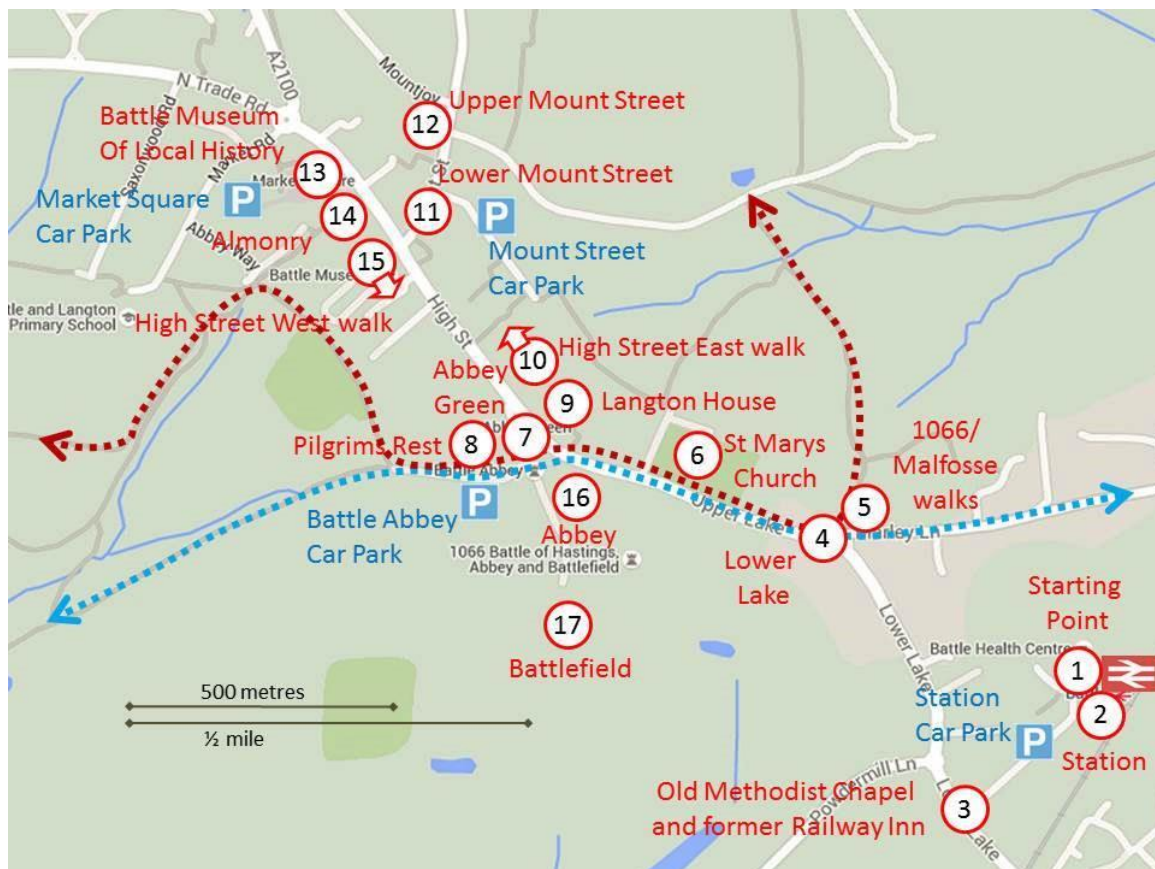


# BATTLE HISTORIC WALK



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Google map with overlays by BDHS

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## INTRODUCTION

Battle is one of 50 *“undiscovered and overlooked” destinations in Europe* according to Lonely Planet.

It all began with the Battle of Hastings. There's no doubting the importance of the battle. It was probably the most significant battle in English history, and marked the last successful invasion of the country. Battle Abbey was built on the site of the battle, and the town grew up around it.

But there's a lot more to the town than that memory.

The whole centre of the town is a conservation area, with some wonderful buildings. The High Street runs along a ridge, so the houses and the yards beside them generally lead to open countryside

Here we tell you about some of them, and some other things. It can take you on a walk around the town, and walks outside it too.

Battle seems to have more tea/coffee shops than anywhere else, and some excellent places to eat and drink.

So walk about and enjoy it. You can pick and choose where to go.

## THE STATION



Source : Wikipaedia Ben Brooksbank CC BY-SA 2.0. Cropped/re-coloured

Battle railway station deserves a closer look. It should remind you of an abbey, for that was architect William Tress's intention, as he used a domestic Gothic style in its design....and in fact this station is a Grade II listed building and thought to be one of the best small stations in England.

