

Battle Museum explains the 1066 Roundabout sculpture

One of Battle's heritage landmarks is the sculpture – funded by public donation - on the roundabout a few yards north of the Museum.



The sculpture is by **Guy Portelli** RBA, FRBS, one of the UK's most famous contemporary sculptors. Born in 1957 and long associated with Tonbridge, he was a student at Medway College of Art 1974-78 and already had his own company designing theatre sets, before he graduated. He won Dragon's Den in 2008, convincing the panel that modern art is a viable and realistic investment.

Guy works closely with the local community when creating public sculptures like this one, and so it is not surprising that in 2016 he was often seen in front of the Museum, encouraging the public to "have a go":



Two elements of particular interest emerged in the public's work on the sculpture. One concerns the Norman **Taillefer**, who is depicted on horseback in the sculpture. His courage and daring are mentioned in several of the descriptions of the Norman invasion written in the decades after the battle, but we should be a little cautious because he is not mentioned by name in the Bayeux Tapestry. Taillefer was a *ioglere* or juggler/minstrel in William's Court but we should assume he had high status as he appears to have had his own horse. At the start of the battle or shortly afterwards William, perhaps to bolster his own side's morale,

grants Taillefer's request to have the honour of charging into the Saxons and striking the first blow. Trading certain death for everlasting honour, Taillefer throws his sword into the air, catches it, and then rides at the Saxons, beheading an advancing soldier before being engulfed in the Saxon shield wall. He is depicted as the lone figure at the left end of the diorama of the Battle of Hastings in the Lower Gallery of the Museum.

In thinking about the Battle of Hastings, and the consequences of warfare ever since, members of the public working on the sculpture in 2016, returned often to the **theme of flowers**, symbolising reconciliation and reminding us of what England would have looked like in the eleventh century. This is why, with artistic licence, there are flowers on the shields: decorations on shields were not adopted in battle for centuries after 1066. A time traveller transported back to England of the eleventh century would be surprised at the profusion and many varieties of flowers and trees in the landscape. Wild herbs for treating all kinds of illness could be picked – for example eyebright for optical issues, comfrey for mending bones, camomile for the digestive system and marshmallow for gout.



Dyes were also obtained from plants in the wild. Several points would strike you about cultivated areas around villages. There would be long and narrow strips of land tightly grouped together behind the houses – Battle High Street retains this early medieval layout to this day. You would notice many orchards, with apples and pears for cider and perry. Hops would be grown but there were also many vineyards. Grapes were grown as far north as Lincolnshire- it was significantly warmer then than it is today. Light purple was a common colour in the fields- this was flax, vital in the medieval era for making rope, cloth and linseed oil. Further north of Battle was a great forest, known to the Romans as *Anderida* and to the Saxons as the *andreaswald*- a dark and terrible place. This forest was gradually reduced but at one stage it was said to have been 70 miles wide and 30 miles deep.

Battle's heritage: we hope you enjoy the heritage of Battle during your visit. There are leaflets in the Museum designed for visitors interested in the town's heritage. Please ask a volunteer to help you.

Battle Museum of Local History : open 1 April to 31 October 10-4.30 Mon-Sat

www.battlemuseum.com

