

EMAS Whitsun Study Tour

Landscape of the

Bayeux Tapestry



Dol-de-Bretagne

21 – 28 May 2016

EMAS Study Tour
Landscape of the Bayeux Tapestry
21 – 28 May 2016
Itinerary

Saturday, 21 May	Westminster; Bosham (cross to Calais; overnight in Calais)
Sunday, 22 May	Montreuil sur Mer; Abbeville (lunch); Abbaye de Jumièges
Monday, 23 May	Bayeux Cathedral; Bayeux Old Town; Bayeux Tapestry Museum
Tuesday, 24 May	Menhir du Champ Dolent; Dol-de-Bretagne; Dinan
Wednesday, 25 May	Mont-St.-Michel; Rennes
Thursday, 26 May	Château de Robert le Diable; Rouen Cathedral, Rouen Old Town
Friday, 27 May	Dives-sur-Mer; St-Valéry-sur-Somme; (overnight in Calais)
Saturday, 28 May	(cross to Folkestone) Pevensey Bay, Hastings, Battle Abbey – where did the Battle of Hastings really take place?

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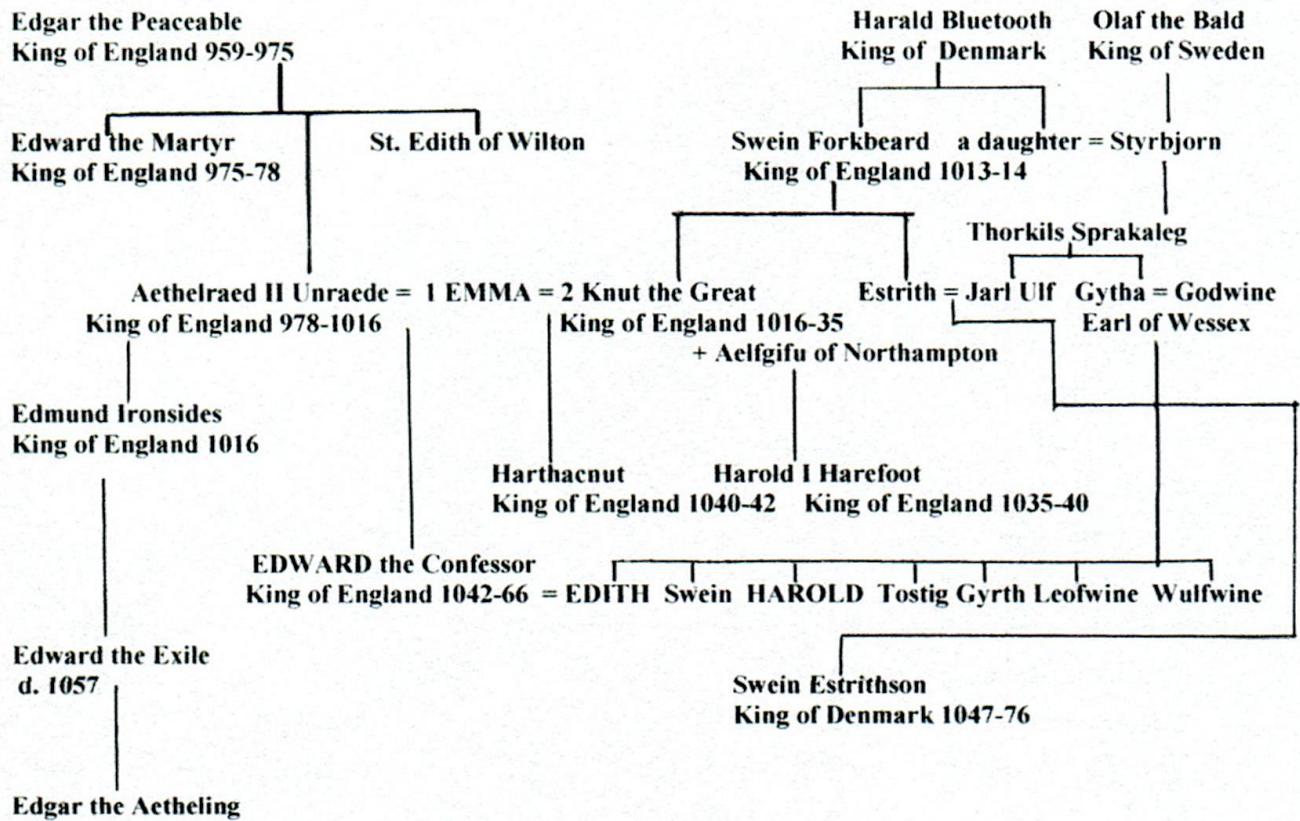
You can find further information at: tiny.cc/emas-aurasma

