

The Swan Song

July 2000

Edition 1

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How strange, you confess to yourself, once again you appear to have been put on one of those infernal medieval junk mailing lists. Not So! It is in fact the next incarnation of the Stafford's Newsletter, making its debut edition in electronic format (where available) and exclusively scrawled by my own fair hand (with contributions from Catherine Wetton). For those of you who do receive this electronically, please print off a copy, it is so much better and easier to read in print. This is the first newsletter of the year and has been delayed due to the handover from Master Brown to myself, who has put in a great deal of effort these last few years. The format of the newsletter has changed and we also have a new name. As well as the usual event 'write-ups' there are also a few items of interest to all members, particularly those who have joined recently. Hopefully by next time we shall have more to entertain, titillate and excite you (for this to work I will obviously be looking for your contributions).

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Tamworth Castle - 24th April

Our first event for this season took place at Tamworth Castle, where it was our good fortune to be the first re-enactors to be let through the doors. Thanks must go out to Paul Mason for putting us in touch with the people who run the castle. Little did they know! He also saved us from getting wet this year, as it naturally rained over the weekend. Particularly at that infamous site Warwick Castle. Tamworth is owned by the local council and as such they have done strange things to the castle, like putting a 15th Century Mammoth exhibition inside! However, not knowing much about re-enactors they welcomed us with open arms, and seemed a little surprised when instead of the eight people who dropped the equipment off on Sunday twenty-one turned up.

The castle itself is an intact shell keep and has many modern conveniences, such as central heating, to which we quickly discovered why they didn't bother with it in the 15th century. Indeed Master Howell (Senior) looked positively glowing in his black gown and black

Sha-per-one! Within minutes of arrival the well-spaced staff room looked like Tom Jewell's old house, with only enough floor space to walk around the room in single file. This disproves the theory that the number of days an event is for, the greater the amount of kit required!

The scenario was based around a recruiting party sent to Tamworth by the Duke of Buckingham, just before the disaster of Northampton. Fortunately none of the locals knew and we were able to take on many new recruits, although few above 4ft tall. There was a lot of work put into numerous displays, all of which ran twice throughout the day. One new display that took place was a representation of the battle of Tewkesbury using 25mm miniatures, this was highly successful and worked well. Particularly as casualties were light and we seemed to return home with exactly the same numbers we took with us! We're still a little short on figures though, so if any one else is interested then talk to Master Harley. The extra dancing practice on Sunday helped, particularly on those wet cobbles, and we also managed to get two groups of people doing the 'Billman's Brawl' dance.

The event went extremely well and the organiser's at the castle would have had us back again this year if they could, perhaps next year though? This was to my relief as I'd already lost several pounds running up and down those stairs, burning off the double cream Mistress Ribbin's had been force feeding me throughout the winter. Certainly one of the best Easter events ever, it being the first one where it neither snowed, rained, flooded, froze or blew a gale!

Goodrich Castle - 28th & 29th May

The event that saw the group return to one of its favourite sites, tucked away in the quite village of Goodrich in the scenic Wye Valley. For some of us a roof and warm bed was a luxury not enjoyed by all during the night, and an unwelcome downpour heard pattering on the roof made it all the more sweet! Better weather was fortunately on the way, although the camp soon began to look like a staging area at the Somme. Those who valiantly turned up on the Saturday night had done a great job sorting out the camp, although few seemed eager to leap into action on the Sunday morning. The prospect of playing with a new toy saw re-enactor's swarm the cannon that morning, as though it were an ice cream shop! Our hard efforts paid dividends and the cannon was successfully fired, and then repeated numerous times just to make sure it really did work.

The day proceeded well, but ever the threat of rain kept the public away and the chance of playing with the cannon slim. A brief downpour in the afternoon saw the arms and armour hastily stowed in the Chapel, where we were unfortunately followed by anyone who could fit into the room! This resulted in another talk about anything we could think of lasting

well over an hour, at the end of which even Master Harley had quenched his angst for talking. The evening went well with the time-honoured tradition of merrymaking through imbibing vast quantities of alcohol. Late in the night another tradition, that being the local youth, visited the castle. Master Hadfield's reputation had clearly gone before us and shouting 'Call the Police!' was all it took to solve that problem. If only the public were so responsive!

