The Swan Song

*Bumper fun!*

DEATH SPECIAL ISSUE

Death? Pish, 'tis but a sound, a name of air,
A minute's storm, or not so much; to tumble
From bed to bed, be massacred alive
By some physicians for a month or two,
In hope of freedom from a fever's torments,
Might stagger manhood; here, the pain is passed
Ere sensibly 'tis felt. Be men of spirit,
Spurn coward passion! So illustrious mention
Shall blaze our names, and style us Kings o'er Death.

Perkin Warbeck, from *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck: A Strange Truth*, by John Ford (1634)
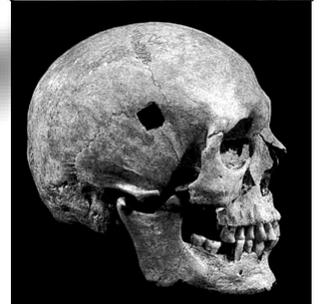
SEASONAL MESSAGE FROM DUKE HARRY:
'HAPPY CHRISTMAS! YOU'RE ALL GOING TO DIE! HA! HA! HA! A-HA HA HA!'

DEATH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

By Jenn Scott

The Middle Ages was a time when people were obsessed by death. They wrote about it, they drew pictures of it and planned over and over again how to achieve a 'good death' –

For as moche as the lif of man in this wretched world is shorte, uncertain and transitory.

Excerpt from a will written in 1540

that is, one where they were able to gain absolution for their sins before dying. It is this that is the key to understanding the medieval attitude to death. Failure to do this would lead to banishment to hell or possibly being condemned to wander the earth as a ghost until their sins were corrected or absolved. The churches were full of macabre images of corpses to remind the living of their inevitable fate, this was particularly true in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century.

People believed that it was better to make a sick person full of 'holsom fere and dred' than to allow them to be damned because of

'flateryn and false dissimalacioun' on the part of friends and family unwilling to face imminent death. They believed that the Devil would try anything to make a dying person sin. The deathbed was often shown as the centre of an epic struggle for the soul of the dying. When Richard ap Meredith was injured at the battle of Barnet, bystanders

'Rural man and death' (14th or 15th century).

Illustration from book on medieval death (mid to late 15th century).

'Dante and His Work' by Domenico Michelino, 1465. The painting shows Dante who holds his book the *Divina Commedia*. The Divine Comedy talks of Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Hell is on his right. Behind him there is Mount Purgatory with its seven terraces. On the peak of Mount Purgatory, there is Adam and Eve who represent Earthly Paradise. Heavenly Paradise consists of the Moon, the Sun and all the other planets.
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MEDIEVAL GHOST STORIES – INTRODUCTION

You may notice a handful of ghost stories interspersed through this issue of *SwanSong*. I should mention that these stories are most likely fictional in nature but, due to the fact that they were found written on a manuscript dating to the 12th and 13th centuries belonging to Byland Abbey, they are worth including. These stories are located in the area neighbouring the abbey and have a strong local colour to them. They refer to Richard II's reign as the past, and were most likely written by a monk resident at Byland Abbey. They were translated from Latin by Dr. James, and were published in the 1924 edition of the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*.

These stories are important as they provide some idea as to the views that the ordinary person had towards death. The common viewpoint of mediaeval times is that everyone tried to make sure that during life they did the right things to help their soul get to heaven, and to help the souls of their friends and relatives also get to heaven, but how many people, especially the peasants, actually believed that? That is a question to which the answer will probably never be known, but at least some insight is given by these stories.

We will leave you to make your own conclusions as to what information they provide about the attitudes the ordinary folk held towards death.

prayed not for his recovery but for him to survive long enough to make his last confession.

The night before the burial, friends and relatives of the dead would watch the corpse – wait the night before the funeral with the body. It was then that the sin eater might visit. The sin eater would consume an offering of bread and salt placed on the coffin. The purpose of this was to transfer the sins of the departed to the sin eater. It was believed that the Devil would possess the body of anyone who died without their sins having been absolved. A victim's body was also supposed to bleed in the presence of their murderer.

