *not* campaigning? E-mailing a *few* friends who know Bedevere and saying, "You know, I think Bedevere deserves a Crescent Sword, and I'm going to write a letter recommending him. If you think he deserves one, consider writing a letter, too. If you don't think he's achieved that level of fighting, just ignore this e-mail." Or, at an event, commenting, "Wow, Bedevere's fighting has really improved, and he's been very chivalrous on the field. Does he have a Crescent Sword? If not, I think I'll write a letter for him."

Essentially, the difference is *pushing* others to write a letter versus *suggesting* that others write a letter; e.g., putting the idea in their heads. When I make the suggestion, I like to clearly say that if others don't agree with me, that's fine.

I Sent a Letter, But the Person Still Hasn't Received His/Her Award. What Do I Do?

A valid question. There are a number of reasons why Their Majesties have not given the award. Perhaps They are waiting to receive more recommendations. Perhaps They are waiting for a particular event at which to give the award. Perhaps They have reasons that are none of your business. And, of course, perhaps your recommendation never got to Them for some reason.

Each set of Royals gives to Their successors any paperwork that's been left unfinished. This includes recommendations that the first set of Royals haven't acted upon.

A good rule of thumb is, if two reigns have passed (the reign in which you turned in the recommendation and the following reign), feel free to write another letter. Be upfront and politely say that you wrote a letter previously (and give the approximate date) and you are following up on that. Give the same information you gave before, and add anything that the candidate has done/shown/produced since you wrote that last letter. (If Their Majesties felt that the candidate wasn't quite deserving of the award before, this will greatly help.)

Remember that all awards are given at the pleasure of the Crown. Always be polite and non-accusatory when following up. This should be obvious, but...*don't* corner Them at an event and demand to know why So-and-So hasn't received that award yet! You will only make yourself and the candidate look bad.

A Final Note

The SCA's award system isn't perfect, but it works pretty well. We all do this for fun, but the SCA is a volunteer group, and nothing would happen without the efforts of everyone involved. The award system serves as a thank-you and recognition of a job well done; skill or prowess in fighting or craft; and the tenets of chivalry, honor, and courtesy, the mainstays of this game we play.

The bottom line is simple: If no one writes a letter, no one will get an award. If you think someone is deserving, write a letter. All the information you need should be in this article, on the web, or from the people around you.

I hope you found this information helpful. I welcome any questions or comments on this article, and can be contacted at dayle.dermatis@mac.com.

Appendix A: Caidan Awards

These are taken directly from the Caidan Boke of Law, which can be found online at the Caidan website (<http://www.sca-caid.org/seneschal>). I have not included awards that are reserved particularly for the Crown to give for personal service to Them.

Section 3:

The Crown shall award the Order of the Dolphin, the Order of the Harp Argent, the Order of the Crescent Sword, the Order of the Argent Arrow, and the Order of the Duelist to those it deems deserving. These Orders shall be equal in rank, shall be ranked between the Award of Arms and the Grant of Arms, and shall carry an Award of Arms if the recipient is not already armigerous. The style of address for these Orders shall be "My Lord/Lady". There shall be no limitations on the number of subjects who may be awarded said Orders in any reign.

- (a) The **Order of the Dolphin** shall be awarded for excellence in service to the Kingdom.
- (b) The **Order of the Harp Argent** shall be awarded for excellence in the Arts or Sciences.
- (c) The **Order of the Crescent Sword** shall be awarded for excellence in SCA-style combat combined with authentic appearance in combat.
- (d) The **Order of the Argent Arrow** shall be awarded for excellent skill in target archery combined with authentic garb and demeanor.

- (e) The **Order of the Duelist** shall be awarded for excellence in SCA-style rapier combat combined with authentic appearance in combat.

Section 4:

The Crown shall award the Order of the Crescent, the Order of the Lux Caidis, the Order of the Gauntlet of Caid, the Order of Chiron, and the Order of the White Scarf of Caid to those it deems deserving. These Orders shall be equal in rank, shall be ranked above the Grant of Arms, and shall carry a Grant of Arms if the recipient has not already received a Grant. The style of address for these Orders shall be "Your Lordship/Ladyship" or "The Honorable Lord/Lady". There shall be no limitations on the number of subjects who may be awarded said Orders in any reign.

- (a) The **Order of the Crescent** shall be awarded for outstanding service to the Kingdom.
- (b) The **Order of the Lux Caidis** shall be awarded for outstanding excellence in the Arts or Sciences.
- (c) The **Order of the Gauntlet of Caid** shall be awarded for outstanding ability in SCA-style combat.
- (d) The **Order of Chiron** shall be awarded for outstanding ability in SCA-style archery.
- (e) The **Order of the White Scarf of Caid** shall be awarded for outstanding ability in SCA-style rapier combat in accordance with the Treaty of the White Scarf.

Section 5:

The following non-armigerous Orders and awards shall be given by the Crown to those it deems deserving. There shall be no limitations on the number of subjects who may be given said awards and Orders in any reign.

- (a) The award of **L'Honneur de la Chanson** shall be granted for excellence in musical arts.
- (b) The award of the **Corde de Guerre** shall be granted for acts of extreme valor upon the war battlefield.
- (c) The award of the **Crossed Swords** shall be granted to such fighting units as have demonstrated exceptional skill at arms, valor, and chivalry upon the battlefield.
- (d) The **Order of the Vanguard of Honor** shall be granted after consultation with the members of the order, in recognition of outstanding honorable and chivalric actions upon the tournament field.
- (e) The **Order of the Acorn** shall be awarded to those minors who have demonstrated considerable contributions to the Kingdom.

Appendix B: Sample Letters

Sample Letter for an AoA

Your Majesties,

I humbly request that You consider granting an Award of Arms to Your subject, Duncan Macleod (mka Adrian Paul).

