

## 13th CENTURY ENGLISH TOURNAMENT

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**Tournaments in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries** were wide-ranging battles in which the object was to unhorse and capture opposing knights for ransom rather than kill them.

The tournament probably originated during the late 11th or very early 12th century in France with the advent of knightly charges with couched lances – they needed practice.

*Middle Ages in England*  
Early: ≈ 850 – 1066 AD  
High: 1066 - ≈ 1300 AD  
Late: ≈ 1300 - ≈ 1485 AD

- No *English* tournaments were held during the reigns of William II (1087-1100) or Henry I (1100-1135), although they were gaining popularity in France during this time.
- By 1130, tournaments were common enough for the Church to prohibit all such “detestable military sports;” this ban was not rescinded until 1316, so virtually all 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> c. tournaments were held in spite of it.
- Stephen (1135-54) allowed some English tournaments, but Henry II (1154-1189) banned them again.

“Throughout the middle ages, tourneying was perhaps the most popular of all aristocratic sports. It ranked with hunting and hawking as one of the pastimes in which excellence was sought... As a game, it epitomized all that chivalry stood for – it celebrated the skills and virtues ... of the knightly classes; the handling of weapons and horses (as well as) courage and perseverance in the face of personal discomfort and ... danger... (The tourneyer could) win reputation and renown ... through personal attributes alone.”

Tournaments first became common in England during the reign of Richard I (1189-99), who not only wished to raise his English knights’ battle skills to the level of the

French, but licensed tournaments for revenue. His charter also regulated the behavior of tourneyers on the way to the tournament (see p. 7); most of his regulations were in force through the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

### An early 13th century tournament:

*Tournaments* differed from battle only because:

- Tourneyers fought without intent to kill and deaths were a matter of regret.
- Captured knights were not to be held prisoner but were released upon their promise to arrange ransom.
- The tournament area contained “*recets*” within which knights could honorably retire to rest and rearm.

#### Rules of engagement:

- No rules or custom *against*: infantry; uneven odds; pretending disinterest and starting when others were already tired.
- Some behaviors were not against the rules but were thought dishonorable: archers; attacking an unhelmed knight; killing a horse; leaving the field (other than to *recets*) and returning; striking at the legs.

*Tournaments were typically organized by barons or earls* during John and Henry III’s reigns; many were held near castles, which meant near towns with markets.

- The tournament ground was a large area of fields and hills with loosely defined boundaries.
- Typically, 2 to 3 weeks prior to the tournament, the baron or earl sent messengers to the surrounding area to announce the event; heralds had no official role in these tournaments.

- Knights, with their squires and grooms, would arrive at the site often the day before the event, staying at inns or being offered hospitality by local nobles, knights, sergeants or merchants.
- Probably  $\approx 2/3$  of the knights at a tournament were *household knights* in the retinue of a particular earl or banneret; the remaining *bachelor* knights were unattached.

The **average** 13<sup>th</sup> century English tourneyer:  
 •Height: 5' 7 1/2"  
 •Weight:  $\approx 150 - 165$  lb.  
 •Age:  $\approx 30$  years old

The **average** 13<sup>th</sup> century warhorse:  
 •15 to 15.2 hands  
 ( $\approx 5'$  tall at the shoulder)  
 •> 1100 lb.

#### *The day before the tournament:*

- Pre-tournament skirmishes called “vigils” or “vespers” were held in the afternoon; the earls, bannerets and best tourneyers rarely fought in these intense “warm-ups”, since no ransoms could be won.
- In the evening, the knights often visited their peers in the towns, reinforcing social ties and talking politics.

#### *Early 13<sup>th</sup> century armor and weapons:*

- A long chain hauberk over a quilted aketon, mail chausses, a few accessories of cuir bouilli or steel, a great helm worn over bascinet, and perhaps leather or whalebone gauntlets.
- A sword girded around the waist, perhaps a mace, a painted lance of soft wood with no metal vemple.
- A wooden shield reinforced with metal or horn.
- Horse armor included tester (head), crupper (under tail) and piser (probably protected chest).
- Coat of arms might be displayed on knight’s surcoat, his shield, and sometimes on his horse’s trapper.

#### *Beginning the tournament:*

- The retinues and unattached bachelors divided into two teams, each taking one end of the field and a recet; each side could be as large as 200, although each side was more commonly closer to 30 or 40.
- The fighting started with informal individual combats called “*comenciailles*”, and the general melee started when one side decided it was time to charge the other side.
- Combat began with lances; when they broke, it continued with swords and maces.
- Captured knights were taken off the field, but released on the promise of ransom; the ransom might or might not include horse and armor.