The watchers sometimes sought to enliven the long and tedious hours of the night by what was known as 'rousing the ghost'. This seems to have consisted of playing practical jokes to frighten the superstitious relatives, and in taking various liberties with the corpse ... This appears to have been quite common, at the Council of York (held in the year 1367), 'Those guilty games and follies, and all those perverse customs which transformed a house of tears and prayers into a house of laughing and excess', were expressly forbidden. The Guild of Palmers of Ludlow permitted its members to perform the duties of the night-watching of the dead only on the understanding that they should 'abstain from raising apparitions, and from indecent games'.

Burial was quite different from today. The coffin was only used for transportation to the graveside. The body was buried in a shroud and, once it had decomposed to the point of de-fleshing, it was exhumed and the bones put in a charnel house so the graveyard space could be re-used.

Women were not allowed to carry the body to the grave. The graveyard had to be consecrated by a bishop and would need to be re-consecrated if blood or semen were spilled. Fashionable tombs often showed the deceased as a decaying corpse, their stomach bursting open to reveal a seething mass of worms. Suicides, heretics, lepers and the un-
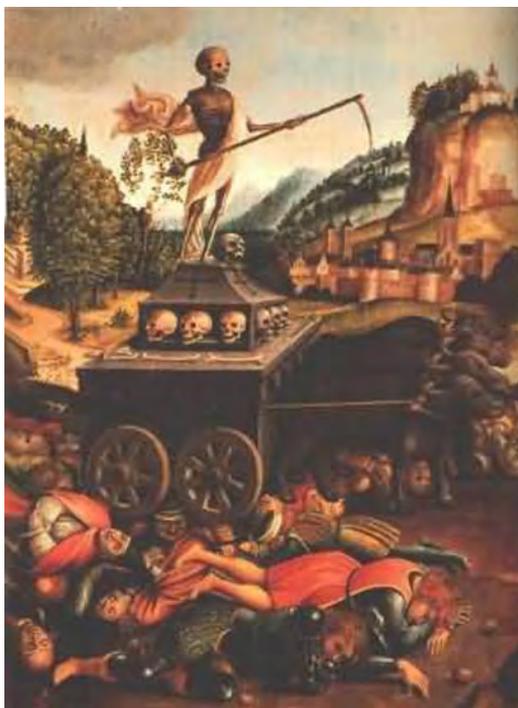
'The Triumph of Death' (16th century, France).

baptised could not be buried a graveyard. Suicides were buried at the crossroads with a stake through their hearts to prevent them from being possessed by the Devil or rising from the dead. Lepers had to go through a humiliating ritual called the rite of separation where they were made to stand in an open grave. The priest would then recite the mass for the dead and cast a spadeful of earth over them showing that they were dead to the world.

Ghosts were said by the church to be those who were trapped in Purgatory. Ghosts were often seen returning to ask their living relatives to correct their errors in life – these frequently include their failure to pay tithes to the church! If this was done then the ghosts could move onto heaven. William of Newburgh, writing at the end of the 12th century describes how, in villages in the north of England and Scotland, dead men were believed to rise from their graves at night and trouble the living. The parishioners treated these ghosts as demonic, calling in the priest to perform an exorcism or else,

often with the compliance of local churchmen, burning the corpses of the dangerous dead.

The corpses of murderers have their own unique superstitions. If the right hand of the murderer was removed after death, called the hand of glory then it was believed to have special powers. The hand would be dried and then candles were fitted on it between the fingers. These were called the 'dead man's candles' were made from another murderer's fat, with the wick being made from his hair. Another method of curing the severed and dried hand was to dip it in wax. After this process the fingers themselves could be lit.

