

The Blue Strand

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER



Wealthy woman bleaching her hair using a lye mixture and sitting in an open sunhat in the sun.

Urine as Hair Bleach?

A sensationalist modern myth

——— U. REA FULLER

If you have enjoyed many a history novel or TikTok, you may have come across the “fact” that women, or the Celtic people of Britain, bleached their hair with urine. Very simply, this is false. There is very little evidence of urine being used as a hair bleach.

First, how did this misinformation happen? Simply, urine was used as bleach for clothes. In particular, aged urine actually contains oxidising chemicals, the same oxidisers sometimes used in modern laundry bleach. But just as you would not lighten your hair with laundry bleach, people historically would not do the same. Besides the point that it's urine, it can spread disease, and you don't want to smell like it. The added urine in particular is a strong bleach when compared to some of the oxidisers listed later and becomes incredibly harsh, concentrated and damaging to your skin and hair and could easily lead to chemical burns or intense hair damage.

So how did people bleach their hair?

Hair bleaching has written records as far back as the 3rd century by historian Diodorus Siculus in On Gaul Book 5. He noted that the “Celtic Britons” hair is blond, and not only naturally, but that they achieve this by “always washing their hair in lime-water”. Lime is another early oxidiser

and would very easily bleach hair.

By the 12th century, there were multiple recipes in medical treatises for mixtures of either lye or alum with sweet-smelling herbs, explicitly labelled as for lightening. Lye and alum are both very good oxidisers, and in particularly with lye, which can be more easily measured and made in controllable concentrations when compared to earlier oxidisers.

By the 16th century in Venice, there was a trend among wealthy women lightening their hair to blonde. We have multiple illustrations and descriptions of a particular method where a wealthy woman would apply a lye mixture and then sit outside with a very wide-brimmed straw hat with the top removed and their hair hanging out of the top.

The hat in particular would have multiple benefits, not least being preventing the lye from touching the skin and chemically burning it. Covering your face from the sun to prevent tanning. The additional heat from the sun from the reaction would increase the speed and potency of the reaction, allowing for lower, less damaging concentrations of lye water as well as a stronger bleaching effect.

Ultimately, to answer the question we started with, no, people did not use urine as hair bleach; they used many other naturally caustic mixtures, including lye, lime and alum.

WHAT'S ON?

July Activities

- Thursday 9th July – Fighter Training + A&S
- Saturday 11th July – Crafthall (Fletching) + Potluck
- Sunday 12th July – Archery Training
- Tuesday 14th July – Council Meeting
- Thursday 16th July – Fighter Training + A&S
- Friday 17th – Monday 20th July – Inter-College War
- Thursday 23rd July – Fighter Training + A&S
- Thursday 30th July – Fighter Training + A&S

More information:
<https://kraeglas.lochac.sca.org/>

Inter-College War:

A word from the Stewarding Team

Hi all, in the lead up to ICW, please see these reminders:

1. Pack warm, it is going to be very cold!
2. All rapier combatants require a stat dec under Victorian law
3. Please reach out to sca@monashclubs.org if you have any queries

The points system for ICW has been set. If you will be representing a college (such as St Monica), please find an explainer on the Monican website:
<https://stmonica.lochac.sca.org/intercollege-war-2026/>

You will also be able to find a link to the timetable on that page.



Left: The current Heavy Fighting Champion of Krae Glas, Lord Robert de Mar. Right: Rob fighting Airdin on Day of Champions A.S LX. Photos by Julia of the Ravens

Q&A with the Heavy Fighting Champion

Q&A with Lord Robert de Mar, Heavy Champion of Krae Glas

———— JULIA OF THE RAVENS, NOV 2025

Interviewer's note: Even though Rob is my husband, I promise I didn't write or prompt any of his answers. Especially the last one. I swear. He likes me, I guess.

How long have you been in the SCA? I have been playing in the SCA since 2000.

How did you get started? My first event was William Marshal and I was drawn by the fighting and the pageantry.

What do you love most about heavy fighting? Although I do enjoy the fighting, winning or losing, it is not the fight itself that I truly enjoy. It is the conversations that happen between the fights/rounds, the inspiration to discuss how a blow was delivered or how a blow was defended against. It is done with camaraderie and with purpose to help each other to become better on the field and push each other's skills to new heights.

What advice would you give for folks interested in starting heavy fighting?

Just try, there is no right or wrong fighting style, the style has to suit you. Listen to all advice and critique, try it and see if it suits you. It took me 4 years to find a style that suited me so just keep trying and one day you will find your fighting style.

What's something new you've recently learned about heavy fighting?

I have just finished making a great sword (thanks to His Excellency Baron Jon) and used it for the first time

during Day Of Champions. I had fun with it and want to continue to learn more techniques to use it effectively.

What are your favourite weapons & fighting style?

While I have a vast experience with many different kind of weapons, I most enjoy the classic sword and shield. The fighting style I prefer is the school of Bellatrix, it has a unique style that I find comfortable with and does focus on not putting the body under too much strain and avoiding common sport injuries.

Tell us about your training philosophy?

When I first started in the SCA some of the newbies were asked what kind of peer did we want to aspire to become? I answered I wanted to be a Knight, but only having a small inclination of how to become one I didn't know much. It wasn't until recently when I had a one-on-one with Sir Eva (thanks to my lovely wife) about chivalry that I had realised something. Even though the majority of my values lined up perfectly with chivalry, I was lacking.

Thanks to the advice of Sir Eva, I hunted for reading material and, once again thanks to my wife, I found Ramon Lull's book of Knighthood and Chivalry. After reading it I stopped focusing outward and started to look within and found my shortcomings, I should not focus on my destination (becoming a Knight) but instead on the journey. After much contemplation and reflection, it is the journey that I should be focusing on and I will reach my destination in time when I am worthy to reach it.



Our archery champion, Sorcha, taking aim at Midwinter Hunt! Photo by Morris Morse Morley Morecocke

Previous On: Krae Glas

The Midwinter Hunt was an event to remember!

— JOANNA OF BRAIDWOOD

If you weren't at Midwinter Hunt – you should've been! It was an incredibly fun event. The weather was just beautiful, clear and sunny (although a little chilly). There were several archery shoots, and then a number of us were set loose to forage for ingredients before the actual Hunt itself began.

Sorcha probably shouldn't have turned us loose quite so far away from the actual foraging area because victory was thus in the palm of those who were able to sprint to

it. The berries were relatively easy to find, being bright red, but the pale mushrooms were rather sneaky and worth the most points!

After the foraging the Hunt began, with the archers creeping through the woods shooting at various game.

Then everyone went back to the Dolphin's Keep to enjoy the spoils of our exercise – a sumptuous feast!

All in all it was an incredible event and I hope that Sorcha may be able to be convinced to run it again next year.

From the editor

Technically it's all from me, but still

If you want to write it – I want to read it.

And I want to make everyone else read it too :P

You could have an article about whatever niche topic you want added to this very newsletter!

You could be as unhinged as me. It could happen.

Send any write ups (almost any length, I can make it work) completely without context to joannabraidwood@gmail.com. Make it happen.



About the editor

Joanna of Braidwood is probably a little mad.

If you made it this far, thanks for joining us.

That's all folks! Huzzah!

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