BATTLE YEAR OF THE NORMANS 2027

MILLENIUM 2027, EUROPEAN YEAR OF THE NORMANS 1027-2027

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Battle and District Historical Society

November Newsletter

Our Next Meeting and AGM

Our November lecture, on Thursday 19th, will be 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 lecture will start at 7.30pm and will be, as usual, in the Wynne Room at Battle Memorial Hall.

This will be preceded by the Society's AGM, starting at 7pm. All members are invited to attend. We would ask, however, that if you are joining only for the lecture, please be aware of the AGM in progress and come into the Wynne Room quietly to avoid disturbing the meeting.

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.

Dates for Your Diaries

The Christmas meeting of the Society will be on Thursday 17th December starting at 7.30pm in the Wynne Room at Battle Memorial Hall. Like last year, the meeting will be a social event with a chance to meet other members and chat over refreshments.

Our next lecture will be on Thursday 21st January when Tom McAuliffe, a postdoctoral member of the History Faculty at the University of Oxford, will be speaking on "The Norman Conquest's Importance to English Law".

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

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 and BDHS is supporting the programme here in Battle with six lectures on Norman themes.

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

"Battle Abbey and the Websters"

Roy Pryce's book "Battle Abbey and the Websters" is no longer available in print but the Society has obtained permission to make it available as a digital ebook in PDF format. The book tells "the dramatic story of the Websters who owned Battle Abbey ... between 1721 and 1976. Driving ambition and great wealth were followed by profligacy on an heroic scale, chronic debt, sexual adventures, importunate mistresses, illegitimate children, disease, lunacy, suicides and early deaths".

The ebook can be ordered online for a total cost of £10 from the Society's webstore at:

https://battlehistorysociety.com/product-orders/

and members' discount will be applied if you enter **Less25** as the coupon code. Once ordered, the PDF will be sent to your email address.

"Mad Jack : The Many Lives of John Fuller, Squire of Brightling"

The Society has been given copies of Annette Lloyd Thomas's book on "Mad Jack Fuller" to sell in aid of BDHS funds. The book, which costs £20, can only be bought at Society meetings but if you would like to reserve a copy you can do so by emailing:

sales@battlehistorysociety.com

The book will then be available for collection at the next meeting.

If you want details about the book, you can find them on the publisher's website at:

https://www.otherwise-publishing.co.uk/work/mad-jack

“A Collaborative Tapestry in Honour of Shirley Ann Brown”

This is another recently-published book that may be of interest to BDHS members. It features 16 essays in honour of a distinguished Bayeux Tapestry scholar which consider the contexts of the Tapestry’s creation and preservation; new studies of its fabric, also its images; plus accounts of new creative and commemorative works inspired by it. The book is co-edited by our Vice-President, Sylvette Lemagnen, and contains among its essays one by her and another by our President, David Bates.

Details can be found on its publisher’s website at:

https://www.brepols.net/products/978-2-503-60966-9

Free immersive Bayeux Tapestry experience coming to East Sussex

People across East Sussex will have the chance to explore the story of the Bayeux Tapestry through a new free immersive experience coming to East Sussex College this November.

The free experience will give people the chance to explore one of history’s most famous stories without travelling out of the county. Community sessions will be planned throughout the rest of the year and into 2027, with a special opening view on Thursday 19th November, starting at 4pm, at the college’s campuses in Eastbourne, Lewes and the Station Plaza in Hastings.

Details are available at:

https://www.escg.ac.uk/blog/free-immersive-bayeux-tapestry-experience-coming-to-east-sussex/

Battle Museum

Battle Museum of Local History closed for the 2026 season at the end of October and will re-open in April 2027.

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.

Roman fort in Wales could prove myth of emperor’s camp is real: Magnus Maximus, the Roman emperor who ruled Britain in the fourth century, led his troops against the Picts and Scots but a theory that he also established a military camp near Frenni Fawr hill in Wales has so far been based on folklore. Now fourth-century coins, among other finds at a newly-identified Roman fort in Pembrokeshire, suggest the medieval tale was rooted in reality.

The fort was discovered by Dr Mark Merrony, a leading Roman specialist at the University of Oxford. He heads an excavation that is bringing to life a story about Magnus Maximus,

as told in the Mabinogion, a collection of medieval epic tales of myth, magic and miracles.