#### *The end of the day:*

- Fighting continued until daylight ended or one side clearly held the field.
- In the evening, knights paid courtesy calls and gathered in “*parlements*” to discuss the tournament and its results, and to settle ransoms; disputes were settled by lords, not heralds.

## **English tournaments during the reign of Henry III (1216-1272)**

#### *Frequency and prohibitions:*

prepared to abolish these exciting social functions than the House of Lords today would be prepared to abolish horse-racing or hunting.” (N. Deholm-Young)

- Tournaments were organized by barons or earls at least two or three times a year during Henry III’s reign in spite of frequent royal prohibitions supporting an ongoing ban by the Church.
- Both John and Henry III were relatively weak kings who had to deal with rebellious barons, making tournaments potentially dangerous gatherings of large numbers of armed knights; Henry III was also a very pious man who prohibited them *pro forma* to support the Church’s ban.
- Pro forma* prohibitions were read at the tournament site and required payment of a fine to hold the event.
- Serious prohibitions due to political unrest were issued in time to prevent the tournament from occurring.

Many tournaments were fought between the *English Baronial party* and the *Royal party of French favorites*:

- 1248** “At this tournament, William de Valence (the King’s French half-brother), ... being of tender age, and not able to sustain the force of the hardy and marshaled knights ... was thrown to the ground, whereby he suffered considerable losses and was well batoned, in order that he might receive his appretisage in knighthood.” (Matthew Paris)
- 1249** “A jousting-match was held at Brackley, at which many of ... England’s Bachelors were injured; ... William de Valence (revenged himself for his earlier beating, and) ... badly injured William de Odingesseles, a bold knight belonging to the Bachelor community.” (Matthew Paris)
- 1251** “...a fierce tournament ... in which the foreigners were so shamefully beaten that they fled with disgrace to the city for refuge; but being met by (English) knights coming in the opposite direction, were again attacked, despoiled, and soundly beaten with sticks and staves; and thus they returned with much interest the blows and injuries they had received at the tournament of Brackley. (Matthew Paris)

**Evolution of a’ plaisance hastiludes:**

- The melees of the early tournaments, as described above, were called *a’ outrance*.
- During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, many tournaments were fought *a’ outrance*, but some were fought *a’ plaisance*: less fierceness and more rules – fought not for ransom, but for prizes.

**Hastilude** (“*spear play*”) became the collective name for mounted martial combat between knights (or squires) that began with lances; they included tournaments (melees), behourds, Round Tables and jousting matches. By 1300, hastilude referred to all the forms *other* than jousting matches.

Evolution of a’ plaisance hastiludes:	
Date	Event
1190s	<b>A’ plaisance</b> tournaments documented
1216	First “ <b>mock tournament</b> ” mentioned
1223	First documented <b>Round Table</b>
1234	First documented <b>behourd</b>
1250s	Jousting matches become the major focus at some hastiludes.

**Behourd:** A very common informal hastilude that included individual jousts but focused on the melee.

- These were more easily organized than tournaments, since they did not require as large or defined an area.
- Behourds were almost always fought *a’ plaisance* with no ransoms taken, but prizes were often awarded.
- Behourds might be restricted to squires, or might allow squires to fight with knights, or might even be restricted to knights; they were often held in conjunction with knighting ceremonies.

**Round Table:** Prestigious Arthurian-themed pageants celebrating knightly values at which the feast was the major focus and the presence of ladies emphasized the courteous romances.

- Round Tables included *hastiludes* fought *a' plaisance*; jousting was the most popular form.
- Knights took the names and even characters of Arthurian heroes – medieval role-playing!
- In later centuries, Round Tables evolved into the *pas d'armes*.

**Quintain** referred to a post with a shield or dummy mounted on the top, or sometimes on one end of a free-spinning horizontal pole carrying a bag of sand at the other end. Charging the quintain was the most common training for lance-work, but could also be staged as a contest.

**Jousting matches** gained in popularity and in pageantry during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; they were typically fought *a' plaisance* and by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, were more popular than *hastiludes*.

Some of the 13<sup>th</sup> century *a' plaisance hastiludes* were fought as “mock tournaments” with linen armor supplemented with cuir buolli, and heavily blunted (“rebated”) weapons, or weapons of whalebone or wood.