The hand with burning candles or fingers was shocking when coming at people. It froze them in their tracks and rendered them speechless. Burglars lit them before entering homes, it was supposed to help them open locks. A warning sign was that if the thumb would not light it meant there was someone in the house who could not be charmed or made afraid.

Finally, if all of this has made you afraid then you need to pray to Saint Uncumber, who will help you to an easy death (and, ladies, rid you of your husband!). She is often shown as a bearded lady on a cross. She is supposed to have been the daughter of the King of Portugal who, when her father tried to force her to marry, grew a beard. Her understandably enraged father had her crucified.

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'The dance of death' (Berlin, 15th century?).

THE FEROCITY OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

It is said by many historians that the ancient nobility was pursued to its extinction, but this is not wholly true. Of some 70 adult Peers who lived between 1455 and 1487 (respectively the dates of the 1st battle of St Albans and the battle of Stoke), 50 are known to have taken part in one or more of the 14 great battles. If captured, they were normally beheaded. There was no room for the medieval courtesy of allowing them to ransom themselves. They were political foes, and their extermination was the accepted method of neutralising them. This was not an invariable practice. King Henry VI spared the life of John Neville, Lord Montague, who later gave him every reason to regret doing so, after the 2nd battle of St Albans 1461. King Edward IV made a point of sparing many lives of defeated and captured Lancastrians in the hope, not always realised, that he could turn them into loyal subjects.

Those who met their deaths, either in battle or subsequently at the hands of the headsman, usually left numerous families. These were sometimes visited with the legal death of Attainder, but King Edward IV, the main practitioner of this process, made free use of his power of pardon and restoration of lands and titles. This was not an automatic process, and neither was it necessarily immediate. Edward would only use it when they had submitted to him and he was satisfied they had learnt their lesson and were unlikely to give him further trouble. Many of the great Houses, whose heads had died as the penalty for being on the losing side, survived and prospered.

'There have been seven or eight memorable battles in England, and 60 or 80 Princes and Lords of the blood royal have died vio-lently', wrote Commynges. The number of battles would have been accurate if he had written this passage during the period of uneasy peace that followed the battle of Hex-

ham in 1464. His reference to the number of 'Princes and Lords of the blood royal' is puzzling; there were never as many as '60 or 80'. Perhaps, however, he was painting with a broad brush. As will be seen from the family trees, many of the Peers had some royal blood in their veins.

Commynges went on to say:

> 'the calamities and misfortunes of war fell only upon the soldiers and especially upon the nobility … England enjoyed this particular mercy above all other Kingdoms, that neither the country nor the people nor the houses were wasted or destroyed.'

This again is only partly true. London, East Anglia, the Southern Counties and Wales rarely heard the tramp of hostile armies or suffered their ravages, although all of them readily supplied soldiers and suffered the loss of slain or maimed kinsmen. The position was very different for the Midlands and the North where the campaigns took place and the big battles were fought. Hungry, wet and cold soldiers will take what they want of food and shelter, and the ravages committed by Queen Margaret's army during its march south to the second battle of St Albans 1461 were extreme. Northampton was put to the torch in 1460, and Royston, Grantham and Peterborough were pillaged in 1461. Ludlow suffered a similar fate in 1459, and St Albans was pillaged twice, once in 1455 and again in 1461. No doubt many other towns as well as isolated farms and manor houses were despoiled without any mention being made by the chroniclers.

At least this can be said; apart from a few castles, there were no sieges. English towns and cities, unlike their counter-parts in France, were spared the horrors of a medieval siege.

Fourteen pitched battles cannot fail to produce what is so often glibly described as the horrors of war without any real understanding what this expression really means. The slaughter was terrible, and there can have been few homes throughout the land that did not mourn some dead or maimed kinsman. This was par-

ticularly true of the leaders who were made a special target during the battle; if captured afterwards, they were frequently put to death. One chronicler records that no less than 42 knights and squires were captured at Towton and were immediately decapitated.

