



NEWSLETTER

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NORMAN CONQUEST - 950TH ANNIVERSARY

This year we commemorated the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings and the accession of William, Duke of Normandy to the English throne on Christmas Day. We recognised the important part Berkhamsted played in our country's history as the site where the Saxon Lords offered William their oath of fealty.



1066 was a momentous year for England. The death of the elderly English king, Edward the Confessor, on 5th January set off a chain of events that would lead, ten months later, to the Battle of Hastings.

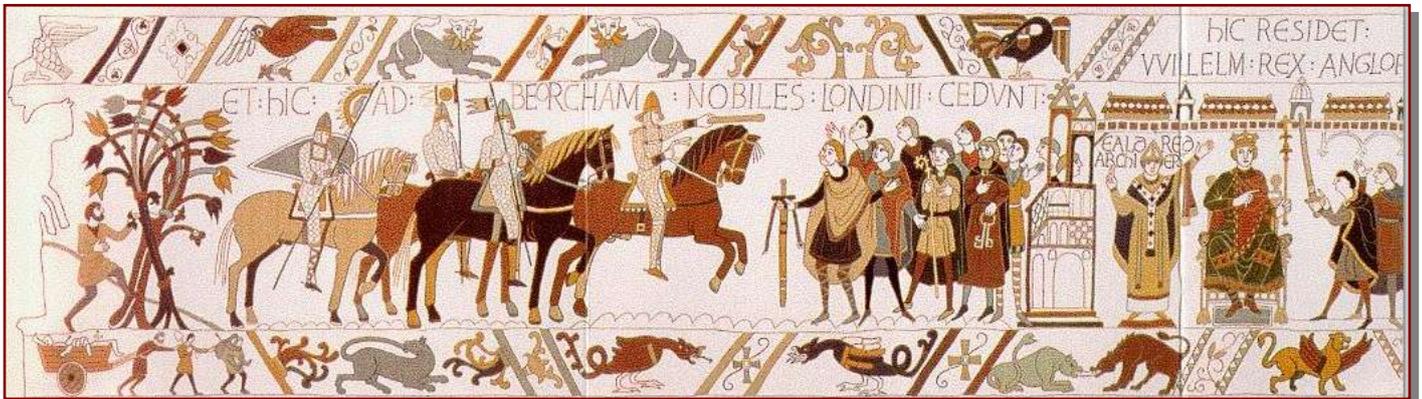
A sculpture was commissioned by businessman, Jon Culverhouse, who said, "People who see the sculpture should be admiring the potency of it. William was a conqueror who rode roughshod over the whole country and was responsible for tens of thousands of deaths. But you don't have to glorify him to see that his arrival was a major moment in English history".

Peter Walker, artist in residence at Lichfield Cathedral, was commissioned to create the artwork, which was unveiled at Berkhamsted Castle on Friday 14th October. It is hoped that the bust will eventually go on permanent display somewhere in Berkhamsted.

John Waller, local history buff who conducts tours of the Castle said, "In my view this is one of the most sacred sites in English history. It's where England changed forever. If William hadn't defeated Harold then we would be more of a Scandinavian country now than a French one".

Lady Val Corbett, widow of the late Hemel MP Robin Corbett, said, "What I like about the sculpture is how it looks regal but accessible. Then there is the way that the crown is dented to show the way it was taken by force – that was a nice touch".

As part of the anniversary celebrations Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society held a public exhibition at Berkhamsted Civic Centre. The star exhibit was the Alderney Bayeux Tapestry finale, a reconstruction of the last missing panels of the Bayeux tapestry created by a Channel Island community project. It depicts the submission of the English noblemen at Berkhamsted (Beorcham) and the Norman Duke, William I on the throne of England.



Photos: Top – image of bust courtesy DHT volunteer. Image of the 1997 tapestry made by Jan Messant – from the Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society collection, cared for by Dacorum Heritage Trust.

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BOVINGDON BROTHERS' WWI CROSSES

It was reported in October 2015 that a 100 year-old, 4 foot wooden cross has been stolen from the cloisters at Salisbury Cathedral. The cross originally marked the spot where Captain Francis Dodgson was killed, aged 27, and buried at Contalmaison, at Battle of the Somme on 10th July 1916. The cross was brought to England when the War Graves Commission offered them to officer's families.



The Cathedral guide Sylvia Biggs was horrified to discover one had been stolen. She said: "In monetary value, I don't suppose they're worth anything. The one that was stolen was the oldest and would be 100 years old next year. Every year some of the descendants come and put fresh poppies by the crosses".

Francis Dodgson (also known as Toby) was born in May 1889, the son of the late Mr Henley Frederick Dodgson of Bovington (d. 1913) and Mrs Helen Hamilton Fulton of Salisbury. He was a kinsman of Charles Dodgson (author Lewis Carroll). Francis Dodgson was educated at Marlborough College and, after being rejected for the army on account of eyesight, Trinity College, Cambridge, where he joined the OTC. He graduated with a BA and joined the family stock broking firm of Hope Dodgson.

Commissioned in September 1914 and posted to France the following August. Francis was promoted to Captain in May 1916 and he was in command of 'B' Company 8th Bn

Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards) in the first major engagement of the Battalion on the Somme.

