



BATTLE YEAR OF THE NORMANS 2027



Battle and District Historical Society October Newsletter

The Society is delighted to announce that Tom Licence, Professor of Medieval History and Literature at the University of East Anglia, has accepted our invitation to become President of the Battle and District Historical Society when David Bates steps down from the role in November 2027

Our Next Meeting

Our October meeting is on Thursday 15th in the Wynne Room at Battle Memorial Hall starting at 7.30pm. It will feature the Commemoration Lecture given by our President, Professor David Bates and entitled “Matilda and England’s Eleventh Century Queens”.

The lecture will focus on the life of Queen Matilda, both as duchess of Normandy and queen of England and as the wife of William the Conqueror. Given that we know so much about Queen Emma and Queen Edith, it will also be comparative and a reflection on queenship and women’s history.

Lecture Recordings

Whenever possible, a recording of our monthly lecture is made available for a week after the meeting on the Society’s private YouTube channel. A link to the recording, once available, is sent to all members. Please treat this link as personal to you and do not share it. These arrangements are part of the Society’s agreement with lecturers and should be respected.

While the Society will provide a recording whenever it can, there are occasions when it is not possible; some lecturers withhold permission for recording and technical issues can sometimes intervene.

Date for Your Diaries

Our November lecture, on Thursday 19th, is the topical “Gunpowder Plot: Fake News?”. It will be given by Meyrick Simmonds and will focus on what really happened in the run-up to the Gunpowder Plot on 5th November 1605 and how it was integral to the subsequent arrest and torture of Nicholas Owen SJ and Father Henry Garnet (then the Jesuit Superior in England).

The meeting will start at 7.30pm and will be, as usual, in the Wynne Room at Battle Memorial Hall.

If you would like to see the full lecture programme for 2026-27, it is available online at <https://battlehistorysociety.com/Programme/>

Website Problem

Since mid-September we have been experiencing a technical issue with the website which has meant that the Contact Form and the Product Order Form are unavailable. We are taking steps to correct this but if you need to contact the Society before the forms are back in action, you can email us using secretary@battlehistorysociety.com.

Millennium - “Millenium”

2027 has been designated the “Year of the Normans” marking the probable 1000th anniversary of William the Conqueror’s birth. Events are taking place across Europe to reflect Norman influence on the continent as well as across sites in the UK.

BDHS is supporting the programme of events here in Battle with six lectures on Norman themes, four of which, including this month’s Commemoration Lecture, fall in the 2026-27 season.

And for the language lovers among our membership, “Millenium” is not a spell-check failure; it’s the French spelling, rather than the English, which has been adopted for all event branding.

To find out more, visit <https://www.millenium.fr/en>

The Normans: conquest, conflict and colonisation

And if your appetite for all things Norman is still not satisfied, it’s not too late to book onto the National Archives’ online events (on 7th, 16th and 23rd October) highlighting a century of change under the Normans.

Tickets can be booked through Eventbrite and are available on a “pay what you can” basis from £0 to £15. To find out more, follow this link:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/cc/the-normans-conquest-conflict-and-colonisation-4861495?_gl=1*7dczc6*_up*MQ..*_ga*OTAYOTg0MDY1LjE3ODc3NTU1NjA.*_ga_TQVES5V6SH*cZ3ODc3NTU1NTkjbzEkZzAkDE3ODc3NTU1NTkkajYwJGwwJGgw

Exhibitions in Hastings

Three events with 1066 connections are happening in Hastings.

Hastings Museum & Art Gallery is the first of six venues across the UK to host “Bayeux Around Britain: casting a masterpiece”, showcasing three rare, hand-painted plaster casts of details from the Bayeux Tapestry. The casts were made in the early 19th century by artist Charles Alfred Stothard, who was commissioned to create the first complete colour drawings of the Tapestry, prints of which are held at Battle Museum. He also took wax moulds directly from its embroidered surface, from which a series of plaster casts were produced. The three casts on show were later acquired by the British Museum and are rarely displayed in public.