The old South Eastern Railway that existed from 1836 until 1921 extended a line south from Tonbridge after 1845 and this reached Battle and Hastings in early 1852, with Battle station opening on New Year's Day 1852.

The line through Battle was not electrified until 1986 and to accommodate new 8 carriage trains the platforms were extended.

The station has a fine reproduction of the Bayeux tapestry on the battle of Hastings (the original dates from the 1070s): go and see it!

## **THE SENLAC INN AND THE OLD METHODIST CHAPEL**



Image from BDHS Archive © BDHS

The Senlac Inn was formerly 'The Railway Hotel', opened after the railway came to Battle, certainly by 1861. Even today the 'Senlac Inn' has some interesting old railway-inspired toilets! Built on the site of what was for a while the old workhouse it was a short distance from the smelly old tannery on Battle Hill, now demolished.

Across the road the Grade II listed Methodist Chapel on Lower Lake opened in 1826 and extended to the rear in 1886/7. It was sold in 2011 and converted to two dwellings. A new Methodist Church opened in 2014 at Harrier Lane and has some interesting modern architectural features.

In 2011-14, in an unusual arrangement, the Methodists met in the back room of the Senlac Inn.

## UPPER LAKE



Image: Neil Clephane-Cameron ©BDHS

Stand at the junction with Marley Lane and look south down Lower Lake.

When the Abbey was built the original trackway from Hastings was diverted to skirt around it and became what we know today as Upper Lake and Lower Lake: 'Lake' deriving from the Saxon name of the area, 'Santlache', meaning sandy stream.

In 1066 the English army was arrayed from the end of the ridge in Marley Lane on your left (where the 'Battle of Hastings' axe was found, now in the Museum), along the top of the ridge to the right, through The Chequers Inn into what is now private gardens and the Abbey grounds behind the high wall on the right. The Norman army similarly extended east-west from near what is now the railway station.

A census made when the town was being first laid out in the twelfth-century tells us the names of the residents and how much rent they paid to the Abbot. Although the buildings you see are much later some still retain their original plot sizes. The proportion of Anglo-Norman names of the residents indicates that this was then the highest status area of the town.

Next to The Chequers Inn is Pyke House (originally 3 cottages). The terrace to which it belongs was built in the fifteenth-century. Although the houses were re-faced number 16 still retains evidence of the jettied upper storey which would have been a feature of the whole terrace. Originally known as 'Newrents' or 'Quarryrents' it is believed to have been built on the site of an old quarry.

On the near side, to your right, was originally a terrace of five cottages and beyond them Abbot's Cottage was originally a single house (late fourteenth-century) which was divided to accommodate the Abbot and Prior at The Dissolution: see the notice on it.

Some of the properties in Upper Lake were shops, as can be seen from the larger than normal windows.