Location of Principal Sites

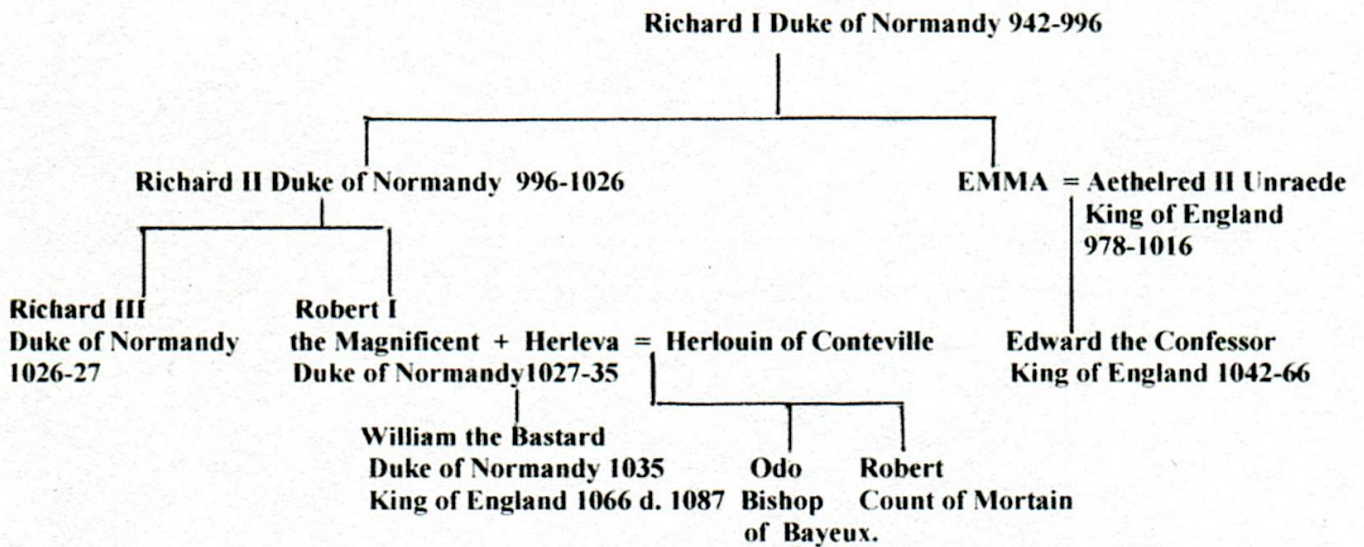


a	Westminster	j	Dinan
b	Bosham	k	Mont-St.-Michel
c	Calais	l	Rennes
d	Montreuil sur Mer	m	Rouen
e	Abbeville	n	Dives-sur-Mer
f	Abbaye de Jumièges	o	St-Valéry-sur-Somme
g	Caen	p	Pevensey
h	Bayeux	q	Hastings
i	Dol-de-Bretange	r	Battle

Anglo-Danish Dynasties of the 11th century



William of Normandy and the English Throne



Duke William was the great-nephew of Queen Emma and so in no way descended from her. There was therefore, strictly speaking, no hereditary claim at all and he was not a member of King Edward's kin.

The Bayeux Tapestry



The Bayeux Tapestry shows the events of 1064 to 1066, beginning with King Edward the Confessor sending Harold to Normandy and culminating in Duke William's invasion of England and the Battle of Hastings.

Despite its name, it is not technically a tapestry, but an embroidery made with dyed distaff-spun woollen threads with a torsion of c. 350 turns per metre on a bleached linen back ground.

The Bleached Linen Background:

warp and weft approximately 18x19 threads per square cm.

c.68.38 m long (224 ft. 4¼ ins.)

c. 45.7 – 53.6 cm high (18 in. to 211/8 ins)

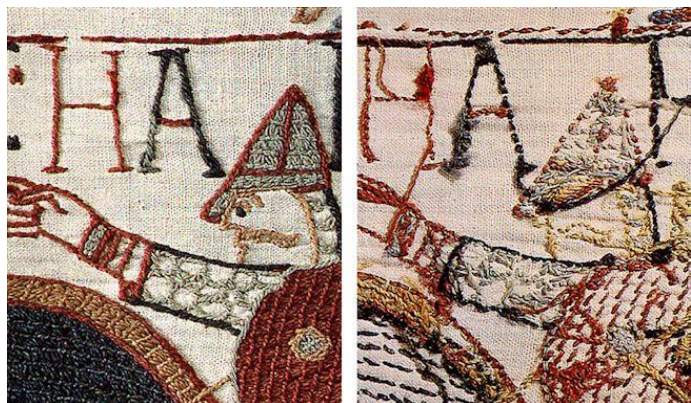
It is in in eight sections: the first two over 13.5 m long (44 ft)

the next five range from 6.6 m to 8.4 m (22 to 28 ft)

the last section is only 5.3 m long (17.3 ft)

The Embroidery:

The work employs two stitches, a stem stitch to outline the figures, and a laid and couched technique to fill in the colour.



Who Commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry?

All available evidence points to William's half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and Earl of Kent, being the person who commissioned the tapestry.

Odo appears as a major figure in three scenes of the Tapestry. In one scene he is shown blessing the meal that had been prepared after William's army moved to Hastings.

In a second scene he is shown seated with William and William's other half-brother Robert, Count of Mortain.

In the third scene he is shown rallying William's troops after the rumour that William had been killed in the first charge of the battle.



Moreover, three of Odo's vassals – Turol, Wadard and Vital – are named in the Tapestry.



If the Tapestry was commissioned by Odo, then it must date to before 1082 which was the year of Odo's imprisonment.

It was probably commissioned after 1071 which was the date of William of Jumièges' "Gesta Normannorum Ducem" as many scenes follow the account in the "Gesta Normannorum Ducem".

The Provenance of the Tapestry

An English provenance for the Tapestry is indicated by the inscriptions.

As Canterbury was the chief town of Odo's earldom, it is likely that the Tapestry was made there.

Additional evidence for this is the fact that where the Tapestry differs from Norman accounts, it appears to follow traditions found in chronicles connected with Canterbury.

Finally, there are similarities with Canterbury manuscripts in the depiction of several scenes. For example, the scene with Odo blessing the meal and a detail of the soldiers seizing food both appear to have been influenced by scenes in manuscripts within the collection held at Canterbury.



Bayeux Tapestry



**Last Supper
(St Augustine Gospels)**



Bayeux Tapestry



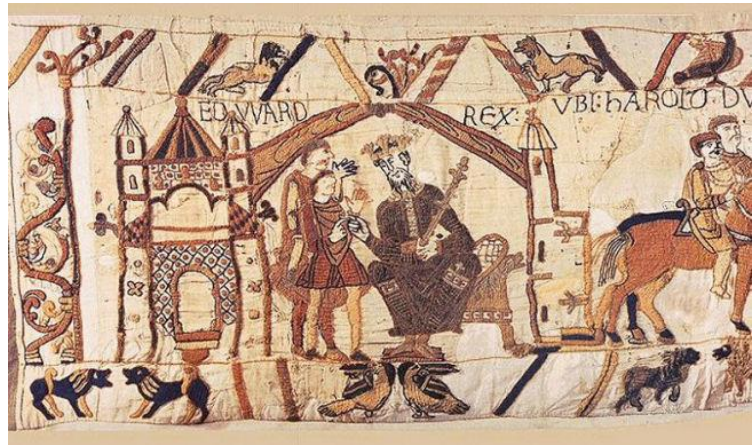
**Prudentius' Psychomachia
(St Augustine's, Canterbury)**

Westminster

The Tapestry opens with a scene showing King Edward in his palace at Westminster speaking to Duke Harold.