Concerning a certain ghost in another place, who, being conjured, confessed that he was severely punished because being the hired servant of a certain householder he stole his master's corn and gave it to his oxen that they might look fat; and there was another thing which troubled him even more, namely that he ploughed the land not deeply but on the surface, wishing his oxen to keep fat; and he said there were fifteen spirits in one place severely punished for sins like his own which they had committed. He begged his conjurer therefore to ask his master for pardon and absolution to that he might obtain the suitable remedy.

A MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS

The first recorded use of the word 'Christmas' was in 1038 when a book from Saxon England used the words 'Cristes Maesse' in it.

William of Normandy had himself crowned king of England on Christmas Day 1066. Those noble men allowed inside Westminster Abbey cheered so loudly when the crowning ceremony was taking place that the guards outside thought something was happening to their master inside the abbey. They rushed inside, attacked people and houses near to Westminster Abbey were burned down.

Carol singers going from house to house is as a result of carols being banned within churches. Carol singers in the middle ages took the word 'carol' literally – it means to sing and dance in a circle. As a result of so many services were spoiled by carol singers doing just this, that the Church at the time banned them and ordered the carol singers into the street.

The Christmas crib originated in medieval Italy. In 1223, Saint Francis of Assisi is said to have used a crib to explain to the local people of Assisi the Christmas story. The part played by animals in the Christmas story also comes from the early 13th century.

December 28th is 'Holy Innocents Day' or 'Childermass Day'. This is the day when King Herod ordered that all children under two years of age be killed. In some European towns it was the custom for a boy to be given charge of a town for one day after being made a bishop for just December 28th.

Elsewhere, children were reminded of Herod's cruelty by being beaten. December 28th was seen by many then as a day of bad luck. No-one would get married on that day; no-one would start a building on that day and Edward IV refused to be crowned on that day.

On Christmas Day the rich would have eaten goose and, with the king's permission, swan. If they could be caught, woodcock would also be eaten. To make a roast bird look even more tasty, medieval cooks used to cover the cooking bird with butter and saffron plant. This would give the cooked bird a golden colour by the time it was served. However, if the poor could afford it, the Church had a fixed price of 7 pence for a ready cooked goose. An uncooked goose would cost 6 pence – about a day's wages.

Venison from deer would also be on the menu. The poor would not be allowed to eat the best parts of a deer. However, in keeping with the spirit of Christmas, a decent lord might let the poor have what was left of the deer. These parts were known as the deer's 'umbles'. These were the heart, liver, tongue, feet, ears and brains. Mixed with whatever else a cook could get, they were made into a pie. Therefore, the poor would eat 'umble pie'.

In Medieval England mince pies were filled with all sorts of shredded meat along with spices and fruit. This recipe only changed in Victorian times when the shredded meat was left out.

Christmas puddings in Medieval England were spicy porridge and known as 'frumenty'. This was considered a real treat. It was made of thick porridge (or boiled wheat). Currants and dried fruit were stirred in. The yolks of eggs were also added and, if available, spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg. The mixture was left to cool and set before being served.

A less than Christian practice at this time and found only really in the countryside was the practice of killing a wild boar, cutting off its head, and offering it to the goddess of farming so that you would have a good crop in the following year.

Christmas Day was also a 'quarter day'. This meant that the poor had to pay their rent on this day!

'Mumming' was also practiced at Christmas. This was where actors performed plays and dances in villages or castles. Mystery plays were also performed in which the story of Christ was told. King Herod would be in a mystery play and he would be the equivalent of the villain in a modern pantomime.

On Boxing Day, the poor received money from their lords and masters in hollow clay pots with a slit in the top. These had to be broken to get the money out. These small clay pots were nicknamed 'piggies'.

Article courtesy of Ghost

Nineteen more were similarly treated after the battle of Hexham.

Captured rank and file were usually allowed to depart in peace after they had been disarmed, and there are no reliable records of the numbers slain in the fighting.

