

The Swan Song



THE STAFFORD NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 17, NOVEMBER 2003

THAT WAS 2003



What's in this issue?

A bumper event-packed special muesli of an edition this month. I have gathered pictures and minireports for *all* the Retinue's events from Tewkesbury to Blore Heath – yes, that is everything from July through to September, *and* managed to release it after that trip made at the end of the season to Kiel.

I did promise you more of yourselves, and this I have given you, although I can't promise that you will all be in here – I had to leave out a veritable bucketload of photographs. I tried to leave out all the quotes as well, but some of these I thought were so good that I just had to include them on their own page (page 9) – but I left the event off, so see if your memory is good, or if you were really off your tree somewhere with that bottle of Maniac mead (this season's must-have after dark accessory).

Now the season is over, thoughts once again turn to other things, like being able to spend time with your non-re-enactment friends/parents/children/pet rock, what you are going to buy at the next trader's market (14–16 Nov and 28–30 Nov; see news page), or what you are going to wear and do at the feast (19–20 March; also see news page).

The photo on the left was supplied by Ghost's good lady, Jacqui; I think it pretty much captures the atmosphere of our battles (that's the Canterbury's in the foreground, with whom we've shared many a hard scrap in the last year).

That's the end of an exceptional season; I hope next year's weather is as good – except that I'd plaintively request about 10 degrees less for Tewkesbury, please!

DUKE HARRY'S DIARY

Who did we beat up this season?

TEWKESBURY 12-13 JULY

As the less-reputable 21st-century newspapers would say: "Phew, wot a scorcha". And it was. To liken the field of battle to Dante's inferno, sans flames, would not be stretching the imagination.

My retinue, fresh from a roasting at Tutbry, found themselves packed off to one side of Tewkesbury's battlefield, far, far from the nearest toilets, a positive trek from the bars (although most of them managed to achieve a state that ensured the return journey was less boring, although in the case of Master Potter, possibly much longer), in heat that would have made an Englishman of an era much later than mine mutter things about mentally unhinged canines.

The battle was d... hot. My retinue stretched their sheltering under the closest tree routine until the very last moment, their following of the available shade tracking with sundial accuracy the passing of the hours, until the moment when wool and metal had to be donned could be put off no longer.

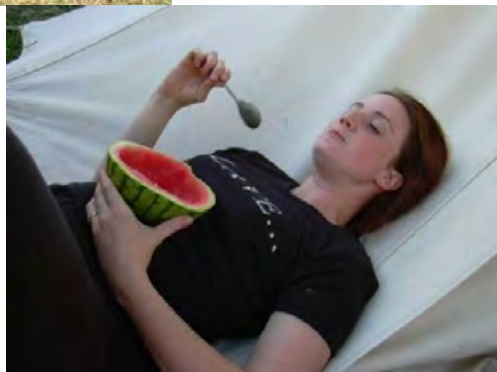
I believe the main highlight of Saturday's battle was Master Harley's shout of 'Make way!' to the Lancastrian forces, after spotting the King. The result was the Yorkist line also parting, allowing the banner guard di-



rect access to the King. On the Sunday my brave soldiers had to actively seek out opponents – I think my 'ladies' may have scared them off the night before with their tough talking about hard fighting ...

(Below) Thanks to Jo, some of us indulged in the sins of the flesh ... melon flesh that is.

Lou digs deep in an attempt to cool down, while Allan (left) just cooks, pre-battle.



The Wrecking Crew At Large

The whole summer in easy-to-digest tablet form ...



I'm not saying who it was, but someone should read more signs. Certainly when driving under low car park barriers. That's all I'm saying.



Before and after battle ... once you'd put your armour on, moving didn't seem so attractive, and those with awnings, such as Andy, found many friends really needed to talk to them. In fact, talking hurt as well, so we just stood around. After the battle, the buckets were ready.

Kate demonstrates an improper use of the captain's pole.

Duke Harry's Diary



The cheerleaders were out again on the Saturday, and were reported to be cheering for York. I do hope this was due to a mistake on behalf of the photographer, otherwise words will be spoken ...

[PHOTO: NICK JACKSON]



Tess (aka Fortis) brought Kate along for a second time this year. Here, Kate and Paul demonstrate next season's favourite Osprey Men at Arms pose.



An unusual approach to gardening



(Above) We couldn't resist the opportunity to stage some possible publicity photos with the cannon and Tess/Kate. Here, Kate re-enacts the charge of the light brigade.

(Right) Rachel and Lou did the cooking on the day, and also became media stars ...

(Below) The Stafford Male voice choir practise for another Saturday night on the town.



We had an unexpected, but delightful, visit from Nigel, ex York City Levy.