The exhibition is at the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery and runs from 10th September to 8th November. For full details see:

<https://www.hmag.org.uk/see-and-do/exhibitions/bayeux-around-britain-casting-a-masterpiece/>

Also, on display until 31st October, the “Hastings Embroidery” can be viewed at Hastings Town Hall. The embroidery, which illustrates 900 years of English history since 1066, was created to mark to the 900th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings and was originally displayed in 1966 on Hastings Pier in the specially-constructed “Triodome”.

This extraordinary 243-foot embroidery depicts monarchs, explorers, reformers and innovators, celebrating the enduring craftsmanship of stitched storytelling and its power to preserve cultural memory. It was embroidered by the Royal School of Needlework and stands as a breathtaking feat of craftsmanship.

For details see:

<https://www.visithastings.co.uk/event/the-hastings-embroidery/288380101/>

And finally, the Hastings Local History Group are holding an event at St Clements Church on Monday 12th October from 2pm to 6pm. Among other presentations and exhibits, the event will feature the launch of a new book by David EP Dennis, a Sussex writer on all things weird and wonderful, entitled *A History of Rameslie and the Battle of Hastings*. “Rameslie” was an extensive French estate belonging to the Norman Abbey of Fécamp and stretching from Hastings to Rye and including Winchelsea. The book explores what difference it made to the outcome of 1066 to have a large French estate, owned by the Abbey of Fecamp, in Hastings and its outskirts.

Admission is free; donations will be welcome.

Further details can be found at: <https://battlehistorysociety.com/documents/HLHG.pdf>

Westminster Abbey Visit – Are You Interested?

Information about this visit has been circulated to all members.

Battle Museum

Battle Museum of Local History is open until the end of October for the 2026 season. The special exhibition this year focuses on gunpowder plot celebrations in the town and the role of the Battel Bonfire Boyes.

History in the News – a digest of recent reporting

If any member spots an interesting history article, just email its details, or a scan of it, to webadmin@battlehistorysociety.com and we'll feature an edited version of it in the next Newsletter.

Archaeologists find the grounds where Alexander became great: A 30-acre ruin in Greece may hide the classroom where Aristotle taught Alexander the Great to rule.

A new excavation near Naousa in northern Greece may have uncovered where some of the events that shaped the life of Alexander the Great took place. Since 2024, parts of a palaestra, a stadium, covered walkways, teaching rooms and a water system have been uncovered in a stretch of ancient Mieza identified as the Royal Gymnasium where Alexander studied alongside fellow future kings Ptolemy and Cassander. During the past year, excavation focused on the Didaskaleion, the “teaching building”, and exposed stone benches, commonly used by audiences during lectures.

Also discovered were two “andrones” which were primarily used for drinking parties and social gatherings. As well as traces of ten dining couches, each room revealed well-preserved mosaic floors that the archaeological team found bore a strong resemblance in quality and construction to the palace of Aigai. Built during the reign of Alexander's father, Philip II, the palace was the centre of Macedonian royal life. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is the largest structure from classical Greece that can still be visited.

<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/archaeology/a73854808/alexander-the-great-gymnasium-student/>

Who wrote Elizabeth I's most scathing letters?: An analysis of more than 500 missives has found that Elizabeth's advisers crafted and even intensified the expression of emotion in her messages to such figures as Mary, Queen of Scots, and James VI of Scotland. Many anecdotes of Elizabeth's short temper survive, and there is an inherited idea from the early modern period that these outbursts were evidence of female irrationality. That the expression of anger in some of Elizabeth's letters was crafted by her male secretaries reveals that, far from being emotional or irrational, the queen strategically deployed emotion to achieve particular political goals.

On February 10, 1586, Elizabeth I wrote one of her most famous letters: a furious rebuke to her favourite, Robert Dudley, First Earl of Leicester. The Tudor queen sharply reprimanded Leicester for disobeying her. “How contemptuously we conceive ourself to have been used by you,” Elizabeth raged. She demanded that Leicester obey her directions and issued a stark warning: “Fail you not, as you will answer the contrary at your uttermost peril.”