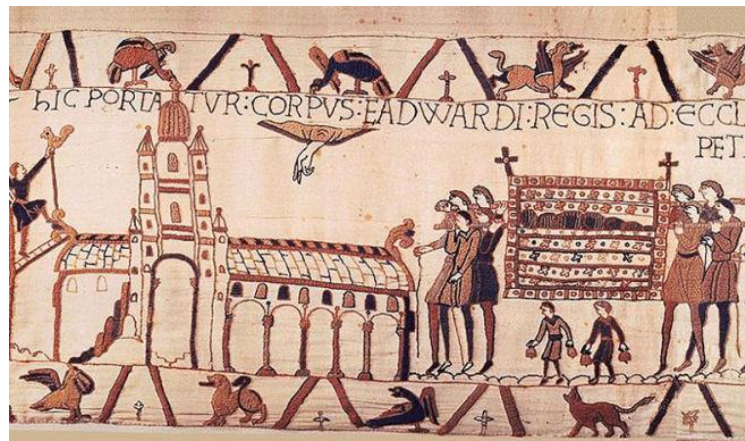
It is understood from the French sources that Harold is being sent as a messenger to Duke William. William of Poitiers' **Gesta Guillelmi** (1071-1077) states:

“At time Edward, king of the English, protected the position of William (whom he loved as a brother or son and had already appointed his heir) with a stronger pledge than before. He wished to prepare in advance for the inevitable hour of death ... To confirm the pledge with an oath, he sent Harold, the most distinguished of his subjects in wealth, honour and power, whose brother and nephew had been received as hostages for William's succession.”



Westminster Abbey features later in the Tapestry (scene 34) with the funeral of its patron, King Edward.

Unfortunately, almost nothing remains visible above ground of the abbey of King Edward's time. The exception is the door that now opens into the Chapter House (shown in the



photograph on the left), which has been recently dendro-dated to a felling date of c. 1030, and probably installed in the Anglo-Saxon abbey during the 1050's.

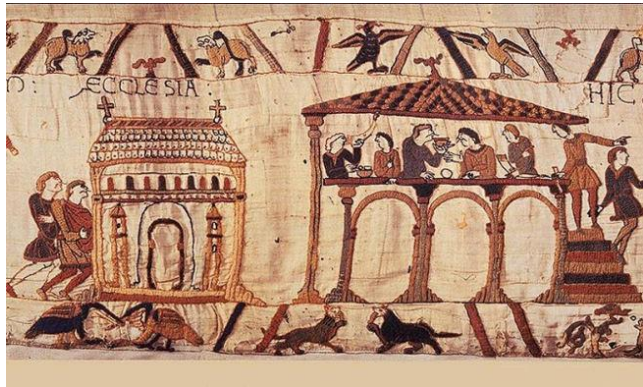
Excavations at Westminster have shown that the best impression of the Anglo-Saxon abbey comes from its sister-house at Jumièges, which we will visit on Sunday.

Bosham

Bosham had probably been the principle seat of Harold's father, Earl Godwin.

The Domesday Book records Bosham as 'Land of the King':

"King William holds Bosham in lordship. Earl Godwin held it. There were then 56½ hides; it paid tax for 38 hides; now the same. Land for ... In lordship 6 ploughs. 39 villagers with 50 smallholders have 19 ploughs. A church; 17 slaves; 8 mills at £4 less 30d; 2 fisheries at 8s 10d; woodland at 6 pigs."



After his audience with the king, Harold and his entourage ride to Bosham. The Tapestry shows them entering the church and then feasting in the hall, which presumably lay close to the church.

Bosham Church

According to Domesday, Bosham Church was part of the lands of Bishop Osbern of Exeter:

"Bishop Osbern holds the church of Bosham from the King; he held it from King Edward. 112 hides belonged to this church. Now 47 are outside it. Hugh son of Ranulf holds 30 hides; Ralph of Quesnay, 17 hides. When Osbern acquired it, the church answered for 65 hides, now the same. Land for ... In lordship 2 ploughs, 21 villagers with 18 smallholders have 8 ploughs. 3 mills at 14s; meadow 12 acres; a salt-house at 2s; 1 site at 8d. Mauger holds 12 hides of the land of this church as one manor, called Thorney."

The depiction of Harold in the Bayeux Tapestry

In the **Domesday Book**, Harold is simply effaced from History. References to the time immediately before William are referred to as TRE (tempore regis Edwardi, 'at the time of King Edward')

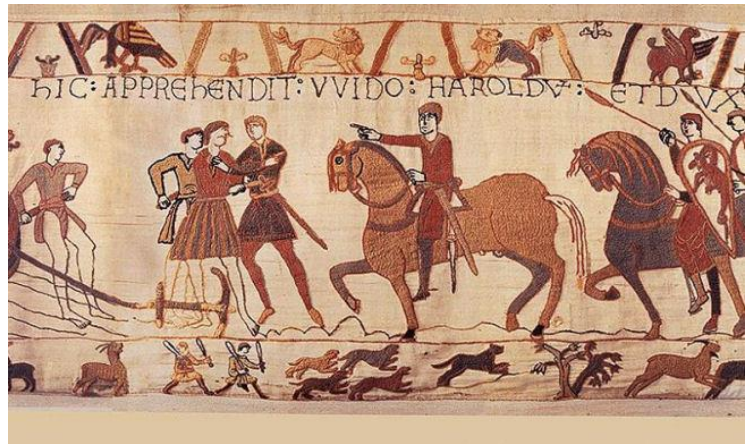
The Tapestry treats Harold in a very different way. After being brought to Duke William, Harold is seen alongside William's men. He rescues two of them when crossing the River Couesnon, and is present in the action at Dol, Rennes and Dinan, following which he is given arms by William, thereby accepting him as his feudal lord. This scene is followed by the journey to Bayeux where Harold swears an oath on Holy Relics. The implication being that by taking the Throne of England, Harold has broken faith with his liege lord and broken an oath to God.



Montreuil sur Mer and Abbeville

After the departure from Bosham, Harold's ship is blown off course and arrives in the lands held by Count Guy of Ponthieu. Guy apprehends Harold and holds him captive.