In *The Dream of Macsen Wledig* medieval storytellers used the emperor's name in Welsh in recounting his rise to power. They described how on his military manoeuvres, he pitched his camp at Frenni Fawr, the 1,300ft easternmost peak of the Preseli Hills. There had been no archaeological evidence for a Roman marching camp or fort on the summit of Frenni Fawr or below it until now. Merrony discovered it about 2 miles south-west of the summit in 2024. Satellite imagery had shown a convincing outline in an overgrown field and, shortly after visiting it, his eye was caught by a Roman tile, which turned out to be the first of many. With financial support from Oxford University and crowdfunding, one of several planned excavations has just finished, confirming his theory of the site and its significance.

Merrony expressed excitement that this landscape held the only Roman military site close to where the Mabinogion places the emperor. "If Magnus Maximus was there, there must have been an army there," he said.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/oct/12/mythical-roman-fort-frenni-fawr-wales-emperor

Who were the 'peasants' of the Peasants' Revolt?: With both the cinema release of *The Uprising* and the publication of A.K.Blakemore's *Doom Painting* last month, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 is making a mark in popular culture. Meanwhile, academics from the Universities of Reading, Glasgow and Southampton have compiled a database from medieval records of many of the "peasants" involved.

The rising was the culmination of a wide range of popular grievances against the government of the young King Richard II and his uncle John of Gaunt. The trigger was the levy of a third poll tax in four years to fund the Hundred Years War. To understand the depth of the rebellion and its impact on society today, the team created *People of 1381*, a database of events, places and people comprising around 28,000 records. It challenges the established narrative that the revolt was focused on a handful of counties in England and restricted to certain levels of society.

The medieval records that make up the database uncover the participation of social groups whose role in the revolt has been underexplored, including household servants, soldiers and women; and the legal records generated by the prosecution of the rebels reveal that they were not just peasants but drawn from every level of medieval society beneath the aristocracy. They show how widespread the depth of feeling was against the government. The revolt wasn't just a march on London – it involved people in over half the counties of England. In the west, there were riots in Bridgwater and Gloucester, while the disturbances spread as far north as Yorkshire and Chester.

Unlike contemporary chronicles, the legal records show how women intervened at key moments in the revolt, most dramatically when Katherine Gamen was accused of pushing a boat out across the River Little Ouse in Suffolk. The chief justice could not escape and was killed.

People of 1381 is a versatile tool which enables the development of many new perspectives on the revolt. However, the ability of the database to reconstruct the human stories connected with the revolt, restoring humanity to the people caught up in the rising who have otherwise only been described in the most generic terms, is its most beguiling feature.

https://theconversation.com/who-were-the-peasants-of-the-1381-peasants-revolt-new-database-has-answers-278011

Could Somerset pub be the oldest in England?: Being England's oldest pub is a title claimed by a number of establishments across the country. Pubs in Nottingham, St Albans and Lincolnshire have all, in the past, claimed to be that very establishment - but one pub in Somerset may have a stronger claim than its rivals. The George Inn, in Norton St Philip, south of Bath, is the focus of that elusive claim to being the country's oldest pub - thanks to some investigative work by Historic England.

The pub itself is Grade I listed and was constructed as a store for wool for the nearby Hinton Charterhouse. It would also welcome travellers who attended the annual wool fairs which were held from the 13th Century until Victorian times.

Samuel Pepys stopped there in 1668, describing it as "a very old house" and it also served as the headquarters for the Duke of Monmouth during the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. Its history then gets a little more grizzly because after the Duke's defeat, the pub became a court room for 'hanging judge' George Jeffreys who infamously condemned local rebels during the Bloody Assizes.

Buildings archaeologist Dr James Wright said science "pinpoints the archaeological development of the George Inn" to about 1430. None of the other pubs possessed the archaeological evidence, archival references or scientific data to back up their claims. He said: "It's all about carefully placing all of the evidence together and working out in what order the real claimants go - and The George came out with the crown."

However, we may never truly know where the oldest boozers are - a sentiment reinforced by Guinness World Records which has "rested" the accolade for the oldest pub since 2000, "when it became clear that it was not possible to verify it in full". A spokeswoman for Guinness World Records said it was "never able to state definitively which was the oldest pub in the country, since the age and historical usage of buildings is, in many cases, uncertain".

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cm5yn0rv6k90o

Kevin Doherty

webadmin@battlehistorysociety.com