## THE 1066 AND MALFOSSE WALKS

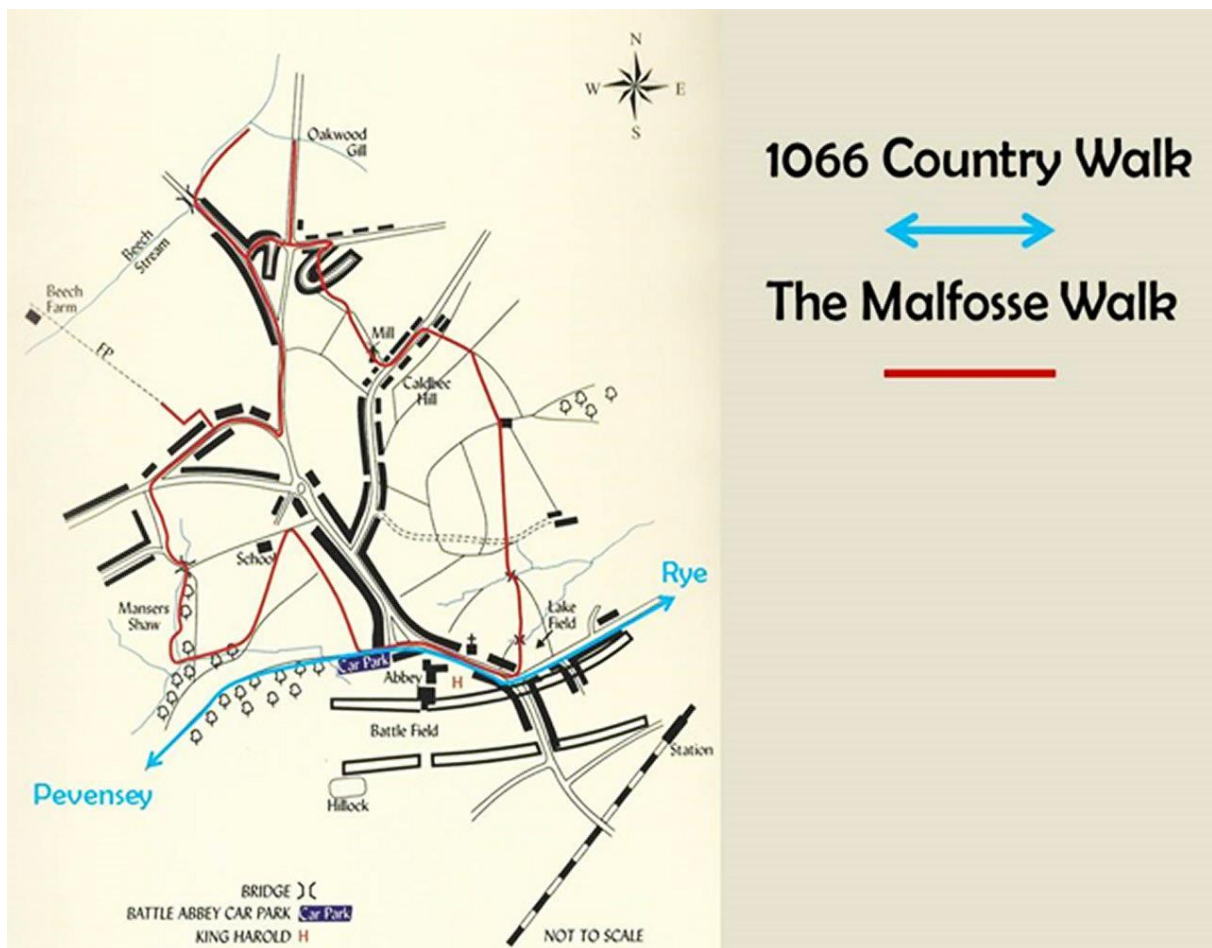


Image ©BDHS

### The 1066 Country Walk

This runs from Pevensey to Rye, past Battle Abbey gatehouse. From here you can walk east or west.

The eastern route takes you down Upper Lake, then down Marley Lane, through Battle Great Wood and on to Rye. At Rye the Saxon Shore Way, from and to Hastings and eastwards around the Kent coast, the High Weald Landscape Trail and the Sussex Border Path may be joined.

The western route takes you down the road past the Abbey car park, then out into open fields which were once the Abbey's Great Park. By carrying straight on you will eventually reach Pevensey. A link from Pevensey leads to the South Downs Way and the Wealdway.

The route is waymarked with red & white discs with an arrow logo.

### **The Malfosse Walk**

The Malfosse or 'Evil ditch' incident occurred towards the end of the Battle of Hastings. The Normans were chasing fleeing English and fell into a huge ditch or down a very steep slope with loss of life of both soldiers and horses. Its location has been debated for many years.

This local circular walk will take you around the possible sites so that you may make your own mind up! An explanatory booklet and guide may be obtained from the Battle Museum of Local History

## **ST MARY'S CHURCH**



Image Keith Foord ©BDHS

When the Abbey was first built the townspeople worshipped there, that is until they interfered too much with monastic functioning: they had to have a church of their own. Monks built its oldest part in 1102 to 1107, and its first lay priest was appointed about 1115. The nave was added early in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the chancel a little later. The south aisle was remodelled in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the north aisle in the 15<sup>th</sup>, when the present tower and the Lady and St. Catherine's chapels were added.

Victorian architect William Butterfield vigorously restored the church in 1867-69. Although he kept the main chestnut timbers of the roof, which are from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he replaced the large wooden tie beams with iron rods. During enlargement of the arch between the nave and chancel a wall painting was lost.

Fortunately much of great interest remains. St. Mary's still has many of the extensive 13th century wall paintings and fine monuments and brasses (some dating from 1426), interesting stained glass including the modern window commemorating the battle, and an unusually large 12<sup>th</sup> century Sussex marble font which has a newer 15<sup>th</sup> century octagonal cover. Sir Anthony Browne received the Abbey from Henry VIII at the dissolution of the monasteries and his alabaster tomb, shared with his first wife Alys, can be found in the Lady Chapel.