STAFFORD CASTLE 19-20 JULY

My retinue returned to their spiritual home for the first time in many years, for an event that was shared with a couple of other groups. The weekend was enlivened by a march into the town centre (in truth, 'twas a march from a market owned by one J Sainsbury, where the horses were stabled, into the town centre) to meet no less a person than the Mayor of Stafford, whose name bore a striking similarity to "Master" Russell, one of my billmen.

My captain and his men acquitted themselves with honour in front of the usual Saturday shoppers, and even managed to find themselves in the local papers a day or so later.

Saturday night was enlivened by a game of "Hunt Master Brown" in the woods. Everyone lost.



Duke Harry's Diary

STONELEIGH 9-10 AUGUST

English heritage's new multi-period event proved to be something of mixed bag for my retinue. Although the event was excellent socially, the actual display proved to be rather tiring in the heat of Saturday and rather dispiriting once the rains had descended during the middle of the Tutbury trial scenario on Sunday.



On Saturday it was so hot that everyone was crowded under the awnings to keep out of the sun. On Sunday everyone crowded under the awnings to keep out of the rain. Go figure!



The assembled combined buccaneering masses from L&M.

A modicum of fun was had from the new 'hunt that pigeon' scenario, involving a parrot, a cardboard seagull and a very nervous owl. My editor managed to demolish the joust barrier in stylish way, by pushing someone into it, and watching stunned as the fence collapsed in true comic manner, section by section. The York City Levy hosted a

pre-arranged impromptu pirate party (see pictures) that proved to be great fun and was enlivened by at least one truly inventive costume (and also had an interactive paddling pool).



Marcus and his parrot, which repeated everything everyone said. Marcus and his parrot, which repeated everything everyone said. Marcus and his parrot, whic



Pirate or Highwaywoman?



Captain Hadfield ready to set sail for Canvey Island.



Galley slave or harem eunuch?



Best costume: Dave Little of York City Levy. It's a lighthouse, right?

Duke Harry's Diary

BOSWORTH 16-17 AUGUST

Being somewhat indisposed and feeling distinctly light headed, it was with pleasure that I allowed members of my Retinue to join with my cousin, Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton to put down that welsh pup, Tudor at Bosworth Field. I have still not forgiven Tudor for swanning around on his yacht while I tried to do away with King Dick the last time.



tics, plus the miracle of Adam's broken ankle healing over night.

The resulting show of Stafford might was a joy to behold, with the Oxford wedge broken and out flanked on numerous occasions, so much so that a member of our opposition, having thrown off his livery, joined our bill lines and set about his former comrades with gusto.



Nice to see that everyone's still got all their limbs.
(Below) The banner guard discuss who to roll over next.



The engagement commenced with the usual arrow storm, but rather than the archers firing merrily away at each other, the ranks suddenly found themselves exposed to incoming clothyards. Master Howes reacted to this surprise event by ordering a general advance into the arrow storm, a tactic I am still trying to understand.

With the arrows spent it was time for the real fighting to begin, the first day's fight was a bit fraught, and at times a close run thing as we came against the organised wedge of the Oxfords: they had clearly learnt a thing or two from our recent confrontation at Tewkesbury. By the end of the day our casualties were higher than what we normally expect and our pride a little dented.

The next day dawned with my men showing renewed vigour, fresh reinforcements to replace the injured and revised tac-

It was a great pity we had to 'lose' as clearly the field was won, but at the required moment Captain Howell gave the order and the Retinue withdrew from the field, heads held high and honour satisfied. Although here was a desire from some of the more enthusiastic members of the Retinue to finish off the 'victorious' Lancastrians.

All in all, an excellent weekend and a very well organised event and I look forward to returning next year.



Cunningly disguised as a water carrier, Wendy prepares to launch a flank attack.

Duke Harry's Diary

DARTMOUTH CASTLE 24-27 AUGUST

The sun shone, the sea was warm (ish) and Buckingham's Retinue descended on the not so sleepy town of Dartmouth during the August Bank Holiday weekend which coincided with regatta week.

We settled down into the cosy quarters (it became very cosy at night with the Retinue occupying all available floor space) of the 15th century gun tower. The first problem of lack of wood for the fire was solved by a scouting party begging from local resi-



We wanted a fire, and a late afternoon trip to find shops that sold it proved less than helpful, so we raided the shoreline. Some dressed for the weather (and since asked not to do it again).



Billman Taylor, guarding something.



(Above) Having unpacked the van, the team take a well-earned break before walking the extra yards into the keep.

(Left) The keep at night, with the bill rack already in place. Atmospheric!

'NO MUMMY, COSTUME TALK NOW, ICECREAM LATER'

Small child overheard

the best echo of any event as the noise rebounded off the opposite bank of the estuary. Sounds of the Were-Duck of Dartmouth were heard from the upper chamber, or perhaps this was the hornpipe in the hands of the



dents and an intrepid group of men in various stages of undress scaling the cliffs for fallen branches. The sun set on the first evening to the melodious drums and singing on the roof which was soon abandoned following a request from the floors below.