There is no agreement as to Harold's actual landing place: Edmer of Canterbury claims it was on the River Maye in Ponthieu, just to the north of St-Valéry-sur-Somme.



Belloc suggests the right bank of the estuary of the River Somme, or Bay of Authie as alternative sites.

The Latin text states that Guy took Harold to 'Belrem', which is usually interpreted as Beaurain. However, this has been questioned by several authorities. Bertrand (Bertrand, S. 1966, "La Tapisserie De Bayeux et la Manière de Vivre au Onzième Siècle, p. 61) states that Guy at this time resided at Abbeville and the Chronique de Normandie claims that is where Guy took Harold. An alternative place of importance in Guy's lands would be Montreuil sur Mer. A charter of 1100 granting fishing rights endorsed by *Guido comes Monsteroli et Pontivensium* (count of Montreuil and Ponthieu). Guy died late in 1100 and was buried in Saint-Pierre in Abbéville, a Cluniac establishment founded by Guy on a grant of land near Abbeville which had been given by Phillippe I in 1075. The original Romanesque church was replaced in 13th century by a Gothic church, which in turn was replaced by a new building in 1774.

Montreuil sur Mer

Montreuil developed around the 7th century abbey founded by St Saulve, Bishop of Amiens, and a fortress built c. 900 by Helgaud, Count of Ponthieu. The town was further fortified in the second half of the 16th century by the creation of a citadel, which was completely rebuild in the 17th century by Errard and then further altered by Vauban.

Montreuil lies close to the site of **Quentovic**, which was the principal early medieval port in northern France and was perhaps the most important of the Frankish seaports. Quentovic is also of interest as it was an important point on the pilgrimage route from Anglo-Saxon England to Rome.

Abbeville

The name derives from the Latin 'Abbatis Villa', the country house of the abbot of the important Carolingian church at St-Riquier. Today the principal site is the late 15th century collegiate church of St-Vulfran.

Jumièges Abbey is an important site containing two churches which both occupy an important place in the development of French ecclesiastical architecture.

The original monastery at Jumièges was founded in the 7th century by St Philibert, a monk from Eauze (Gers). The monastery had royal protection from the start: it was Clovis II, the King at that time, and especially his wife Bathilde, who encouraged Philibert's appointment and gave him an area of the Crown lands as a gift.

Nothing remains of this original church which was destroyed by the Vikings in the 9th century. It was rebuilt in the 10th century by Duke William Longsword (893 – 942). In the 11th century, the church of Notre-Dame was built. This church was consecrated in the presence of William the Conqueror in 1067.

The earlier of the two churches, the 10th century Carolingian church of **St-Pierre**, survives best at the west end, where the distinctive double-light baluster shaft openings sit above a line of blind circular arcading, which in turn sits over the low main arcade. To the east, the church was heavily rebuilt in Gothic style in the 13th and 14th centuries.



The main church, **Notre-Dame**, is of importance not just in terms of the development of French architecture, but also of English Romanesque. This church is a magnificent piece of early Norman Romanesque. The church is of surprising height for its date – the additional height resulting in an area of blank walling between the triforium and the clerestory.

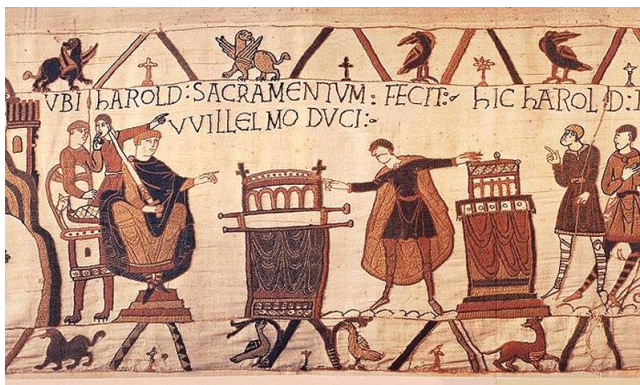
Excavation has shown that Notre-Dame at Jumièges was the sister church to Edward the Confessor's abbey church at Westminster. It is probably that Westminster was started after Notre-Dame, but with royal patronage work progressed quickly and the church was ready for dedication in 1066.

Bayeux

Bayeux was founded as a Gallo-Roman settlement in the first century BC under the name Augustodurum. It was the capital of the territory of the Bessin people of Gaul, whose name appears in the writings of Pliny the Elder. The earliest evidence of human occupation of the territory comes from fortified Roman camps, but there is so far no evidence of any major pre-existing Celtic settlement before Roman arrival.



Bayeux was built on a crossroads between Lisieux and Valognes, developing first on the west bank of the river. By the end of the 3rd century a walled enclosure surrounded the city until it was removed in the 18th century. Its layout is still visible and can be followed today. The citadel of the city was located in the southwest corner and the cathedral in the southeast. An important city in Normandy, Bayeux was part of the coastal defence of the Roman Empire against the pirates of the region and a Roman legion was stationed there.



Bayeux was largely destroyed during the Viking raids of the late 800s but was rebuilt in the early 10th century under the reign of Bothon. William the Conqueror's half-brother, Odo of Conteville, completed the cathedral in the city and it was dedicated in 1077. However, the city began to lose prominence when William placed his capital at Caen. When King Henry I defeated his brother Robert Curthose

for the rule of Normandy, the city was burned to set an example to the rest of the duchy. Under Richard the Lion Heart, Bayeux was wealthy enough to purchase a municipal charter. From the end of Richard's reign to the end of the Hundred Years' War, Bayeux was repeatedly pillaged until Henry V captured the city in 1417. Charles VII recaptured the city and granted a general amnesty to its populace in 1450. The capture of Bayeux heralded a return to prosperity.

The Oath of Bayeux was sworn by Harold Godwinson promising to uphold William's claim to the English throne. The scene from the Bayeux Tapestry shows Harold swearing on holy relics as William sits on his throne.