Monday was a hugely successful day and we outperformed ourselves, dazzling large crowds with the sun high overhead. All went well and most were loath to leave at the end of the day. Mainly due to the fact that everything had to be carried up the cliffs on the sides of the moat. Every year negotiating the 'Heights of Abraham' seems to be conveniently forgotten by the next time we come to do the event, perhaps the instalment of a cable car should be suggested to EH. For those who felt hard done by missing Stafford Castle with L&M, a cold and windy weekend was all that was missed. Once again proving God is on the side of the righteous.

Kenilworth Castle - 10th & 11th June

Kenilworth is one of those popular sites that some of us know all too well, having done it on so many occasions in so many guises. Indeed one year the head custodian, a charming and affable man, commented on our performance by saying 'they're not as good as the Tudor group we had last year', that was of course ourselves. Alas this time there were no Snappy's 'Beast' sized pizza's to comfort us after a hard days re-enacting, although these days the pub seems to have moved closer by at least half a mile! After last years living history event, someone seems to have had the bright idea of putting on one of those ever-popular sieges.

After arriving at the site we quickly discovered that our campsite was as far away from the paths as possible. EH typically deciding that driving on the grass might spoil their beautiful site. Once again the local topography seemed set against us, and not for the last time this year (those of you familiar with Helmsley!). After having carried all the equipment up to the area next to the Great Hall, it was decided by those owning 4x4 vehicles that grass was for driving on and soon took on.

The camp was set up in no short order, with a sea of new campaign tents marking the outer bounds. Due to the fact that the poles for Master Harley's Burgundian tent had been accidentally misplaced (Shame!), we had to forgo the pleasure of putting up his tent on this occasion.

Saturday saw plenty of action for all involved, fighting inside for once we immediately gave up our advantage and left the Castle to fight on the jousting field around the back. Although being slightly outnumbered everyone gave a good account and most of us seemed to survive. The fight in the afternoon involved us being pushed back and attacking down the treacherous grass slope between the outer walls. After much effort and many casualties, we eventually wrapped up the fight by pushing the Yorkists back out.

Our usual excellent battlefield co-ordination seemed to leave us for a pivotal moment, when Master Harley and myself were ordered to engage about half a dozen Gloucester's at the bottom of the bank. This we did and would have normally won, except for the fact that by the time I'd been told to go Master Harley was

already being butchered at the bottom, what a waste!

This was also the first day that anyone outside the group had seen our cannon in action, which was ably commanded by Master Gunner Brown under the kind supervision of Paul Mason (as he was the only person with a shotgun licence mad enough to help us out). All the hard work and effort put into making the carriage for the cannon was well worth it, as no one else's guns came close to ours, even those of 1471's who are a specialist artillery group. Special mention has to go to the willing and able young ladies in the group who helped crew the gun, to those who did archery and those that carried ample supplies of water. Most reports concur that all had a good time in the pub that evening, with vast quantities of alcohol being consumed by all concerned.

Sunday took similar form with a fight and a retreat back into the castle for a much-deserved lunch. Due to the crowd refusing to yield and let us pass, we had to take a quick jog the long way around through the main entrance of the castle. This may explain why only two of us left the field alive and the gun crew turned coat and was taken by Yorkists. In the afternoon the final fight on the inside of the castle took place, where the defenders retreated into the main keep. Pursued by Yorkists, who once through the doorway and out of sight of the public, pretended to have died and allowed the

defenders back out. This proved highly confusing as none of us were in on this part of the plot and suddenly we just saw our lot being allowed back out, whereupon those still of sound mind took this as a cue to follow. We were all very quickly butchered in glorious fashion for our adoring public. The only injury throughout the weekend was done to Essexman, whom Master Hadfield accidentally caught in the face in his excitement to retrieve his bill, which he had just swapped for the sword Dave 'Triple D' kindly broke. A new record for the 40m 'billman's dash' was set by Master Harley, with Master Hadfield coming second by a short bill point.

Kenilworth saw the addition of both new and old member's coming to join the group, with Mistress Gilmore bringing along friends from Durham University. With the promise of yet more recruits from Mistress Reeves as well, the group's future prospects appear most encouraging. As well as those of the men in L&M! We also saw the Keeper of Dudley Castle, Adrian Durkin, making a guest appearance for the day along with the promise he would be attending some events with us in the future. Adrian is an interesting character and has one of the largest personnel collections of historical firearms that I know of. Which should excite those who now have a taste for black-powder.