Duncan has been an active member of the SCA and our Shire of Highland for approximately 1.5 years. In that time, he has proven to uphold the values of the SCA such as courtesy, honor and chivalry. He is always eager to volunteer, help someone, or learn something new.

Duncan attended his first war this year, and was an invaluable addition to our encampment. He was constantly jumping to his feet when someone had barely commented that they wanted or needed something. He was instrumental in seeing that dishes were washed after meals and that the kitchen was ready for the next day.

Duncan's interest in all facets of the SCA is boundless. He expressed an interest in learning how to do Lists, and by the next event was running them by himself. He has been attending our weekly Arts & Sciences meetings, and has been learning about sewing so he can make more garb.

Perhaps the most striking action that showed Duncan upholds the tenets of the SCA occurred at our recent weekend event. Early on, Duncan had volunteered to work Troll Booth in the evening Friday night, from 6 – 9 P.M. He was unable to get out of school and make it to the event until 7 P.M. He immediately sat down at Troll and began working—before he even checked in, found his cabin, or unpacked his gear.

It would be a great honor if You would grant Duncan Macleod an Award of Arms at Your next available convenience. I do know that he will be attending Highland Fling in June and Coronation in July.

Respectfully,
Barwnes Rhieinwen Cyfarwydd ferch Angharad, GoA
Order of the Crescent of Caid, Order of the Dolphin of Caid, Orden des Lindquistringes
(Drachenwald)

A few notes:

This is a composite letter, pulled from various letters I have sent over the years. It was sent as a postal letter.

Paragraph one states the person and award, making it easy for Their Majesties or an assistant to file the recommendation. Paragraph two gives general information, while paragraphs three through five give *specific examples* of what the nominee has, in my opinion, done to deserve the award.

I included in my signature several of my awards, three of which are for service. In the letter, I'm highlighting Duncan's service, so the inclusion is appropriate.

Sample Letter for a Crescent of Caid

Your Majesties,

I humbly request that You consider granting a Crescent of Caid to Your subject, Robert Roy MacGregor (mka Liam Neeson).

Robert has been in the SCA for 8 years. He has taught four local events and helped with others, and is often the last person to leave site after an event. For the last two years, he has been on the staff of GWW. He pays special attention to newcomers and always welcoming and willing to answer their questions—in fact, he attends all newcomer meetings for that purpose.

He has also served as local Seneschal and was instrumental in assisting the Kingdom Seneschal with writing a new training document for local seneschals. He has applied to be Kingdom Seneschal when the current seneschal steps down.

Robert is a skilled metalworker and has assisted many Shire members with making their own armour, opening his home on a weekly basis. He has taught metalworking at several local Academia. He fights heavy as well and supports our local practices.

Your Majesties, I beg your graciousness in inducting Robert Roy MacGregor into the Order of the Crescent of Caid at Your next available convenience. Among the upcoming events he will be attending are Highland Fling in June and Coronation in July.

Respectfully,
Barwnes Rhieinwen Cyfarwydd ferch Angharad, GoA
Order of the Crescent of Caid, Order of the Dolphin of Caid, Orden des Lindquistringes
(Drachenwald)

Sample Letter for a Laurel

Your Majesties,

It is with great hope and pride that I submit to you the suggestion that you admit Veronica Franco (mka Catherine McCormack) to the Right Noble Order of the Laurel.

Veronica has been a member of our noble Society for 15 years. In that time, she has honed and perfected her skill in the arts of costuming and needlework, as well as her knowledge of the history in these fields. She has already been honored for these skills with a Harp Argent and a Lux Caidis.

The purpose of a Laurel is to honor those who have not only learned, but who have taken that knowledge and experience and passed it on to others. Veronica has been a mainstay for teaching costuming in the Shire of Highland for many years. Her willingness to teach is boundless, and more importantly, so has been her patience.

Nearly everyone in our Shire--I would be so bold as to guess 95% of the current and past members--has benefited from her help, either directly or indirectly. (I can speak for myself on both counts: She has taught me immeasurable things, and I have thus been able to instruct others.) I personally cannot imagine how empty my garb closet would be--or how poor my costuming skills would be--had I not been given gentle and wise guidance from Veronica. It is to Veronica that I routinely send newcomers for costuming help and advice.

Veronica's interest is in 16th-century Italian garb. To that end, she has done extensive research in the time period and place, with an emphasis on correct cut and fabric. She has read original (translated) texts describing outfits of the time and has also examined paintings from that period, some of them first-hand.

Additionally, she has consistently assisted with Stepping-Up and/or Stepping-Down garb for many years. She has taught at numerous Collegia, won first place in Costuming at several Pentathlon, and also submitted an article to *Tournaments Illuminated*.

Her secondary art form is blackwork, which she uses to decorate the 16th-century garb that she makes. She has taught blackwork at the local level and to members of surrounding local groups. She also often volunteers as a Field Herald, showing knowledge and support of heavy-weapons fighting. She is interested in all things 16th-century and Italian, and is knowledgeable about the food and dances of the time in particular. Veronica's name and device was registered with the College of Heralds in 1992, and she fulfills the Corpora requirements for a Peerage in all ways.

Your Majesties, thank you for your time and consideration of this recommendation to honor Veronica with a Laurel.

Respectfully,
Barwnes Rhieinwen Cyfarwydd ferch Angharad, GoA

A few notes:

The Peerage Councils of Caid ask that you include a picture of the candidate, if possible. (We all know how hard it is to match up names and faces sometimes.)

For a complete list of what to put in a Laurel Recommendation letter, see the June 2002 issue of the *Crown Prints*. This contains a great deal of information that can be used when writing a Knighthood or Pelican letter as well.