- These were probably intended as a safer form of tournament, but rarely fulfilled that hope and often had a higher frequency of injury and death.
- The earl of Essex was killed at the first recorded “mock tournament” in 1216.
- Lord Edward’s “coming out party” in 1256 was a “mock tournament” fought with blunted swords and in quilted linen armor and probably the only 13<sup>th</sup> century tournament held in England with both royal and papal approval. The tall, athletic 17-year old Edward fared well, but several were injured so badly that they died within another year, another had to have his lands put into the hands of guardians due to his head injury, and the Earl Marshal almost died of later complications.

“About Whitsuntide, a general tournament was held at Blithe, according to the laws and discipline of the chivalry, at which the king’s eldest son Edward attended in linen clothing and light armor to be instructed in the laws of chivalry.” (Matthew Paris)

#### **Women at tournaments:**

- The description of a Round Table in 1279 contains the first explicit mention of ladies attending a tournament in England, although their presence was certainly common at Round Tables, beginning in 1223.
- Women were more likely to be found at smaller *a' plaisance* tournaments held near towns and at jousting matches, which catered to spectators.
- Women were typically the prize-givers at such tournaments, although with less ceremony than in the 14<sup>th</sup> C.
- Sleeves and veils were the most popular favors granted as tokens, often fastened to lances and helms.

### **1274 – 1299: The “golden age” of English tournament**

*Edward I (1272 – 1307) actively promoted tourneying.*

- During his reign, hastiludes and jousting matches emerged as a full-fledged social functions officially recognized by, and formally attended by the Royal Court.
- Edward I particularly liked the Arthurian pageantry of Round Tables, and sponsored several.
- By 1299, Welsh wars forced him to curtail tournaments.
- Jousting became more popular at hastiludes, and jousting matches (with no melee) became more frequent.

“The 13<sup>th</sup> c. is the best period of the tournament. Its popularity was at its height; there was some degree of organization, but the sting had not yet been taken out of the fighting. The ‘lists’ were still in the distant future, when the wargame fought by teams was replaced by the futile but highly stylized and ornamental pageants of the 15th century.” (N. Denholm-Young)

**A late 13<sup>th</sup> century jousting match:**

- Knights typically rode from opposite ends of the fenced-off lists with no barrier.
- In the more informal jousts, all knights were present in the lists and when one knight felt ready, he would start forward toward his opponents. *Usually*, all but one opponent would drop away as they saw others making the approach.
- Knights did not yet train jousting destriers separately from warhorses, but in a joust, the horse had to run head on against a single opponent and take the full shock of the encounter repeatedly. In a melee, this was much less frequent.

**HIGH MEDIEVAL JOUSTING**

Knights had great difficulty just running a successful pass in an individual joust. The horses often swerved, crossed over each others’ paths, collided, or simply refused to complete the course. Many attempts ended with no chance to strike the opponent. A Spanish knight who tourneyed widely described the “French method” as running full speed at the opponent to overthrow him with the momentum of horse and rider. This assumed the challenger was not a better rider able to turn the situation to his advantage. Another method popular with the Germans used the horse’s dexterity first to avoid the shock of the encounter, then to wheel around to reach the opponent before he could re-engage.

*With royal recognition and approval during Edward I’s reign came more rules and regulations.*

- Laying hands on opponents (grappling) was strictly forbidden after 1274 – while at a tournament in France, Edward had been dragged from his horse by his neck.
- By 1300, both striking from behind and striking an unhelmed knight were strictly forbidden.
- The Statua Armorum (1292) regulated esquires at a tournament, restricting their number and weapons (p.7).

**14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century hastiludes and jousting matches:**

- These featured the highly expensive pageantry of nobles and their retinues jousting for public admiration using specialized weapons, armor and horses; the last melee tournament in England was fought in 1342.
- The introduction of the barrier in the tilting lists in the early 1400s completed the separation of jousting skills, weaponry and horses from those used in battle; jousting had become a sport, not training for battle.

**Conclusion:** How do SCA tournaments compare to high medieval English tournaments?

Not surprisingly, many SCA tournament forms and conventions have no equivalent in high medieval tournaments, although SCA “wars” actually replicate a high medieval tournament reasonably well.

- Simple practicality and safety dictate foot combat, which is a late medieval *hastilude* combat form.
- The formal role of heralds is also essentially a late medieval development in tournaments.
- The most blatant anachronism that has **no** equivalent in any medieval or renaissance *hastilude* is the idea of trying to “kill” each other, and that the defeated combatant “dies”! (We **need** to change this!)