Middleham - 1st & 2nd July

Middleham was the reprise of James Wilson as 'Big Dickon'. Only a handful of people were required for the event, as this was a Richard III at home with a difference. This included important people from the period, although some of them would have never been there. We broke with tradition by putting the tents up before midnight, instead of after 3am! To top it all we didn't have to cook, it was full English breakfast both mornings, courtesy of the Richard III Hotel, tea on Saturday from our usual Middleham drinking haunt, The Black Swan Pub and the obligatory visit to the teashop!

For the event itself, the usual informed (!) Public attended. Highlights comprised of the bobble hat brigade, complete with pacamacs, providing living proof that interbreeding is alive and well in Wales. Scarfy did an absolutely wonderful job of acting the guard dog after chewing through his lead and chasing 2 young boys out of the camp! Thankfully

Andy discovered this before any mayhem could ensue, although Scarfy looked very pleased with himself. Is anyone else wondering if there were originally 3 boys?

Master Wilson, as the starring role, quoting the local newspaper, baring an uncanny resemblance to Richard III, was, as overheard from the public, either "very good", "I wonder if he is a priest?" "You can tell these are professionals, look at the difference" and another special "I wondered why there wasn't any grey in his hair" referring to James' wig. Master Harley had the usual ever-growing fan base for Stanley and was suitable booed and hissed yet again. Be warned, he's getting yet another picture done, so that makes books, a T-shirt, films, videos and a personalised drawing. We think it's the lived in face. Quote of the weekend was from Master Wilson when it was put to him about sleeping next to Mistress Reeves, "She couldn't have been that good, I slept through the whole thing!"

Catherine Wetton

Tewkesbury - 8th & 9th July

Our token battle event for the year where everybody feels they can just let their hair down, swan around in civvies for the day and then knock the wind out of a few 'Wang-heads'. Need I say anymore!

Our arrival on Friday saw us initially setting up our living history encampment, consisting of the tents and a bag of dog crap left outside Master Howells tent (senior). The event seemed well set to move on from there and indeed most people moved on toward the beer tent. A rousing atmosphere saw many people depart way into the next morning, then mysteriously rise well before noon and saunter back toward the beer tent! It was later uncovered that the queue for breakfast was shorter the earlier you got up.

Most spend their day and also their cash wandering through the market. Few bargains were on offer, although the general range of quality goods now available has gone up considerably. My budget was filled by the purchase of a sturdy handbill for two pounds, whilst Mistress Bladh went and spent in a day what I've spend in the last two years!

As usually happens at Tewkesbury organisation is not one of the strong points. Some idiot this year decided that the Lancastrians should have the field on the first day, which met with general murmurs of disapproval. This was born out when the tight confines of the field and poor marshalling meant that most of L&M was pushed back into the barriers. Thanks to the redoubtable efforts of Master Howell (Senior) nearly everyone made a retreat back off the other end of the field. Master Hewitt was soon to be our only fatality as he refused to leave it alone and was promptly butchered by excited Lancastrians. Fortunately light casualties meant a full

victualling party to the beer tent, preceded by a cracking roast dinner in town. Entertainment by Paescod went on into the small hours and the beer tent seemed determined not to shut. Even those normally stern statues of masculinity in the group were to be seen oscillating rhythmically! In traditional form Adam Cherrington also spent the evening chatting to young ladies, though the outcome of his efforts doesn't take a soothsayer to predict. Although apparently Master Morris had more success!

Sunday's vengeance for the previous days defeat was threatened by the risk of rain. So in true fashion the group carted itself off to the Tea Shop, continuing on a long running group tradition. On return it was decided that getting into kit and arming up was a good idea, it now being around two hours after noon, with the battle at three! The plot had now been corrected so that the Yorkists were meant to win, however we knew what the outcome was going to be anyway. With the support of a few other groups and individuals, the Stanley's on our right and Gloucester's on our left, nothing was going to stop us. Several highly successful columns were used to break the groups in front of us and they worked splendidly. Victory was total and everyone had a good fight. Even the man on the P.A. did better than the previous day, when he was heard to say 'and now you can hear the soldiers cries of incoming'.

The quote of the weekend had to be the reassuring words of Master Hadfield. Who to calm Master Howell (the even younger), who was concerned over the fact it was his first fight said 'all we're going to see of you Will is a pile of crap with eyes sticking out of the top'. Wise words from an old hand!