Their attack on Contalmaison started in a north-easterly direction from Horseshoe Trench across 1,000 yards of open country, but almost immediately came under shrapnel fire. With 500 yards to go they met heavy machine gun and rifle fire from the front and left flank at Bailiff Wood. Then, at the bottom of the rise, found the wire practically uncut. The Battalion then took heavy casualties and although all obstacles were eventually overcome no more than four officers and 150 men reached the village. Six officers were killed, including Captain Dodgson.

He was reported missing on Monday 10th July 1916 and, in early August 1916, was officially reported killed in action. His commanding officer wrote to his mother as follows:

"It is with the deepest sympathy that I write to you to say that I fear there is now no doubt whatever that your son was killed on advance on Contalmaison. The ground that we advanced over was quite open, and the Battalion did magnificently, led by your son and Capt. Thomson. The advance was without cover, advantage was taken of the numerous trenches and shell holes. Your son was evidently killed and completely buried in one of the trenches, for we found no trace. He died gloriously, leading his men, and he lies with many others of his Company, in the torn and shell-swept valley just southwest of Contalmaison".

Pte. Angus later wrote: "Captain Dodgson was leading and encouraging his men like an old veteran.....but about 100 yards from the goal Captain Dodgson got hit in the head.....leading his men over the open ground".

Francis had planned to marry Marjorie Secretan on his next leave. The correspondence to her from Dodgson's mother (by then Mrs Fulton) survives and records his loss and the subsequent memorial arrangements. Wishing to keep his grave where it was, Mrs Fulton told the 'Graves Commission' she did not want him moved and hoped to buy the piece of ground. "I hated the notion of his being moved. I think it is awful what they are doing and so unnecessary. They are trying to do things on much too large a scale". When she went to France she was shocked to find the grave gone and already transferred to the cemetery.

Without delay, Mrs Fulton went to a stonemason in Amiens, found a granite post which had come from a ruined building in Albert, had one side flattened to take an inscription and put it on the spot where her son's grave had been. His original wooden cross was then moved to Salisbury Cathedral together with that of his brother Capt. Guy Dodgson



of the Hertfordshire Regiment, who died of wounds 14th November 1918, and is buried at Caudrey, BC. Despite having a grave Francis Dodgson is also named high up on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing.

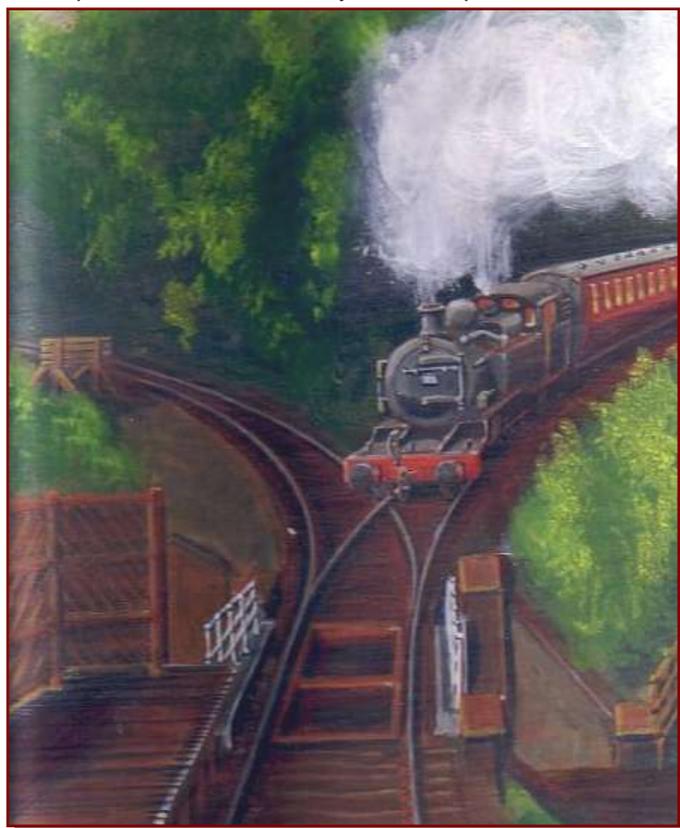
The little stone post remained where it was until 1962 when the field was sold and broken up into smaller plots. To save it from possible damage it was moved some 90 yards to its present position beside the track. The inscription reads: 'IN MEMORIAM FRANCIS DODGSON CAPTAIN 8TH YORKS REGT. WHO FELL HERE 10-7-16'.

For more information on the life and career of Captain Dodgson is told in the book 'Marjorie's War' by Reginald & Charles Fair, published by Menin House and available from Amazon books.

Photos: The Bovingdon brother's crosses at Salisbury Cathedral and Capt. Francis Dodgson, both images are in the public domain.

'PUFFING ANNIE'

'Puffing Annie' (later corrupted to 'Puffernanny') is the name the locals had for the branch line engine that related right back to the name of the contractor's engine "Annie" when the line was built by A. Oliver in the 1870s. The line itself was called the 'Midland Branch', never 'the Nicky Line' at the Hemel end. Some of the route, sadly not the viaduct, has been preserved as the Nicky Line footpath, none of the rest of what the poem refers to (the final mile and a half of the line) is recognisable today.