Interestingly, two of the common “discussions” encountered among the SCA armored fighters *are* equivalent to high medieval arguments – people themselves just haven’t changed much.

1) The virtues of fighting *a’ plaisance* vs. *a’ outrance*:

- In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, some knights preferred the *a’ outrance* melee for its greater danger, use of group tactics, lack of regulation and emphasis on winning by any means (not to mention the increased chance of monetary gain); they considered those preferring the *a’ plaisance* *hastiludes* to be “show offs” and less “strenuous” (tough) since the joust only tested single combat with the lance, rather than multiple weapons in the chaos of a melee.
- On the other hand, the knights preferring *a’ plaisance* *hastiludes* valued them for their focus on individual skill and the greater emphasis on chivalry dictated by the presence of spectators; they considered *a’ outrance* melees a chance for unchivalrous thugs to win by brute strength assisted by the lack of rules.
- Sound familiar? Talk to armored fighters about “war fighters” vs. “tournament fighters”.

2) The importance of authentic recreation vs. a sport:

- Medieval tournaments evolved as an authentic recreation of battle, but over the 13<sup>th</sup> century, jousting became the most popular form of martial sports. Over the 14<sup>th</sup> century, specialized jousting horses, weapons and armor developed, and the barrier in 15<sup>th</sup> century jousting matches completed the evolution of jousting into a sport unrelated to battle.
- Some 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century knights decried this change, calling for a return to combat training.
- Many knights supported the joust as a valid chivalric sport in its own right, and chose to acquire the specialized horses, weapons and armor to excel in this form.
- Sound familiar? Ask various armored fighters if SCA combat is a martial art in its own right or if it should be based more soundly in actual medieval combat techniques.

### **Regulation of tournaments:**

**Richard I’s charter (1194):** This first set of regulations laid the foundation for all later attempts to regulate the sport. The charter attempted to control tournament location and prevent collateral damage, but did not attempt to regulate conduct on the tournament field. Most charter regulations, except the location restrictions, stayed in force through the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

**Five tournament locations:** Salisbury to Wilton (Wiltshire); Warwick and Kenilworth (Warwickshire); Stanford to Warinford (probably Suffolk); Brackley to Mixbury (Northamptonshire) and Blyth to Tickhill (Nottinghamshire).

**Fees:** (1 mark = 2/3 £; in 1194, an income of £20 or 30 m. per year was probably minimal to support a knight; an earl might have an income of £500 - £1000/year).

- License to hold tournament was 10 marks in 1194 (£6 2/3)
- Individual fees for participation in tournament were graduated according to the rank of the tourneyer: 20 marks for earl; 10 marks for baron, 4 marks for landed knight, 2 marks for landless knight.
- 2 clerics and 2 knights of the justiciar were to be present on the day of the tournament to receive the oaths of the earls and barons that they would pay their fees in full before permitting anyone to tourney, on pain of personal arrest.
- Substantial fines were levied for tourneying without king's license: Ralph FitzStephen in 1200 was fined £20 (much more than his 4 mark entry fee) for tourneying without a license.

**Oath:** A special form of oath was drawn up to administer to would-be tourneyers to ensure that movement of armed men about the country did not endanger the peace.

- From leaving home, all were to pay reasonable market prices for food and other necessities; nothing taken on pain of having to make amends.
- Royal right of vert and venison were given special protection in a clause that prohibited tourneyers from breaching the king's forests.
- Any tourneyer in feud with another had to swear not to harm the man in the tournament itself.

**Edward I's Statua Armorum** of 1292. The Statua appears to have simply given statutory force to customary regulations that had been voluntarily imposed previously. The statua regulations were *not* intended to limit the weapons and armor of the *tourneyers* (grans seigneurs) as Denhelm-Young interprets it, but that of their *esquires*, who were frequently trouble-makers at the events. Prior to the statua, the number of esquires per tourneyer was unlimited. Even after the Statua Armorum, the weapons and armor of the *tourneyers* were unrestricted.