The church had the distinction of being a 'Royal Peculiar', a remnant of its association with the Royal abbey of William the Conqueror, from the time of its founding until 1846. The church still has a 'Dean' rather than a vicar in memory of that.

Behind the church is the fine Elizabethan Deanery. Now private, it cannot be visited.

## **THE ABBEY GREEN**

Stand with your back to the Abbey gate and you will see the Abbey Green in front of you. It has been there since the Abbey was built and from the sixteenth century was the market, which later moved to the north end of the town. A memory of that time is the circular paved area at the south end, which is where any bull for sale was kept within railings.

The Green was grassed until about a hundred years ago, then paved. It is maintained by the Town Council with trees and benches.

It was always the site of the annual Guy Fawkes celebration of the Battel Bonfire Boyes, though fires became illegal during the two world wars, and they have returned in recent years rather than use the battlefield which suffered badly from the crowds attending. The annual Marbles Tournament, Scarecrow Festival and Mediaeval Fair and other activities take place here. At other times it is simple and open space for people to walk around on or sit on the benches.

Much care has been taken to keep the buildings around the Green in good order, from the Abbey to the Pilgrim's Rest and on the other side Langton House.



Image from BDHS Archive © BDHS

## THE PILGRIMS REST



Image from BDHS Archive © BDHS



Abbot Odo built a house for pilgrims and other travellers in 1175-1200, just outside the Abbey gate. It stood behind a courtyard, itself behind some dwellings with a gateway onto Abbey Green. These were once lived in by Brihtwin the town Beadle and Reinbald de Beche, the abbot's lawyer.

The date of removal of the buildings in front of the Pilgrims Rest is unknown, but the nearest buildings (2 & 3 High Street) are from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and these will have replaced much earlier houses. Excavations of the rear garden area (which has never been built over) have confirmed continuous occupation from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The present Pilgrims Rest replaced the earlier hostel in 1420. It is a Grade II\* listed example of a timber framed Wealden house, with a restored open hall, which has a moulded crown post roof. The centre of the building is recessed and the wings have overhanging first floors. The pointed doorway has an original iron studded door. Internally various ancient detailing can be seen including Tudor painted patterns on window lintels and small circles carved into the oak.

It has been suggested that there may be a tunnel connecting Pilgrims Rest to the Abbey gatehouse. If so this may form part of a passage extending below the houses along the west side of the High Street.

## LANGTON HOUSE



Image Keith Foord ©BDHS

This attractive house stands where the High Street meets the Abbey Green.

The house dates from about 1570, though it has been much changed. Then it was only of two storeys and between it and what is now the Abbey Hotel was Carrier's Yard. In the 18th century the top storey was added and a new front built. In the mid-twentieth century it was extended over Carrier's Yard and the present bow windows were fitted.

Langton House had been home to several of the wealthier families of Battle, including doctors, but in 1958 a trust was created for it and in 1960, after extensive internal works, it became the Battle Memorial Halls. As such it is host to public meetings, exhibitions, markets, films and other community activities. The entrance contains memorials to the dead of the two world wars: but look at the ceiling, which is much older.

The name Langton House remains a mystery. It was home to Elizabeth Langton, whose legacy founded a school, but it may have borne that name long before her time. For much of the eighteenth century it was home to the parish workhouse, possibly in Carrier's Yard.

## THE HIGH STREET EAST WALK, LOOKING WEST



Images BDHS Archive and Keith Foord ©BDHS

Start on Abbey Green and walk on the right side of the street, past the pedestrian crossing.

At once you will see the stationers beside you, with its plaque to Battle's only civilian casualties of the Second World War. Now look at the range of buildings on the other side.

With only one exception all of these are old, sitting on plots of land originally laid out by the monks. Almost all of them have been refaced at some point with bricks and tiles, but the roofs and chimneys often tell an older story.

Notice among others Steamer Trading (17th century), and then, just after the bank, the former Priory coaching inn. Then the George Hotel (Georgian front), the narrow and tall half-timbered building where an alley once ran, the half-timbered former old pharmacy building and the Bull Inn, built of stone from the Abbey.