Bayeux Cathedral

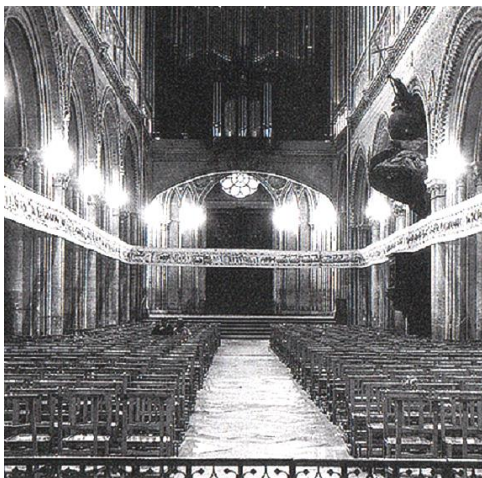
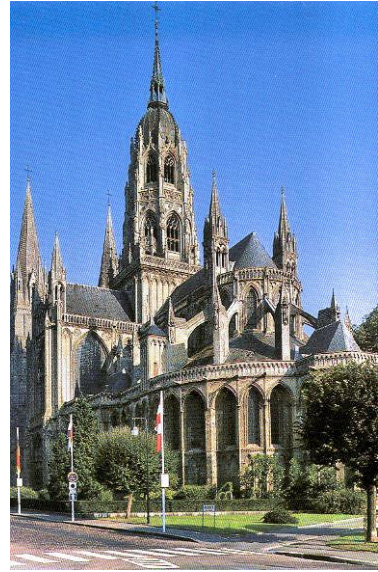
The Cathédral Notre-Dame is a fine example of Romanesque and Gothic. Only the west towers and the crypt remain from the original church built by Odo of Conteville, William's half-brother and Bishop of Bayeux. This church was consecrated in 1077.

The original west towers were reinforced in the 13th century when they received Gothic spires. The central tower is 15th century, but the hideous cupola is a 19th century excrescence.

The tympanum over the south transept doorway shows the story of Thomas Becket.

The main arcade of the nave is impressive 12th century Romanesque, while the clerestory and vaults are 13th Gothic.

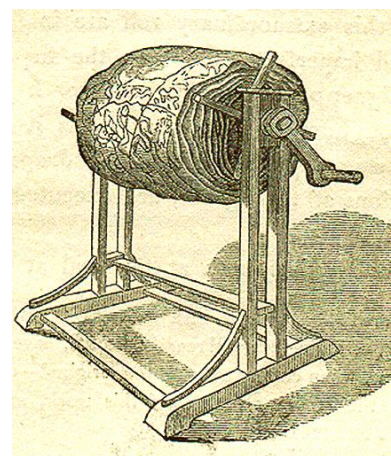
The chancel with its apse ambulatory is a superb example of Norman Gothic. The great arches are separated by pierced rose windows; the triforium is highly ornate and the clerestory is spacious and well lit. The stalls are 16th century.



The Inventory of the Treasury of Bayeux Cathedral of 1476 contains the entry: "very narrow strip of linen, embroidered with figures and inscriptions representing the Conquest of England." The entry goes on to describe the tradition of hanging the textile around the nave of the cathedral during the Feast of Relics, as can be seen in the photo.

Later, however, the tapestry was not so well treated. It was recovered during the Revolution, when it was seen being used as a cover for a wagon. Later, it was stored in the cathedral on a large drum.

An early 19th century descriptions tells how it was displayed: "It is right, first of all, that you should have an idea how this piece of Tapestry is preserved, or rolled up. You see it here, therefore, precisely as it appears after the person who shews it, takes off the cloth with which it is usually covered." (Thomas Frognall Dibdin's *Travelogue*, 1829)



This explains the amount of damage on the first part of the Tapestry.

The Breton–Norman War of 1064–66

The war between the Duchy of Brittany and the Duchy of Normandy started when William the Conqueror, as Duke of Normandy, supported Rivallon I of Dol's rebellion against the hereditary Duke of Brittany, Conan II.



While Harold was in Normandy he accompanied William in his campaigns in Brittany. In the tapestry, these include the scenes at Mont-St-Michel, Dol, Rennes and Dinan, culminating in the scene where William gives arms to Harold. Both William of Poitiers and Oderic Vitalis mention William's gift of arms, although both place this ceremony before the Breton Campaign. William of Jumièges simply states that Harold returned to England "with many gifts".

Dol-de-Bretagne

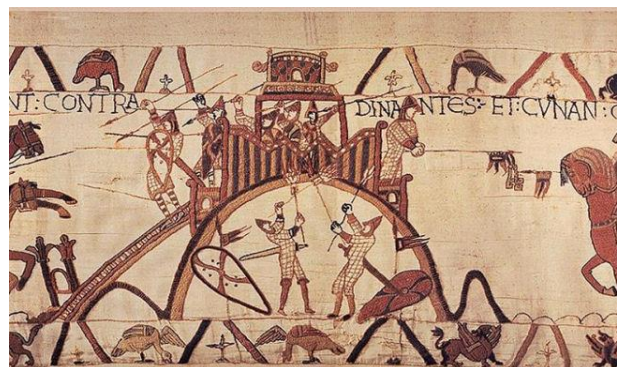
Dol is situated near the coast and at one time, like Mont-St-Michel, was completely surrounded by water. Dol was an archbishopric, and a highly prized citadel which was besieged many times during the medieval period.



In 1064, Count Conan II of Britany besieged Dol, whose lord Rivallon of Cambour was loyal to Norman rule. The Tapestry shows the Normans attacking Dol, apparently held by Conan who flees, though other contemporary accounts differ in some details from the Tapestry.

Dinan

In the eleventh century, Dinan was a principal stronghold of Brittany. In the Tapestry, Count Conan II of Brittany might be shown fleeing to Dinan after being routed by William's troops. One scene shows Conan surrendering the keys to Dinan.



No other contemporary source records this incident, or even mentions Dinan. The Tapestry's depiction of William's campaigns in Brittany are more fully discussed under the section in this brochure covering Rennes.

Mont-St-Michel

The Tapestry shows Harold rescuing two of William's men from the treacherous sands at the mouth of the River Couesnon.

Le Mont-St-Michel was used in the 6th and 7th centuries as a stronghold of Romano-British culture and power until it was sacked by the Franks; thus ending the trans-channel culture that had stood since the departure of the Romans in 459 AD.

Before the construction of the first monastic establishment in the 8th century, the island was called Mont Tombe. According to legend, the archangel Michael appeared to St. Aubert, bishop of Avranches, in 708 and instructed him to build a church on the rocky islet.