The passage of five centuries has blunted the memories of those terrible days. All wars are fearful, and civil wars are doubly so. The evidence that there is shows the Wars of the Roses were no exception. When in 1474 the Common House was considering the taxes to be raised to pay for the 1475 expedition to France, a member alluded to the miseries of the wars and the number of lawless people who, as he saw it, could well be recruited into an army to fight in France. He was speaking to an assembly which had first-hand experience of the Wars of the Roses, and there cannot have been any temptation to engage in hyperbole or exaggeration:

'Every man of this land that is of reasonable age hath known what trouble this Realm hath suffered. None hath escaped … yet there is many a great sore, many a perilous wound left unhealed, the multitude of riotous people which have at all times kindled the fire of this great division is so spread over all and every coast of this Realm, committing extortion, oppressions, robberies and other great mischief's ...'

(*Literae Cantuariensis III,* J. B. Sheppard

> What I write is great marvel. It is said that a certain woman laid hold of a ghost and carried him on her back into a certain house in presence of some men, one of whom reported that he saw the hands of the woman sink deeply into the flesh of the ghost as though the flesh were rotten and not solid but phantom flesh.

(ed.), Rolls series London 1889.)

In June 1483, Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, spoke in similar terms to the Great Council, adding that more men had been killed in battle during King Edward IV's reign than during the whole of the Hundred Years War. This was an obvious exaggeration, and there were no available figures for a comparison. It is enough however that the Duke was recording what all could readily accept; there had been some appalling slaughter in which very many people had died.

Article compiled from M. D. Miller, 'An analysis of the Wars of the Roses and the course which they took' (available at: www.warsoftheroses.co.uk).

Original text © Michael D. Miller

THE FEAST OF THE DEAD

by Jenn Scott

A specific medieval form of venerating the dead was the cult of relics. The remains of notably holy people, or even famous benefactors of the Church, were displayed at their death. They were regarded as saints and the people wanted to touch them to power of healing or for good fortune. Churches or abbeys commonly made themselves the centre of some relic cult, writing vitae or lives listing the wonders of the saint and his or her bits, alive and dead, as brochures to impress the pilgrims so that more would come again next year. Pilgrimages were the equivalent of seaside or foreign holidays in the Middle Ages and churches and abbeys made themselves very rich trading on the gullible travellers who came to venerate the relic.
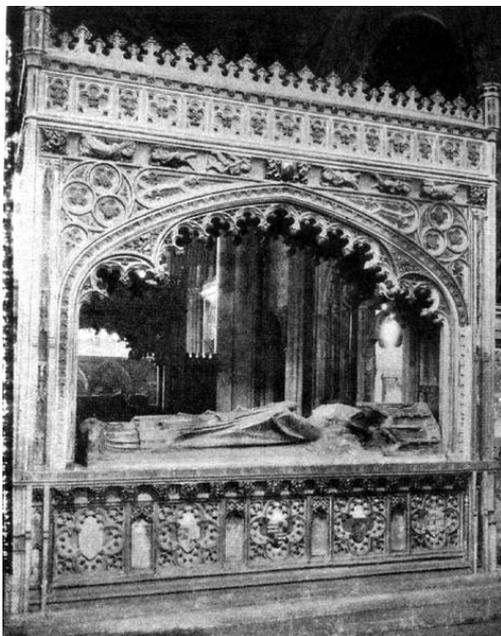
Classical Pagan religions taught that the soul remained with the body for three days before departing. Medieval people retained the idea that death was not instantaneous. They thought it was a slow process accompanying the corruption of the body, which actually began before death with the symptoms of aging. The soul of the dead remained with the body until it was fully decomposed, when it would leave it for pastures new, and

the dead person was indeed dead. Before then, there was a danger of haunting. This accounted for some medieval funerary customs.

