

## FAQs on 1066

### What there is to see

At Battle Museum the volunteer guides will help you understand from the exhibition, what happened on 14 October 1066, and why. Allow half an hour. Open Monday- Saturday 1 April to 30 October, free admission, next to the Almonry, now Battle Town Council offices.

In Battle Abbey you can tour the battlefield, guided by helpful explanatory notices sited around the tour. Allow an hour. Adults £11.20, children £6.70. Open daily 1 April to 30 September, Check their website for opening times the rest of the year.

In St Mary's Church, opposite the Abbey and a little bit down Upper Lake, is the Battle Community Tapestry, on display there until the end of September. Made by over 700 volunteers - local, national and international - and with the same type of materials and techniques as used on the Bayeux Tapestry, this unique three metre long embroidery describes in a series of historically verified scenes, the origins of the town of Battle following 14 October 1066. Explanatory leaflets are in the church.

Below, Margaret Emeleus and then Mayor Margaret Kiloh, make the first stitch in 2015, overseen by artistic creator of the Tapestry, Tina Greene:



## Where was the Battle of Hastings?



Not at Hastings, which was just the nearest settlement in 1066: where the town of Battle now is, was just empty heathland when the battle took place. Some visitors ask about the controversy over the Time Team programme in 2013, which suggested a "new" site for the Battle of Hastings: at the Marley Lane roundabout. Some 14000 men took part in the battle and could never have fitted into such a small area, which would have been at the front of the Saxon front line as scholars have said for years. In any event, the Marley Lane roundabout is only yards away from Battle Abbey which marks the traditional point at which Harold fell. The chances are that Harold sought to do battle on the highest ground available in what is now the Battle Abbey site, blocking William along the only route he could take from the coast towards London. So there is no "new" battlefield.

Others have suggested alternative sites for the battle: the Caldbec Hill site (too large); and Crowhurst (too swampy). Alternative site theories should be seen in the context that it is recorded that William insisted that the Abbey be built where we see it today, to mark where Harold fell, in spite of the protests of the monks, who could not find water and did not want to excavate an entire hill to begin with.

## **One in the eye (or not)**

There are no eye witness accounts of how Harold died at the Battle of Hastings, 14 October 1066.

From the accounts written subsequently, it seems Harold may have died from an arrow in the eye, sustained when, towards the end of the battle, William ordered his archers to shoot high in order to disrupt the weakened shield wall of the Anglo Saxons.

An arrow in the eye was a symbol of treachery so this manner of death may have been invented to suit the Norman view that Harold took the throne in defiance of Edward the Confessor's decision to make William the successor. However in recent years some historians have come round to the view that perhaps Harold really did die that way.

Some accounts say that Harold died differently. He was spotted near the edge of the diminishing Anglo Saxon shield wall and an assassination squad was sent in to kill him, so as to finish the battle off. Most accounts agree that the Count of Eu was banished by William for disrespectfully hacking a leg off the body.

Perhaps both accounts of how Harold died, are right. He may have been hit in the face by an arrow, the Normans spotted this and took the opportunity to finish him off. They certainly had the motive to do that. Harold died in the late afternoon – the light was failing and so the Normans were running out of time to get the decisive victory they needed. They had limited food, winter was coming, so they had to win. For Harold a draw would have been enough. The battle had begun around 9 in the morning and had been very close. A quick end was now essential for the Normans.

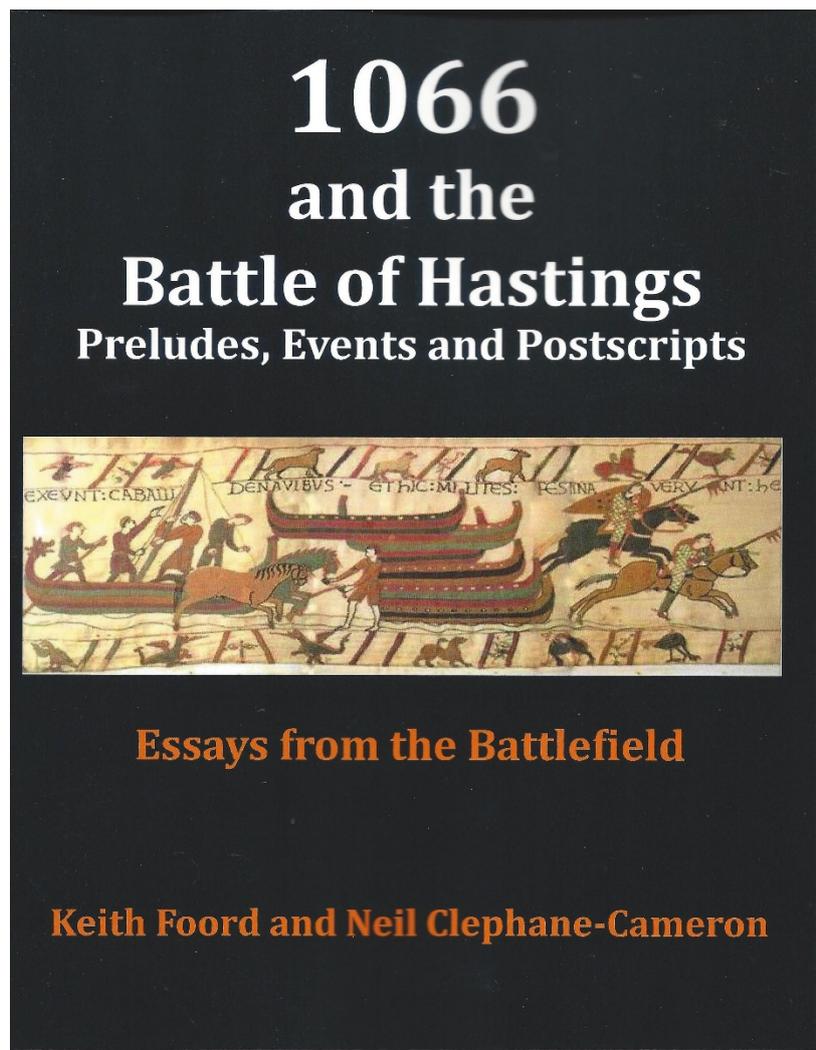
The Bayeux Tapestry contains two possible images of Harold being killed. One appears to show him holding an arrow in his eye but that part of the Tapestry has been altered – possibly to emphasise the treachery point - and may have originally showed a lance. The other image shows a body on the ground with its leg being hacked off. The rare Stothard painting of the Tapestry as it was in 1818, which the Museum has, does not help either way.

Perhaps both images in the Tapestry are intended, in order to show that Harold died from an arrow as well as from an assassination attack. We have to be careful though, at drawing too firm a conclusion from the Tapestry. There have been many alterations over the centuries and when it was finished,

around 1077, it was a “political” work of art. Political in the sense that the Normans won the battle and so told the story their way, just as the invading Tudors won the Battle of Bosworth 419 years later , and told their version of the story, with the help of Shakespeare.

### **Further Reading**

The best book to buy to read further about the Battle of Hastings – what led to it, what happened, and the aftermath – is by local historians Keith Foord and Neil Clephane Cameron.



Priced £14, this book is on sale in Battle Museum and in Battle Abbey.