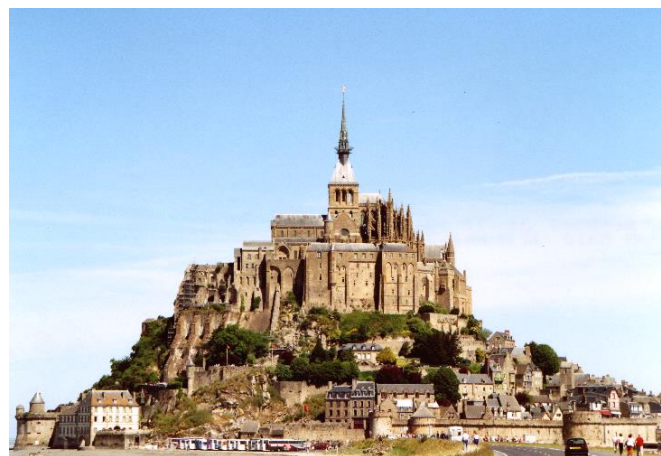
But Aubert repeatedly ignored the angel's instruction until Michael burned a hole in the bishop's skull with his finger. The dedication to St Michael occurred on October 16, 708.

The mount gained strategic significance in 933 when the Normans annexed the Cotentin Peninsula, which placed the mount on the new frontier with Brittany. It is shown in the Bayeux Tapestry, and ducal and royal patronage financed the spectacular Norman architecture of the abbey in subsequent centuries.

An Italian architect, William de Volpiano, designed the Romanesque church of the abbey in the 11th century, placing the transept crossing at the top of the mount. Many underground crypts and chapels had to be built to compensate for this weight. These formed the basis for the supportive upward structure that can be seen today.

Robert de Thorigny, a great supporter of Henry II of England (who was also Duke of Normandy), reinforced the structure of the buildings and built the main façade of the church in the 12th century. Following his annexation of Normandy in 1204, the King of France, Philip Augustus offered abbot Jourdain a grant for the construction of a new gothic style architectural set which included the addition of the refectory and cloister.

The wealth and influence of the abbey extended to many daughter foundations, including St Michael's Mount in Cornwall. However, its popularity and prestige as a centre of pilgrimage waned with the Reformation and by the time of the French Revolution there were scarcely any monks in residence.



Rennes

The Tapestry shows William's army crossing the River Couesnon, and making their way to besiege Conan II, Count of Brittany from 1040 to 1066, at Dol. Conan flees from Dol, and the next scene shows soldiers riding past Rennes, which is represented by a motte and bailey castle. This is followed by a scene showing William's troops engaged in battle with the men of Dinan, whereupon Conan surrenders the keys to the fortification.



There is some confusion over this section of the Tapestry. It is possible that when Conan fled from Dol he was pursued to Rennes and then to Dinan, although other authorities have suggested that the inscription for the scene:

HIC MILITES VVILLELMI: DUCIS: PUGNANT: CONTRE DINANTES: ET: CUNUN: CLAVES: PORREXIT

(Here Duke William's soldiers do battle with the men of Dinan, and Conan surrendered the keys)

simply means that the men of Dinan were fighting, but that the battle was taking place at Rennes. However, William of Poitiers does not mention Rennes in his account of the campaign, which has led some scholars to suggest that the inclusion of Rennes in the Tapestry simply indicates that this is the destination to where Conan had intended to flee, as this was the principal stronghold in his territory.

In Roman times Civitas Riedonum was a town of considerable importance, in part owing to its strategic position. To the west its principal street, the via Osismii, ran from Civitas Riedonum to Vorgium (Carhaix-Plouguer in Finistère). In 275 AD threat of attack led to the construction of the town walls, of which part still remain.



The Holy See of Rennes was established in 453, and a church has occupied the site of the present cathedral since the 7th century.

Rennes became part of the Kingdom of Brittany in 851 and became a duchy paying tribute to king Louis IV of France in 942. Rennes generally was considered to be one of three cities acting as the territory's capital, the others being Nantes and Vannes, with Rennes Cathedral being the coronation site for the dukes of Brittany.

Château de Robert le Diable

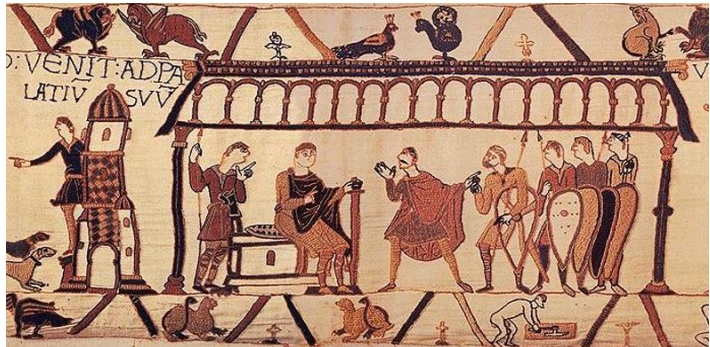
The Château de Robert le Diable is more correctly known as Château de Moulineaux. The castle was built in the 11th and 12th centuries but destroyed and then rebuilt by Philip II Augustus.

Legend associates it with Robert le Diable, otherwise known as Robert le Magnifique, the father of William the Conqueror. However, there is no evidence to link him with its construction.



Rouen

In the Tapestry Harold is taken to William's palace in Rouen. Rouen was the capital of medieval Normandy. In the eighth century, Charlemagne considered Rouen to be one of the five principal entrances into northern Gaul. In 911 in response to pressure from Viking invaders, Charles the Simple gave to *Hrófr* (Rollo) and his followers the area around Rouen. During the tenth century the Norman rulers extended their power over all of present-day Normandy. By the time of Duke William's rule, Rouen was the undisputed capital of the area and the location of William's principal palace. The exact position of the palace is not known, but it presumably was situated close to the Cathedral.



Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Rouen

The first cathedral at Rouen was built in 396 by Bishop Victricius. This was destroyed by the invading Normans, who replaced it with a larger cathedral with a wooden vault. Consecrated in 1063 in the presence of William the Conqueror, all that remains of this building is the crypt beneath the choir.