## LOWER MOUNT STREET



Images Keith Foord ©BDHS

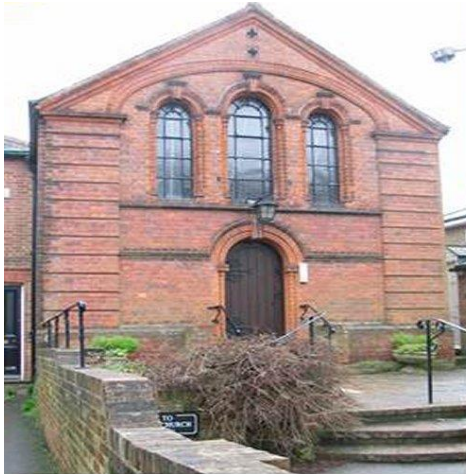
As you turn into Mount Street from High Street you will note a building with three round arches and a rectangular gable. This was once a blacksmiths' forge. The other

buildings on that side (the north) of the street are nearly all from the 17th century but with more modern frontages.

Those on the south side of the street may have been built even earlier and there are notable chimneys dating from the 16th century.

These buildings all stand over what was the market place until about 1560, after which the market moved to Abbey Green.

## UPPER MOUNT STREET



Images Neil Clephane-Cameron and Keith Foord ©BDHS

The Baptist and Catholic churches are next door to each other. This situation has an intriguing history.

A group of Calvinists formed in 1776 and in 1782 bought an 'old Presbyterian building' and built a larger chapel by 1790. In 1793 after a schism they became Universalists, then Unitarians, but some remained Baptists. The Unitarian church survived to 1898; their building was demolished in 1957.

The Baptists built a wooden church nearby in 1798 and Richard Sinnock built the house (now called 'The Hollies') in 1799. He later gave the land to the Baptists on

which to build the galleried Zion Chapel which opened in 1821. With modern extensions this now extends over the previous Unitarian site. The Unitarian graveyard was cleared and the remains reinterred at Battle cemetery in 1989.

Sinnock's house and back garden were bought by the earl of Ashburnham in 1882. Ashburnham was Catholic and he funded the Catholic Church which opened in 1888 in the back garden of 'The Hollies' which is now the Catholic Presbytery.

Both churches remain very active and work in ecumenical harmony with the Anglican and Methodist churches of Battle.

Just a little further up the street, on the right, is Lewins Croft (no access), an extraordinary collection of half-timbered houses forming a single structure.

## BATTLE MUSEUM OF LOCAL HISTORY



Image from BDHS Archive © BDHS

The Museum covers 125 million years of history for you to enjoy! Admission is free.

You can see the 'Battle of Hasting's Axe', thought to be the only weapon found from the battle, alongside a replica and videos showing how it was made and used. Experts at the Wallace Collection in London have identified it as a military axe from around 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century, typical of Danish and Saxon use at the time. Hands on

History, who made a full scale replica for the Museum, have confirmed that there is no doubt it was a battle axe. So circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that it is overwhelmingly likely that the axe was used at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the only weapon of some 14,000 to survive.

There are also a diorama of the Battle, a complete print of the Bayeux Tapestry produced by Charles Stothard in 1818 and several unique copies of scenes from the Tapestry embroidered by locals.

But it is not just about 1066. The Museum also houses remains of dinosaurs, finds from local Roman Baths, the effigy of Guy Fawkes (oldest in existence) and a display about Battle in the wars.

The collection began following the collection of local artefacts in 1951-53 to celebrate the Festival of Britain and then Queen's coronation. The Museum moved to its current location in the Almonry Gardens in 2003 - the building used to be a garage and before that an abattoir and was converted through the generosity of the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Museum was awarded full MLA (Museum and Libraries) Accreditation in 2006 and again awarded full accreditation by the Arts Council in 2014.

## **THE ALMONRY**



Image from BDHS Archive © BDHS

A house has been on this site since 1090 and was mentioned in the Battle Abbey Chronicle in 1170.

It was never actually the site of the Almonry but the land was put aside for the use of the Almoner of the Abbey and for many years it would have been the farmhouse for Almonry Farm.

The current building probably dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and would originally have contained an open hall but the building was extended in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was converted into a courtyard townhouse typical of that period. Once known as 'Knight's' after one of the important Battle families who used to lease it, the house was sold in the 1980s to Battle Town Council who use it for Council offices and meetings.

Come and explore the award-winning gardens surrounding the house – they are now maintained by 'Beautiful Battle', 70 or so volunteers who not only look after these gardens but also many of the sites around the town. Don't miss the Tudor courtyard, which you can reach through the back garden.

