

The Battle of Hastings

Tuesday 17 October 2006



Last weekend was a famous **anniversary**. No, not my birthday. Not the anniversary of the last time England won the World Cup. It was the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, which took place 940 years ago at a place called (appropriately) Battle, which is near Hastings on the south coast of England. In 1066, the army of Duke William of Normandy defeated the army of the Saxon King Harold of England. Following the battle, England was ruled by Norman kings, who imposed their own system of government on the land.

The English language almost disappeared. The ordinary people still spoke English of course, but the king, the royal court, the courts of law and the nobility all spoke Norman French. And when, two or three hundred years later, English re-emerged as the main language of the country, it had changed. For example, in the old English language, the plurals of nouns were all irregular – like “mouse – mice” in modern English. In the new English, people made the plural of nearly all nouns by adding the letter “s” to the end, because that is how plurals are made in French. And English people started using French words alongside the old English words. Ever since then, it has been natural for English people to import words from other languages whenever they want.

But to return to the battle. Every few years, there is a **re-enactment** of the Battle of Hastings, on the site of the original battle. People dress up in Saxon and Norman armour, and ride around on horses, and fight using **replica** swords, axes and arrows. Kevin took part in the re-enactment this year. He was a Saxon soldier and his job was to die heroically in the final Norman **onslaught**. After the battle, it is normal for both armies to retire to a nearby pub, to drink beer and tell stories about the heroic deeds of the day. The battle has of course got its own **website**¹. You always knew the English were mad. You were right.

Photo of the re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings

anniversary the day on which an important event happened in a previous year . re-enactment if you re-enact an event, you try to make it happen again in exactly the same way that it happened the first time, often as an entertainment . replica an exact copy of an object . onslaught a very powerful attack

1) <http://hastings.vikingsonline.org.uk/>