

Building a Period Kit While on a Budget

By Lord Roland Brokentoath

We can all admit right here and now that fighting in the SCA is awesome. There is nothing quite like the flurry of combat and the sound of rattan on iron to awaken the ancestral urges we all feel. Yet there is a barrier to this satisfaction that many find insurmountable: the expense of a passable period kit. Fine period armor is usually fairly expensive to purchase from an established armourer and many lack



the resources and skill to fashion their own. So what is a burgeoning SCA fighter to do?

For a kit that is period, it is best to start from the helm and work your way down. I would start with the helm, specifically a bascinet. There are many good reasons for choosing a bascinet as the first helm of a new fighter.

Foremost, use of the bascinet style of helm was widespread and long lasting. They could be a 14th century German noble or perhaps an early 15th century English soldier. This gives the new

fighter a bit of wiggle room when it comes to choosing his or her persona. Bascinetts are also easily padded in a variety of ways and the roomy insides make chinstraps easy to install. They also retain much of their resale value as bascinetts are always in demand.

From a fighting standpoint, bascinetts also have some fantastic glancing surfaces that could mean the difference between a shot landing "Good" and skipping harmlessly off of your helm. There are many armorers who offer "muntions grade" bascinetts with prices ranging from \$150-\$250. Ironmonger Armoury has an impeccable reputation for quality and sells a basic bascinet for \$135. Web savvy and patient newbies might catch an even better deal on websites like "The Armour Archive" where second hand bascinetts have been known to sell for as little as \$50.

**Note for the newcomer:*

If you are brand new, be sure to talk to your local Knight Marshal or experienced fighters before jumping at what might seem like a great deal. The Armour Archive is also a good source of reviews for armor.

Now on to body armor. There are a fair amount of personas that can be emulated using hidden armor. Many early period kits might consist of plastic pickle barrel armor form fitted and worn beneath period garb. Many fighters wear opulent surcotes and tabards over their hidden armor which lends a period appropriate look. However if

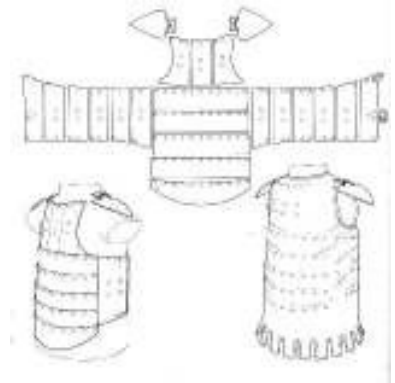
you still want your armor to show, you have a few options. First let's pick up our materials.

The cheapest material available to our burgeoning fighter is the plastic "pickle barrel." Obtaining a supply of plastic barrels is fairly easy. They can be found at many mom and pop style hardware stores. The barrels I have purchased typically run around \$20, but I am confident that a motivated person could find them cheaper. These barrels come in two common styles and a small range of colors. The most common color encountered is a horrendous blue, followed by a much more palatable black, the rarest being white. Sometimes you may even be able to find red and green plastic barrels.

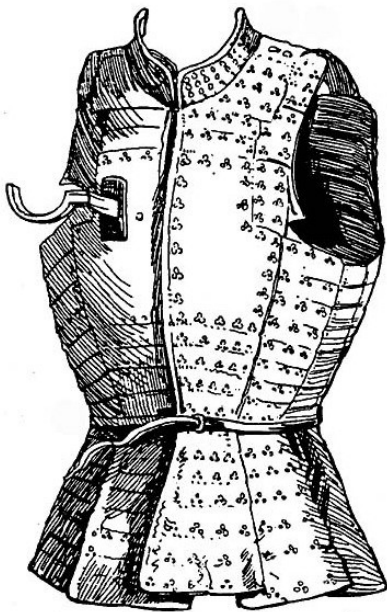
The barrel styles I have encountered include a 50 gallon drum style and a screw lid style. My experience has shown that the plastic found in the screw lid type is thinner than the plastic of the drum type. However, while it might be thinner, the screw lid barrels have a more consistent thickness throughout the entire barrel. The drum type barrels vary in thickness depending upon the distance from the top and bottom of the barrel. Therefore, plastic near the middle is thinner than plastic found near the top or bottom of the barrel. It is a matter of personal preference which barrel style you choose.

SPECIAL NOTE: Be sure to rinse out the inside of your barrel

before making your armor. Chances are these barrels may still contain residues left over by their former contents. Give them a good scrub before you put that next to your skin.



There are many styles of “transitional plate” that can be made using pickle barrel plastic. The “Coat of Plates” in the Wisby style is the perfect first armoring project for the fighter on a budget. This type of armor involves riveting a series of plates to the inside of a leather or cloth (heavy canvas works



best) cover. The plates themselves are rather simply shaped to fit the curve of the wearer’s body. This can be accomplished using a heat gun or by baking the plates in your oven (don’t go over 250°F) for a few minutes. Some fighters find that they are already fairly “barrel shaped” so shaping the plates is that much easier. There are numerous variations of this style of armor to satisfy your persona. Other styles of covered

armor include the “Corrazina” and the “Brigandine.” Patterns and tutorials for making each of these styles can be found on the Armour Archive or from websites like “Talbot’s Fine Accessories.”

Knees and elbows can be a bit tricky. These are a harder to make in plastic and maintain a period look because of the dishing necessary to get the correct shape. Luckily, mild steel knees and elbows are both plentiful and typically cheap. Once you have procured a set of knees/elbows it is a cinch to attach them to a set of shaped plastic vambraces or cuisses. To get a period look, simply cover the plastic in the same style of fabric you used for your torso protection. All you need is a can of 3-M spray adhesive and you are in business. Cut your fabric larger than but in the rough shape of the vambrace or cuisse. Spray both the cloth and the plastic surface and let it sit for 30-60 seconds until tacky. Then simply wrap the cloth around the plastic, smoothing out the surface as you go. Apply a bit of glue to the backside of the plastic and wrap the extra fabric around the cuisse or vambrace. Now you can attach your elbows or knees to a period looking piece and feel great about looking spiff on the cheap. For extra flair you can add two piece rivets or decorative studs in lines to your vambraces/cuisses to give the appearance of splinted leather.

So there you have it. All total this kit should run you less than \$250 from head to toe. Most of the expense will be in the purchase of the helm which is an item you should be saving your pennies for. If you happen to already own a bascinet you can have yourself a more period looking kit for much less. Happy armoring!