The first day was set for living history the setting being the castle manned and prepared to protect the town from invasion from the sea. The archers were poised to shoot from the battlements as was the hand gunner and the cannon fired into the bay producing



(Left to right) Andy's daughter Laura at her first event, Surgeon Hewitt and Gunner Toon.

Duke Harry's Diary

public? The dancing was precariously staged on a sloping site with lower level paths but the dancers survived the experience intact.

The second day marked the first murder mystery plot with a cunning storyline involv-

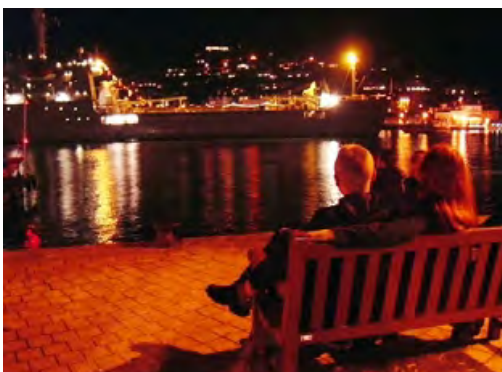


Bow demonstration in the arena. We couldn't lose the arrows, so we mimed.



Our trip into town proved to be a success, with dancing and singing by the quayside popular with the locals. Less said about attacking Cat's car with bills on the way home, the better.

ing one of the young princes being smuggled out of the country. The next day the plot changed as did a number of the characters – there were so many characters that the castle



Those of us left to stop over on Wednesday night made another trip into town to buy chips and visit a pub. Here, Allan and Jayne ponder which Royal Navy ship would look best on the mantelpiece.



(Above and right) Members of Buckingham's Barracudas formation swimming team display the pasty flesh for which they are rightly renowned (re-enactor's tan aside). The washing barrel was called into action to rinse the team off, and was left filled all day to warm the water up. Honest.



(Above) Billman Taylor guarding something else.



(Right) Definitive proof that Mark does in fact have the occasional tipple! He tried to hide it folks!

'THIS IS NOT YOUR NIECE'

Allan to Phil

garrison became more symbolic than actual! Allan threw himself into the role of King's Envoy and inquisitor with gusto and should be congratulated on an excellent plot with many subtle twists, turns and cul de sacs.

Highlights of the weekend included a vigorous rendition of the Bear Dance on the quayside in town following much singing and dancing, the group having been fed and watered by the local hostelry. A member of the public was heard to say 'Those poor souls, I wonder how late they have to work'. Also, the formation hypothermia display by Bucks' Barracudas swimming in the sea from the castle steps (a special award for bravery for those who attempted it on the final evening when the sea was a little more aggressive), singing in the car park, a practice shoot of flaming arrows at night into the bay (bought back the next day by a local, much to the consternation of the English heritage staff!) and the fine mussel broth produced by Rachel and Lou.



'I'VE GOT A SOFA MADE OUT OF THE SAME FABRIC AS YOUR DRESS'

Member of public to Cat Wetton

'THE WHOLE GARRISON SEEMS TO HAVE HAD ACCESS TO THE VINTNER'S BOX'

Judge Hutton

Duke Harry's Diary

BLORE HEATH 20-21 SEPTEMBER

Blore Heath, the last event of the year, a whole seven months to go before next season. How am I to cope?

This has become a regular event now and is an excellent one with which to start the wind down for the off-season. I won't bore you with the details of how awesome we were, except to say – YES, OH YES, OH YES! Everyone was superb, the line fighting, the tactics, the drinking – need I say more, lets skip to the highlights!

1: Dave H in the tourney, a well-honed fighting machine who demonstrated the art of speed stabbing with a dagger.



(Around) Photos from Sunday's foot tourney, contested by our very own Master Harley. The contest, won by a young member of the Levy – well done Josh (and only 16!!!) - was fought over a weapons rack donated by a stallholder, which we had earlier voted to buy in our committee meeting! Unfortunately, Allan lost his first round, although from the photo on the right you can see that because of where he is holding his axe, his opponent's blows possibly weren't all that powerful. Never mind!



'I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING WITH IT, THEN RHIAN GOT GOING AND GOT IT FIRM IN FIVE MINUTES'

Sue (the mind boggles)

2: Vast quantities of ale and singing on both nights.

3: The BBC coming to visit, resulting in the now famous 'Four go mad in the Baltic' escapade.

'YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BREAK THEIR LINE – ITS NOT IN THE PLOT'

A marshall – well, if they were any good, they'd have stopped us, wouldn't they?

4: The look on the oppositions' face on Sunday, when the 'heavy panzers' went into their side.

5: Emma's excellent birthday cake – definitely accurate; some of you were out of line on it.

6: Marcus Petz's display of tent dropping.

Allan Harley

'I'VE FOUND LOADS TO BUY, BUT I'M NOT BUYING IT'

Andy Howes