**Each tourneyer could only take 3 esquires to the event.**

- Esquires' armor was restricted to knee pieces, cuisses, shoulder pieces (espauliers) and a bascinet, and each wore a cap of their lord's arms to identify them. No knight or esquire *servi*ng at the tournament (vs. knights tourneying) could be armed with a sharp sword, knife, cudgel or mace, but they were allowed broadswords. This implies a restricted but active fighting role on horseback, since the broadsword was a cavalryman's weapon, but the limitations of their body armor prevented them from participating in the preliminary jousts or from getting too involved in the melee fighting with better-armed knights.
- Of a knight's retainers, only the 3 esquires were allowed to pull a tourneyer from his horse legitimately. If anyone else did so, the tourneyer had his horse restored and the wrongdoer forfeited his own horse and harness and was sent to prison for 3 years. This implies that the horse was the legitimate booty of the 3 esquires if captured in the proper way. It must have been in acquiring horses as booty by pulling a knight from his horse in combat that allowed esquires their first experience in the sport before they were knighted and promoted to a tourneyer's rank.
- The numbers of more menial servants, *e.g.*, grooms and garcons, was not restricted, and they were not specifically identified by armorial caps; but they and all the audience were forbidden any weapons or defensive armor on pain of imprisonment. Heralds and marshals (active at tournaments at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> c.) were only allowed their blunted swords of office, and were identified by armorial tabards.
- Only esquires performing the duty of carving their lord's meat were to accompany a tourneyer to feast.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barber, Richard and Barker, Juliet, **Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages**, 1989, New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; ISBN = 1-55584-400-6.

- This book combines the skills of two experts on medieval history into a very entertaining and valuable resource. It is the best book I have found for a very solid (and scholarly, but readable) overview of tournaments, jousts and other hastiludes throughout the Middle Ages. I prefer Juliet Barker's book when focusing on high medieval tournaments, but this is definitely the book for those interested in late medieval jousts, *pas d'armes* and other pageants. Available through Amazon.com.

Barker, Juliet R.V., **The Tournament in England, 1100 – 1400**, 1986, New Hampshire: Boydell Press; ISBN: 0-85115-450-6.

- This is the most scholarly and comprehensive book I have found on medieval tournaments, and it is relatively well organized and easy to read, as well. If you want one book on this topic, this is the one. The introduction also contains Juliet Barker's brief opinion on each of the other significant sources on tournaments, which is very valuable. My only complaint frequently also applies to other scholarly books on medieval history – the Latin and French quotations are not translated! Available through Amazon.com.

Clephan, R. Coltman, **The Medieval Tournament**, 1995, New York: Dover; this is an unabridged reprint of **The Tournament: Its Periods and Phases** published in 1919, London: Methuen and Co., Ltd.

- This is an enjoyable book to peruse and contains some nice tidbits not found elsewhere, but keep in mind that it was written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and relies heavily on medieval romances.

Cripps-Day, Francis Henry, **The history of the tournament**.

- This is my least-favorite of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century books on tournament, since it is difficult to read and seems the least accurate.

Denholm-Young, Noel, "*The Tournament in the 13<sup>th</sup> C*", **Collected Papers of N. Denholm-Young**, 1969, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1948; also published in **Studies in Medieval History presented to F.M. Powicke**, Hunt, RW, Pantin, WA, Southern, RW, eds., 1948, pp. 240-268.

- This monograph is well worth reading. As Juliet Barker states, it provides the first analysis of the political side of tournaments; it also provides a lot of useful information on 13<sup>th</sup> century tournaments and knights, in general.

Paris, Matthew, **Matthew Paris's English History from the year 1235 to 1273**, transl. from the Latin by Rev. J. A. Giles, 1854, London.

- If you can check this 3-volume set out from a library, do so. Although I still skip much of his discussion of church politics, there is no substitute for listening to a voice from the time period. Matthew Paris was the most prolific historian of 13<sup>th</sup> century England; he has strong opinions on the events of his day, which makes for very entertaining reading. (Did you know that Henry III received a live elephant from the King of France in 1255?) There is a commercial book available on Matthew Paris that covers only 3 years, but contains reproductions of many of his drawings.

Santina, Mary Arlene, **The Tournament and Literature, Literary Representations of the Medieval Tournament in Old French Works, 1150-1226**, (1999) Peter Lang Publishing.

- This is a recent book focusing on how early tournaments are described in a variety of medieval French sources; it provides useful guesses about some of the every-day details of tournaments and how they were run. Available through Amazon.com.

### **These excellent books on medieval knights have chapters or discussions of tournaments:**

Barber, Richard, **The Knight and Chivalry**, Boydell Press, (1970) 1995 revised ed., ISBN 0-85115-663-0.  
Excellent discussion of knighthood and its evolution.

Keen, Maurice, **Chivalry**, Yale University Press, 1984, ISBN 0-300-03360-5. Also an excellent discussion of knighthood and its evolution, written more recently than Barber's.