

## An Interview with Balin the Fairhaired, Founding Baron Beyond the Mountain

*Interviewed by Evaine ferch Brangwen, September, 2016*

Balin the Fairhaired, founding baron of the Barony Beyond the Mountain, and his wife Morgana Eressea di Sanpere, joined the SCA with Balin's brother Mitchell Gray Cloak, in Seattle in 1970. Balin learned about the SCA through the writings of a favorite author, Poul Anderson, who was a member of the SCA in California.

Mitchell, Balin, and Morgana discovered what would later become the Barony of Madrone in Seattle and joined. Events were held in the arboretum at the University of Washington, where they both were students. Balin started to fight, wearing an 18-gauge propane tank helmet.

"The blows were taps compared to what you see today," Balin said. "It was a lot of fun."

When he graduated in 1971, Balin and Morgana moved back to his hometown of Woodbury, CT in 1971. They contacted the SCA to find the local group and quickly learned there wasn't one.

"I was told there was a man in Meriden who wanted to start a group, but he didn't do anything," Balin recalled. "So we decided to do it."

They organized the first tourney in June 1972 on a field in Woodbury across the street from his mother's house. It turned into their baronial investiture. Eight to ten people attended, including Mitchell, Balin and Morgana, a couple of women from Waterbury and an artist who created posters to advertise the event.

Kingdom Seneschal El of the Two Knives came to conduct the investiture ceremony to name Balin and Morgana the first baron and baroness.

"We became barons by virtue of starting the group," Balin said.

They chose the English translation of the Native American name, Housatonuc River, meaning "beyond the mountain," as the new barony's name.

"It seemed like a nice medieval sounding name," Balin said.

Richard of Rideja served as first baronial seneschal. Richard was best known for creating expert replica medieval coins of both pewter and silver. Balin served as both baron and seneschal for a time before Richard took the position.

Balin went to grad school at the University of Connecticut in Storrs in 1972-73 for medieval studies. He didn't recall when he first met Salaamallah, but it was at UConn.

"When did I not know Salaamallah?" he said.

Salaamallah joined early on and soon became baronial seneschal.

The barony continued to grow, with the cantons of Ravenhill in the western part of the state, Fennbrycg, centered at UConn, and Dragonship Haven in the southwestern portion of the state. The barony hosted a Crown Tourney on the same field across from his mother's house in Woodbury. Balin entered.

“I didn't do too badly,” he said. “I fought pretty well, but I was eliminated by Akbar, who became king.”

Prior to fighting Akbar, Balin defeated one combatant with a “classic” blow to the head, he recalled. But at the same time, the man slashed Balin's knee. He continued fighting, but the knee grew worse.

After the weekend, Balin missed his UConn class on High Germany. His professor knew he had entered the medieval tournament and joked to the class that he probably got his leg cut off. The next day, Dale hobbled into the classroom on crutches.

“The whole class burst out laughing,” he said.

The early barony hosted many events at Woodbury High School, including a poetry contest that brought fantasy author Marion Zimmer Bradley to town. Her husband won the poetry contest.

“It was pretty neat knowing Marion Zimmer Bradley,” Balin said.

One incident, however, wasn't so neat. Duke Cariadoc of the Bow (formerly King of the Middle, King of the East, and progenitor of the Pennsic War) came to one post-event gathering at Balin's mother's house in Woodbury. As they chatted, Cariadoc wielded his rattan broadsword to demonstrate a move, made an upward thrust and poked a hole in ceiling. “Maybe she won't notice,” someone said.

She did.

Balin remained baron, but in the 1980s, virtually disappeared, to the point where people referred to him as the “phantom baron.” He had moved to New London and had become an activist in the New London Landmarks group, pushing to save historic buildings in the Whaling City. Eventually, on January 4, 1986, his old friend Salaamallah the Corpulent replaced him as Baron.