The queen’s fury jumps off the page. Yet the only surviving copy of this letter is written in the hand of a secretary: Francis Mylles, servant to Elizabeth’s principal secretary, Francis Walsingham begging the question whether Mylles and Walsingham were involved in writing this apparently personal royal communication. Without the original copy of this letter, it is uncertain but, through careful analysis of more than 500 of Elizabeth’s other letters, Clodagh Murphy, a researcher at Leiden University, has found that the expression of emotion in her correspondence was often carefully constructed by her secretaries.

One example is a letter from Elizabeth to George Talbot, Sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, written in May 1584. At the time, Shrewsbury was the custodian of Mary, Queen of Scots; Elizabeth would have expected Shrewsbury to share the missive with his royal prisoner. In the letter, Elizabeth strongly rebukes Mary. She writes that Mary “shall never live to see those days that the crown of England shall depend upon the crown of Scotland.” She also criticizes Mary’s son, James VI of Scotland, claiming that he was “ill counselled when at the first entry into his government the same was seasoned with blood” (a reference to the 1581 execution of his regent James Douglas, Fourth Earl of Morton).

Studying a draft of this letter, however, revealed that it was substantially edited by Walsingham, whose handwritten revisions remain on the manuscript and that Walsingham’s edits intensify, rather than temper, Elizabeth’s criticisms of Mary and James. The vocabulary of these revisions bears significant overlap with the phrasing of the secretary’s own writings. It is Walsingham’s voice, not Elizabeth’s, that speaks in this letter—and possibly his emotion that spills out of it.

Again, in an October 1584 letter written to another one of Mary’s custodians, Ralph Sadler—and also intended for the Scottish queen’s eyes—Elizabeth again criticizes her cousin but is now more conciliatory. She describes the “liking we had for a time” of Mary’s friendship and raises the potential for “a thorough reconciliation.” Historians have generally assumed that Elizabeth composed this letter; however, the discovery of a hitherto unnoticed draft littered with Walsingham’s scribbled emendations revealed that these expressions of goodwill were his additions.

Murphy argues that Walsingham’s alterations to both letters were intended to manipulate Mary’s impression of her relationship with Elizabeth and move her to act in English interests. By crafting an “angry” Elizabeth in the letter to Shrewsbury, Walsingham hoped to show Mary that refusing to cooperate with the English government would get her nowhere. By constructing a “nostalgic” Elizabeth in the letter to Sadler, he sought to convince Mary that the English queen’s favour could be regained in the hope of dissuading the former from plotting against the latter.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-wrote-elizabeth-is-most-scathing-letters-new-research-suggests-the-tudor-queens-male-secretaries-revised-her-correspondence-to-emphasize-her-temper-180989565/>

Library's first edition reveals Austen's early fans: A first edition of Jane Austen's debut novel has shed light on the author's connection with one of Britain's historic country houses. The 1811 first edition of *Sense and Sensibility* is on the shelves at Longleat House in Wiltshire, with its title page still carrying the anonymous attribution "By A Lady". It is thought to have been acquired by the 2nd Marquess of Bath around the time of its publication.

Bound in green and brown leather with a gold title, the relatively unassuming volume is among thousands of books in the seven historic libraries at Longleat House. It is presumed Jane Austen signed her first novel "By a Lady" to maintain her anonymity. Writing novels for money or public fame was generally considered unfeminine and improper for women of the gentry class during the 18th and 19th centuries and Austen's identity as the author only became widely known after her death in 1817, when her brother Henry identified his sister in a biographical notice.

The edition is evidence that during her lifetime, Austen's books were being read and collected by the elite social class - the very social circle she depicted in her novels. Dr James Ford, curator of Longleat House, said the estate had "a wonderful group of early Jane Austen editions", including *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

"An invoice we discovered last year records the 2nd Marquess purchasing Mansfield Park shortly after it was published in May 1814," Ford said, "He was also one of the first owners of Longleat to open his park gates and hall door to early tourists, rather like the country house visit Austen evokes when Elizabeth Bennet arrives at Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c52e0le8gyneo>

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