In the uncertain period while the soul is preparing to leave the body for good, a dead man's wife thought it wise to remain faithful to her dead husband as if he were alive, lest jealousy should persist beyond the grave. A dead person's possessions had also to be retained as if he were alive, in case he should haunt anyone who tried to dispose of them. Until the body had decomposed, it might be re-animated to knock on your door late at night. One way of ensuring that such horrors never happened was to make sure the proper liturgy was said to appease the spirit of the deceased.

There was a belief that dead people in the intermediate stage still needed feeding and, if food was not offered, again the mouldering corpse might come to get it. Putting food in a grave is distinctly non-Christian, as is commemorating a dead man by consuming a meal on his grave, a common practice in some Pagan religions. Bowls and dishes containing prepared foods, wine glasses and pots are all found in medieval graves like those in Cologne cathedral, the pots and vessels still containing the bones of the animals constituting the food. Bones of pigs, hare, birds, cows, and deer, as well as walnuts, hazelnuts, grain, snails and mussels, and traces of honey, and various brews and decoctions have all been found. Pagan burial practices like these were deeply rooted in the customs of the people and lasted on into Christian times. Many of them are concerned with the belief that the soul of the deceased continued to live in or about the tomb.

The practice of eating meals on graves in memory of a dead person became the fashion in the late Empire, about the time that Christianity was victorious. Depictions of it occur in the catacombs. Archaeological discoveries offer evidence of such practices. Excavations made in a Christian cemetery of the fourth or fifth century at Tarragona shows signs of these Pagan banquets for the dead. Four hundred years later Saint Boniface was still warning about it, and ducts for the passing of food to the dead were even built into graves from the fourth to the sixth centuries. Though prelates constantly decried it, the serving of a meal to the dead persisted even in monasteries into the high Middle Ages. A Pagan fashion of the late Empire contin-

St Sebastian:
A day in the life of a Martyr

'St Sebastian'. Anonymous (14th century)

Parish Church of S. Giovanni Battista, Magliano (Tuscany, Italy). Fresco.

'Martyrdom of St Sebastian' (c. 1500). Bartolomeo di Giovanni (1465–1510)

Walker Art Gallery (Liverpool). Oil on panel. Scomparto di predella from the Chiesa di Sant'Andrea a Camoggiano.

'St Sebastian and St Fabian' (1475–1500). Anonymous (Spain) (15th century)

The Hermitage (St Petersburg, Russia). Oil and tempera on panel.
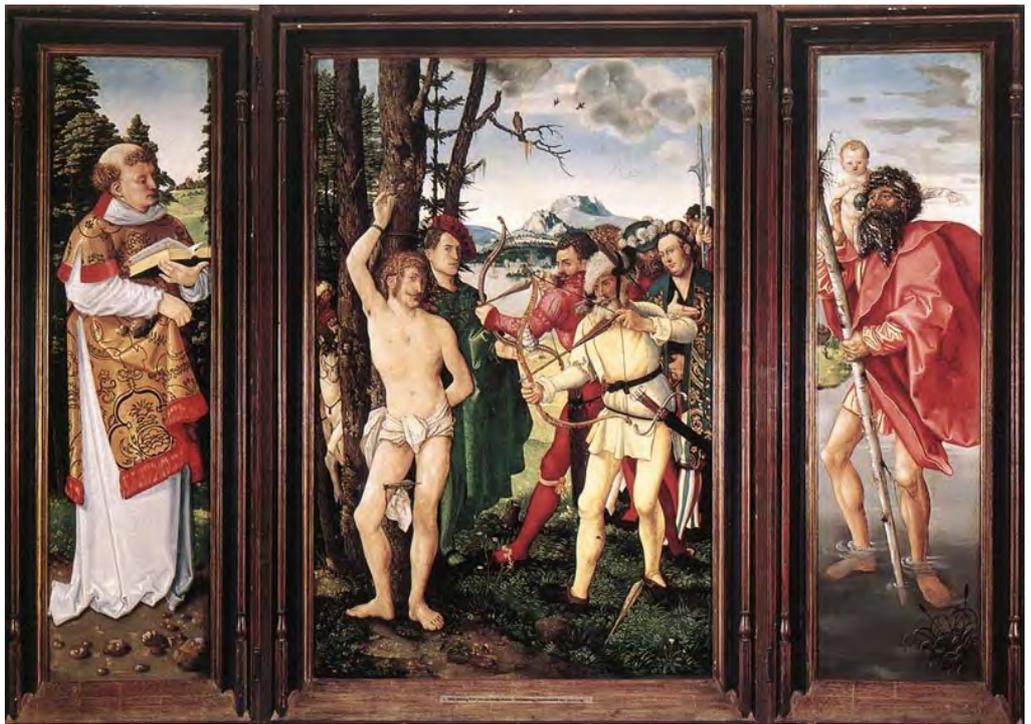
(Above right) St Sebastian Altarpiece (1507). Hans Baldung-Grien (1484/5–1545)