Rouen Cathedral was rebuilt in 1145 by Bishop Hugues d'Amiens based on the new Gothic style he admired at Saint-Denis Basilica in Paris. After a devastating fire in 1200 destroyed all but the nave arcades, the Saint-Romain tower and the left portal, reconstruction began



immediately. The choir and remainder of the cathedral were built in the more mature Gothic style of the 13th century, completed around 1250.

In the 15th century, the facade of the cathedral was given a makeover in the Flamboyant Gothic style of the day. The upper portions of the left tower were modified, the facade was renovated, and a new tower was added: the Tour de Beurre (Butter Tower), named for its funding by donations from wealthy citizens in return for the privilege of continuing to eat butter during Lent. (Bourges Cathedral also has a Tour de Beurre.) The tower was not completed until the 17th century.

Other towers, spires and vertical extensions were added over the years, most notably the Tour Lanterne (Lantern Tower) of 1876. With that great spire, Rouen Cathedral became the tallest building in the world (but it only held the record until 1880).

Dives-sur-Mer

William of Poitiers says that on hearing of Harold's usurpation, William took council with his vassals and organised the building of ships and provisioning of an army. Eadmer of Canterbury records that William, when hearing of the refusal of his requests to Harold, became incensed and assembled a fleet. William of Jumièges simply notes that William quickly ordered a fleet to be built. Oderic Vitalis states that the duke called a great meeting where the pros and cons of an invasion were vigorously debated.



The fleet assembled at Dives-sur-Mer, a small coastal fishing village situated on the River Dives. In the 11th century, Dives-sur-Mer was also a boat-building centre and it is likely that many of the scenes of shipbuilding and provisioning in the Tapestry took place at Dives.

The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* notes that the fleet waited a long time in readiness and William of Poitiers reports that the fleet waited at least a month for good winds.

St-Valéry-sur-Somme

On leaving Dives-sur-Mer William's fleet sailed along the coast to St-Valéry-sur-Somme where they waited for about fifteen days for opportune winds and possibly also for news of the outcome of Harold's encounter with Harald Hardrada and Tostig in the north of England. The Tapestry does not include this episode – the fleet set sail and arrive in Pevensey.

Pevensey Bay

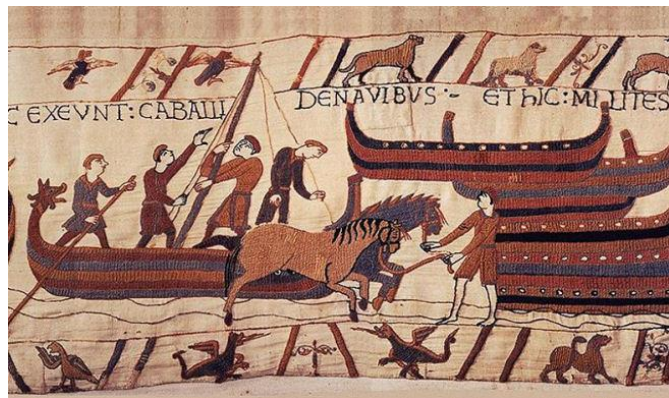
The inscription showing the landing specifically names Pevensey as the destination for William's fleet and William of Poitiers states that the fleet landed near Pevensey.

Both William of Poitiers and William of Jumièges report that William then raised fortifications at Pevensey.



Grape and Gibbs-Smith both comment that the gently sloping sand of Pevensey Bay would have made for an easy landfall and unloading of horses.

After the Conquest, the region surrounding Pevensey was designated one of the five rapes of Sussex and granted to Robert of Mortain, the brother of Odo and half-brother of William.



Hastings

Hastings was a major port city of the Cinque Ports, an association most active from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. The port was also the closest city to William's landing site, and was quickly overtaken by Norman forces. Wright considers it likely that William chose Hastings as his bridgehead as it "provided a geographically defensible position protected to some extent by the now dried up lower reaches of the rivers Brede and Bulverhythe on the flanks, and a beach from which a defended retreat could be made should the need arise."



Battle Abbey

In 1070 Pope Alexander II ordered the Normans to do penance for killing so many people during their conquest of England. William the Conqueror vowed to build an abbey where the Battle of Hastings had taken place, with the high altar of its church on the supposed spot where King Harold fell in that battle on Saturday, 14 October 1066.



He started building it, dedicating it to St. Martin, though William died before it was completed. Its church was finished in about 1094 and consecrated during the reign of his son William Rufus.

William the Conqueror had ruled that the Church of St Martin of Battle was to be exempted from all episcopal jurisdiction, putting it on the level of Canterbury.

The image on the left shows a reconstruction of the Norman chancel of the abbey church.

According to the English Heritage Website:

“The site of the Battle of Hastings is one of the least altered of medieval battlefields. In 1066 this part of Sussex was little populated, and the battle was fought on open land immediately south of the dense Wealden forest.

The ridge was held by the Saxon army, with the Norman forces attacking from the south. With perhaps 14,000 soldiers involved, fighting is likely to have spread along the ridge, now marked to the east of the abbey by the road to Sedlescombe.

The foundation of the abbey a few years later effectively preserved most of the battlefield, although no relics of the battle have ever been found there.”

However, recent archaeological work has challenged the idea that the Battle of Hasting was fought on the Abbey Fields.

Where did the Battle of Hastings take place?

The Bayeux Tapestry is consistent in portraying Harold's troops as fighting from higher ground with a shield wall defence.