The 'Fowler Prairie 22' was an ex-LMS suburban, condensing, passenger tank, 2-6-2T Class 3P built in 1930, and scrapped in 1962.

The painting depicts the approach to Heath Park Halt, which was roughly on the site of the present Kodak Tower at the Magic Roundabout. The white railings are on the bridge over what was then the approach road to the five-way Plough road junction.

On 13th September 1949, a number of wagons descending the incline from Hemel Hempstead Midland Station over the Marlowes Viaduct, on their own, at speed, derailed and ended up a pile of smashed bits and pieces on this pair of points. By a miracle the wreckage did not spill over onto the road below and no one was hurt.

In the Second World War an Army tank on a transporter tried to get under this bridge and took it along for the ride. The old steel girders were left by the buffer stops for years. The same thing happened at the London Road Bridge, but the date is not recorded.

The left-hand line led down to Cotterells Sidings, now buried under the Leighton Buzzard Road.

This poem, after Longfellow's Hiawatha, is a 'vision' dating to the latter part of the Second World War.

I dream a lot
And as often as not,
Whether in daytime or night,
Steam engine visions present themselves
And take control of my sight.

Clear as day at Claydale Sidings,
Clear as day to Godwin's Halt,
Clear to all the world at summit,
Track bed weeded to a fault.

Alien to the tranquil setting,
Thundering over incline crest,
A drama bursting into view,
A noisy shimmering, snorting ghost,
Fowler Prairie 22,
Followed by an endless train
Stretching to infinity.

Launched itself upon the incline
A touch of mist in long, deep cutting,
Down the track that skirts the forest,
Belching upward smoke and steam.

On the bank past Highfield Mansion,
Whistled warning to the rabbits,
Past steep slope where sledge had been,
Past the Workhouse grim and threatening,
Past St Paul's, still standing proudly,
As yet unconscious of its fate.

To the bridge where countless children
Smelled their first of engine odours,
Whistling now to warn the workmen,
Clanking, panting through the station,
Fowler Prairie 22.

Past the place of gravel grinding,
Past where envelopes are loaded
And the chalk has been eroded,
All Forty Eight steps clearly seen.

Here the ground frame, still with roof on,
Here stored coal in sleeper bunkers,
Here the Fowler carrots grow,
Here be Sages, Trends and Bonfields
Here be various grades of Rowe.

Through the cutting of the strawberries,
 Past the place of noble healing,
 Past the school-bound cinder track,
 By Paradise (it should be closer),
 This is where wild Tibbles roam,
 Here be Butchers of enchantment,
 Here the platform without home.

Ever downward, ever onward,
 Slower now with flanges screaming
 On the ever tightening curve,
 To Gade vale unspoiled and verdant,
 To the viaduct of Marlowes,
 Dashed unheeded over void,
 Over where the hair was barbered,
 Over where the grains were processed,
 Over Edmunds' hoard of turnips,
 Rumbled over points and crossings,
 Shrieked and trembled in my view
 The shimmering, hissing, clanking ghost of
 Fowler Prairie 22.

Now just past the Cotterells Junction,
 Whistled warning of approach,
 Snorting gently on the downgrade,
 Ghostly Heath Park Halt emerges,
 Built entirely of timber,
 Squeezed above a five road junction

Massive timber staircase surges,
 A Gents below where men may function,
 Nothing for the ladies' comfort
 Except a Cranstone water fountain.

Steel girder bridge across the 'cut',
 A lock to regulate the flow,
 Low embankment beckoned onward.

Over Bulbourne timber trestle,
 Here be stickleback and toad,
 These are lands of Boxmoor Trustings,
 Rumbled over London Road.

Here, perhaps without due reason,
 Alternating red and white,
 Horse chestnut trees in bloom, in season.

Long roadside row of uniform height,
 Into cutting dark and damp,
 Calmer now and panting gently,
 Low twist lands of Barnes and Gasworks
 Inverted sleeper still with chairs on,
 Improvised crude buffer stop,
 Wherewith to halt the sighing ghost of
 Fowler Prairie 22,
 Gently to evaporate,
 Gone for all eternity.

Eric Edwards

Image: Original painting by Eric Edwards, image courtesy of Eric.

CURATOR'S CORNER



It's a Girl!

Many of you will know that our Collections Manager, Nina Glencross, was expecting a baby and started her maternity leave at the end of September.

We are delighted to announce that Nina and Matthew are the proud parents of Neve Dorothy, who is the most delightful baby. She was born at 11.30 am. on Wednesday 13th October, at Milton Keynes hospital.

All of us at DHT send our good wishes to the Glencross family and their beautiful new arrival. Parenthood is a great adventure that Nina is enjoying every minute with her new daughter.

Nina will be on maternity leave until next autumn; in the meantime we have a new member of staff, Nicola Minney, who has now joined our curatorial team as Nina's maternity cover. We welcome Nicola and hope her time with us will be interesting and enjoyable.

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☞ We wish you a very Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year ☞



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