News Events

Recruitment

Recruitment! Recruitment! Recruitment! All groups rise and fall on the strength of their membership. Fortunately we have always had a plethora of vigorous and active members ready to do thine bidding and create mischief of their own. This year we have begun to see more new members coming into the group and stronger attendance from existing ones.

We are now managing an average attendance at events of over twenty people, which is

considerably up on last year as we only had around a dozen for some events. With a greater number of people on the committee this year, we now have Allan Harley heading up recruitment. So if you have anyone you want to bring along to an event, get in touch with Allan if you need kit or a lift arranged so that we can make sure it is available.

Competition

Not really, but the chance of winning something seemed the best way to attract you blood suckers (no offence to James!). As you all know we now have a cannon, an excellent achievement. However we still seem to be struggling to find a suitable name that everyone can agree on. At the last cannon building session this issue was discussed and the name Margaret came out. At the risk of 'editorialising', this name is inseparable for me from Margaret of Anjou and also my Aunt Margaret (no connection!). If anyone can think of another name of any kind then please come forward and suggest it. Otherwise I'm afraid that we will be stuck with Margaret being engraved on the carriage. Another popular contender is Catherine, the patron Saint of the Stafford family. We also have at least four Catherine's in the group now, could we cope with another?

Shotgun Licences

With the emergence of the new cannon this year firearms are bound to become a growing issue within the group if they aren't already! So how do you obtain one? Where can you keep it? How do you get black powder? What does the law require of you?

Well the first thing anyone needs to either own or use a firearm unsupervised is a shotgun licence. These are obtained through your local police firearms officer and have a duration of 5 years, for an initial cost of app. £50. Depending on where you live will determine how long it will take for the police to get back to you and award the certificate, this can be any time between x weeks and x months. To obtain the licence you must satisfy the police that you are safe in their eyes to use a shotgun. They will require a report from your doctor and also a suitable person such as a civil servant, doctor etc... to sign your form. Mistress Kracke has already volunteered herself for certain peoples and there was no problem. To keep the gun yourself you must have a cabinet which conforms to set standards, however it is not necessary to own a gun to have a licence. The police are generally sympathetic to re-enactors as our guns are pathetic by modern standards. They are also much more likely to award you one if you tell them you don't intend to own a gun, just use the group's one. You may then proceed to buy one after you've obtained the licence if you so wish.

In order to fire the gun you will need an explosive licence, this will allow you to use black powder. You need only apply for an

'acquire only' certificate, as Chris has a 'requisition, storage and sell licence', which means he will be able to give people powder at events. To use any firearm as part of a public display the site must be registered, the group will automatically have done this.

Hopefully this short piece will set the record straight and encourage some of you to get licences. The more people who have them, then more flexibility we have at events. At this point thanks should go out to Andy and Chris who have already taken this step (somehow satisfying the sanity clause) and obtained licences. Without these it would not be possible to use the cannon at events and we wouldn't be able to show so well the high standards we aspire to.

Women Fighting

Long were the days and meetings when Women's Lib in the group was fighting fit, men would often fear to wander out after dark for fear of being 'Wolf Packed'. Sadly, now that the issue has been put to rest with the agreement women can fight, there haven't been any! Yet some of us may live in hope to see comely young lasses wearing tight fitting hose and shirts! If only captains of old had known this would be the result then they could have saved themselves much trouble and simply agreed.

With the increase in the number of women in the group, it should interest you all to know exactly where you stand with regards to fighting, and whatever other activities you may get up to! Now that we have a cannon again there is the chance for at least two women to help crew the gun, as happened at Kenilworth. There is also no reason why you can't do target shooting with the bow and also do some archery on the battlefield as a non-combatant. However, at our own events you can also cross-dress and fight the same as the men. This would involve a minimum of changing into hose and shirt, donning a jack, gloves and sallet and fighting with a bill. Obviously this is quite a lot of kit and anyone who is serious should begin trying to sort some out well in advance. My recommendation is to do it the same way as the men do; beg, borrow or sleep with someone (so I've heard)!

As far as training goes, there will no doubt be a line of men determined to show you the best way to use a bill, and also how good they are in the process. It seems likely at future events the men will be doing some kind of training each day, so be the first to pick up the bill and maim young men in horrible and nasty ways!

Future Projects

Put a group of men, materials and power tools together and anything can be created! As was proved with the creation of the cannon, our latest toy. Much thanks must go to Sam & Andy for allowing us to take over their garden and house.