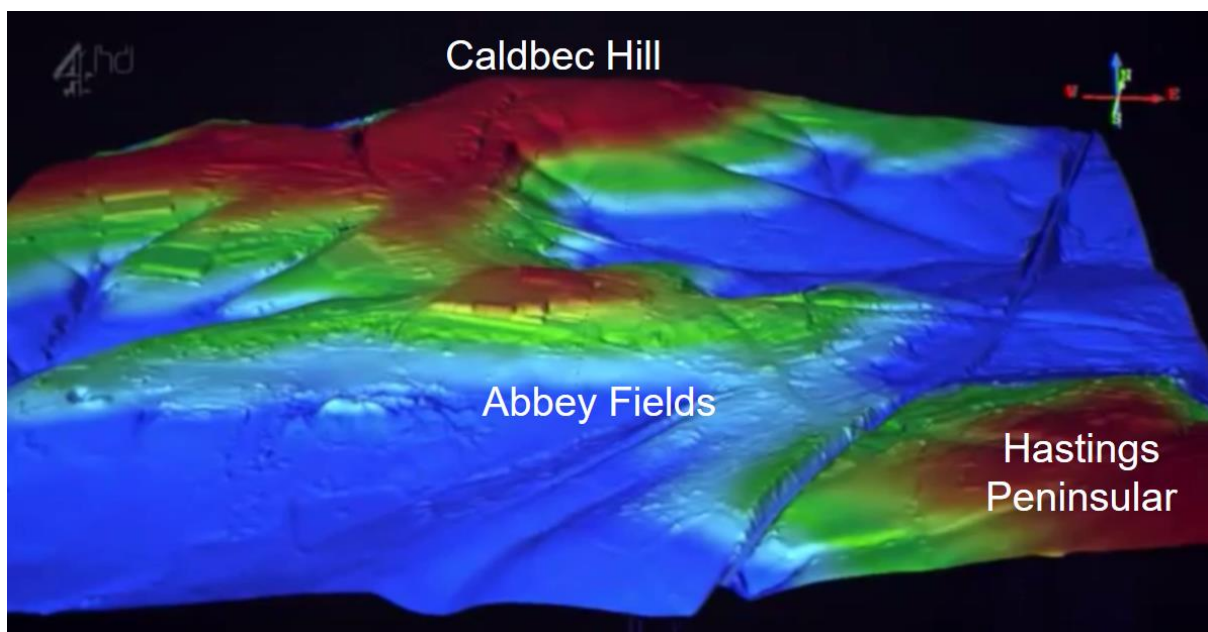
Over the years, a number of historians and archaeologists have challenged the theory that Abbey Fields were indeed the site of the battle.



In 2013 a Time Team programme set out to test this theory.

English Heritage allowed excavation of a large area of the fields which failed to produce any evidence of a battle having taken place there.

Time Team then turned to the use of LIDAR to continue their search. The LIDAR images allowed the team to recreate the eleventh century ground surface of the area.



The ground surface in the 11th century as reconstructed by the LIDAR survey.
(Red is high ground, blue is low lying marshy ground)

Several points immediately became apparent.

Firstly, that the area where William's troops were assembled at Hastings was a peninsular in an area of low lying marshy ground.

Secondly, the land at Abbey Fields was so marshy that it would have been very difficult for infantry to fight on it and utterly impossible for cavalry.

Thirdly, Caldbec Hill (an alternative location for the battle) covered too large an area to be defensible by a shield wall.

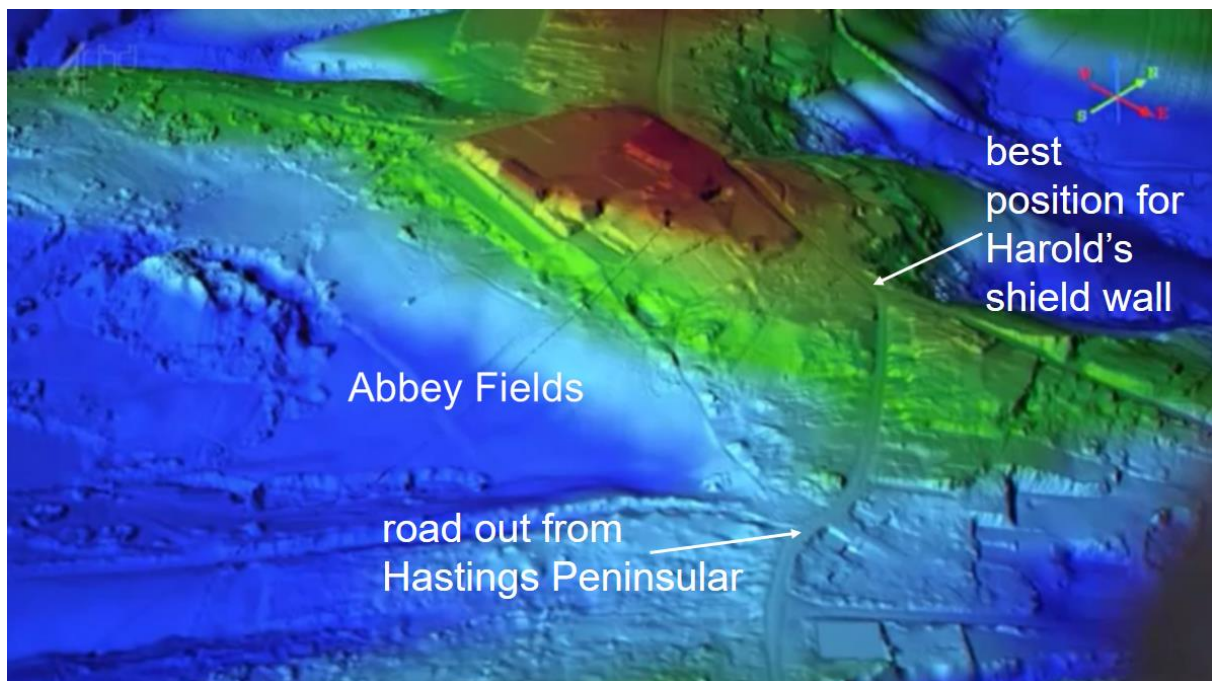
Indeed, given the nature of the topography, Harold's best ploy might have been a waiting game, leaving the Norman troops on the Hastings Peninsular to gradually run short of supplies.

It was obviously in William's interest to bring about a decisive battle before this could happen.

This could well be the reason that we see the Normans in the Tapestry burning Anglo-Saxon houses. The house-burning scene follows immediately after the scene where William receives news of Harold and his forces.



By attacking Anglo-Saxon non-combatants William is in effect forcing Harold's hand. He cannot afford to play a waiting game when this is happening.



Looking at the eleventh century topography, there is only one possible route by which the Norman forces can leave the Hastings Peninsular, that is the old road leading out from Hastings.

Given this fact, Harold had only one area that was really defensible by a shield wall, that is the narrow ridge where the road from the Hastings Peninsular encounters the higher ground. The narrowness of the ridge prevents the Norman forces encircling Harold and his men, so that the position was one that could be strongly defended.