## THE HIGH STREET WEST WALK, LOOKING EAST



Images Keith Foord ©BDHS

Start at the top end, where the new buildings begin.

On your right is the front Almonry garden, and set back from it the Museum. Carry on past the old house known as the Gildhall and after the Mount Street junction look across the street.

Again these are generally all old buildings refronted, though not as impressive as those on the eastern side.

One building immediately stands out here: very Victorian and slightly odd. This is the former Congregational Chapel. This dates from about 1881 and was founded by dissident Baptists. It has not been a chapel since about 1950 and is now, ironically, a betting shop.

Carry on looking across the street to the wrought-iron Newbery Arch across a yard. This is the site of the once very successful family business of Newbery's, jam-makers that shut in the 1980s. The whole area behind has been redeveloped.

By now you are almost at Langton House on your left, and you will be almost on the Abbey Green.

## **BATTLE ABBEY**



Image from Google Earth



Battle Abbey is the lasting memorial to the Battle of Hastings fought in 1066 between Normans led by William and English led by Harold. The Abbey gatehouse dominates Battle, particularly when viewed from the High Street.

Building did not start until 1070 and then in the wrong place because, it is thought, that the designated site had no water. William I again ordered the monks to build it on the site of Harold's death, so they came back to where it is now. By 1076 an abbot was blessed at its altar, and it was fully dedicated in 1095 in the presence of king William Rufus, a son of William.

After the building of the abbey church the rest of the abbey was built in phases, adding the chapter house, dormitories and undercrofts, latrines and a fine cloister.

A great re-building process started in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This included improving the Abbot's lodging, a greatly extended church and a separate bell tower which may have contained four bells called Mary, Jesus, Gabriel and le Whyppe. In about 1338 castellated walls were built at a time of fear of French invasions, and the gatehouse was enlarged.

After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538 the great church, once intended to be as large as Canterbury Cathedral, was razed to the ground and the only evidence of its size comes from the remains of the crypt chapels.

The stone from the church was used to make a manor house, to flatten the area in front of the house and to enlarge the gatehouse further by building a court house on its eastern side.

Over the years many changes were made by the owners and in 1976 they sold the Abbey. With considerable American financial assistance it was bought for the public. It is now looked after by English Heritage.

Battle Abbey School has occupied the old manor house since 1922, and there was an extensive fire there in 1931, followed by renovation. The Canadian Army was billeted at the abbey in WW2 and stored explosives in the gatehouse. These were nearly blown up by a bomb, which bounced on Abbey Green and hit the right side of the archway without exploding!

## **THE BATTLEFIELD**

The Battle of Hastings took place over an area that ran from the top of Marley Lane (English) and the railway station (Normans) in the east to the hillock in the grounds of Battle Abbey. The area owned by English Heritage covers only that part of the battlefield within the Abbey grounds. A full explanation is available, in film, audio and printed versions, within the Abbey.

The English army stood at the top of the ridge and the Norman army faced it from the valley, but the battlefield looks very different from how it did on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1066. Apart from the presence of the Abbey the ridge was levelled to accommodate

the new structures, so the old profile of the slope in front of Harold's command post is lost. The valley bottom where the Norman army deployed is now much drained, the monks having created fish ponds, and later a large lake was dug to power the gunpowder mills.



Image from Google Earth

Harold deployed his army on foot and as a single dense body with the shields of the front rank overlapping in the traditional Anglo-Nordic manner. He set up his standard at the highest point of the hill. William deployed with archers front, then infantry, then mounted knights.

The English line stood firm against attacks. The Norman army was repulsed three times. William was enraged and despairingly laid into his own men with his lance and fist to stop the rout. The English killed many Normans during these retreats and even when the Normans counter-attacked a group of them made a bloody stand on the hillock above the marshy ground of the valley.

William personally led some of the attacks. Toward dusk the remnants of the English army now appeared routed and many more English were slain as they ran. Yet the English maintained some cohesion. During the final pursuit William saw in the fading light a body of English which he took to be reinforcements, and led the onslaught against the last resistance.

The battle lasted all day and there were heavy casualties on both sides. William may have been unhorsed as many as three times; Harold was killed as were two of his brothers, together with most of the English leaders. For an army which we are told spent the night before in drunken singing the English had shown none of the symptoms of sleep deprivation and hangover which one might expect. It was a close-run thing.

**Compiled by the following members of the Research Group of Battle Historical Society**

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