Though surely this prestigious piece of group kit will not be the last to be produced from the sick and twisted minds of our members. Indeed, Master Harley is already keen to begin building a tower for the camp, so that we may stand above all others. Whilst Essexman is determined to build an organ gun, using some steel piping from his old work place. One thing that the group desperately needs is a Household banner, along with a stock of new bills. Anyone who wishes to help out on either of these projects should contact Master Howell (Senior). If anyone has any suggestions of their own they feel the group should pursue then please come forward.

Quote of the Month

A "book of housekeeping" in 1523 suggests that a good servant learn by heart a list of his master's possessions. With few exceptions this might easily be a description of the equipment and personal belongings of a well-paid 15th century household archer:

"Purse, dagger, cloak, night cap, kerchief, shoeing horn, wallet, shoes, spear, bag, arrows, sword, buckler, horn, leash, gloves, string, bracer, pen, paper, ink, parchment, red wax, pumice [eraser], books, penknife, comb, thimble, thread, spare points, bodkin, knife, shoe maker's thread".

Surely this is a direct copy of Master Harley's kit list for this year! All those aspiring to earn the coveted title of 'Kit Junkie' should take note for the next time they're around a re-enactment market.

Book Reviews

For those of you who are not learned concerning our period then you should be, for those of you who are then feel free to learn more. There is nothing more rewarding than to completely confuse someone who thinks they know it all about our period. One of the hardest things is trying to find good books with reliable and accurate information. However, these two

books should make an excellent start to any library or prove a valuable reference for even the most learned of us.

The Military Campaigns of the Wars of the Roses, Philip A. Haigh, Bramley Books
ISBN 1-85833-770-4
Price - Paperback £10.99 Hardback: £18.99

This is an excellent account of the entire period of the Wars of the Roses with all the major battles and events surrounding them. If you learnt most of the information contained within this book you'd be an expert on the period. It is generally reliable with only a few minor errors that I've picked upon. Here is a quote from the book concerning one of the less scrupulous members of the Stafford family,

"The most unfortunate casualty of Northampton must have been Sir William Lucy. Sir William, who lived near Northampton, heard the artillery fire at the start of the battle and rushed to the king's assistance. But he arrived just as the battle finished, and it is said that a Yorkist knight (reputedly Sir John Stafford), who noticed his approach and recognized him as his rival, took the opportunity to kill him. The motive for this killing was rumoured to be that Stafford was in love with Sir William's wife, and therefore seized the chance to make her a widow, and then, after a respectable amount of time in mourning, make her his wife. Indeed Stafford did marry the widow Lucy the following year.

Osprey Warrior Series - English Longbowman 1330 – 1515, Clive Bartlett
Gerry Embleton
ISBN 1-85532-491-1
Price - Paperback £8.99

One of those infamous osprey books, fortunately this one doesn't have loads of pictures with the people standing in stupid poses. It contains plenty of information about our period and is very accurate, with many colour plates showing the kind of kit we should have. This book should help plug any gaps in your knowledge about the more practical side of the period and complements the other book well. This quote from the book is by Friar Antonio Agapida concerning Sir Edward Woodville who fought with 300 of his retainers in the conquest of Granada,

'This cavalier was from the island of England and brought with him a train of his vassals, men who had been hardened by certain civil wars which had raged in their country...They were huge feeders and deep carousers and could not accommodate themselves to the sober diet of our troops, but must fain eat and drink after the manner of their own country. They were often noisy and unruly, also, in their wassail, and their quarter of the camp was prone to be a scene of loud revel and sudden brawl. They were withal of great pride, yet it was not like our Spanish pride... their pride was silent and contumelious. Though from a remote and somewhat barbarous island, they yet believed themselves the most perfect men on earth...'

A bargain at only twenty pounds for both books! Indeed, I feel it could be time to begin another round of evening quizzes, so get reading!

What Next?

Well nothing really, how foolish it would be of me to use all my best material in this issue! Anyone who would like to make a contribution

and write something please do so. Particularly Master Hadfield who needs to exercise his pencil once again in drawing some cartoons. Perhaps one of our new recruits would like to write something about their first impressions... It would also be gratefully appreciated if our resident journalist may also find time to scribble down a thing or two! So for now all I can say is,

Souvente Me Souvene, ('Remember me often', Buckingham's motto)

Phil Howell

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