Germanisches National museum, Nuremberg. Oil on wood.

'Frescos in the Cappella San Sebastiano' (1484). Baleison Giovanni (late 15th century)

Marmora (Cuneo, Italy). Detail of main altar showing the martyrdom of St Sebastian.

'St Sebastian' (1476). Antonello da Messina (1430–1479)

Staatliche Gemäldegalerie (Dresden, Germany). Tavola per l'altare di San Rocco nella chiesa di San Giuliano, Venezia.

CUT, HACK, SLASH

THE BRUTAL EVIDENCE OF ENGLISH MEDIEVAL WARFARE

By Tee Gilmore

What can I say? I'm sure everyone is aware of the efficiency of medieval weapons and how deadly they proved to be, but it's not often that actual evidence turns up to prove just how efficient they were.

The first mass burial relating to an armed conflict on English soil has recently been excavated and, for once, the publishing timescale has not fallen within the normal archaeological boundaries (i.e. one decade), which means that we get to debate what these findings mean (editor's note: I have attempted to remedy this situation by sitting on this article for three years …). This burial pit was found by accident during the extension of Towton Hall, Yorkshire. From a mixture of archaeological evidence and documentary records, the mass grave was accurately dated to the Battle of Towton, which took place on Palm (or Bloody) Sunday, 1461.

A minimum of 37 individuals were excavated and, because we are dealing with the limits of a rescue operation and normal archaeological law (i.e. the most interesting part of your site is either under the spoil heap or lies just outside the limits of your trench!), some of that number consist of disarticulated remains. But do not be downhearted!, plenty of information has been yielded by the remaining individuals. I will start with the basic information before dealing with the interesting pathology and weapon-related trauma, which I am sure is the main reason you are reading this article!

Basic physical information

Sexing proved to be fairly straightforward as all individuals were assessed as male using the sex traits in the skull and pelvis s guidelines. Age at death was much harder to determine. Some individuals were fairly easy to age as they had not finished growing. For older individuals, however, the age ranges are only approximate.

Stature was assessed and the individuals were seen to be slightly taller than other contemporary populations, but that did also al-low for the odd smaller person to sneak in. The height range was from 5 ft 3 in to 6 ft 0 in.

Fig. 1 Uppermost of mass grave. Towton 13 lies in the centre of the picture.

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER MCNAUGHT

Pathology

Now, for the interesting part – the pathology. However, although these skeletons were excavated from a mass burial pit dating to the Battle of Towton, we should not leap to the conclusion that they were killed during the battle. They could have died afterwards due to infection. It is hard to determine the cause of death in most situations, and all the injuries that are described are only what has affected the bone. No soft tissue injuries or illnesses can be detected on the bones, but must be considered when dealing with skeletal remains.

Compared to other populations, such as the male skeletons from Wharram Percy (a deserted mediaeval village in Yorkshire), there is a relatively low frequency of dental decay or caries. However, on one skeleton, Towton 8, there was an interesting pattern of wear. A groove was worn into the upper incisors – possibly linked to the running of a string (a bow string?) across the teeth daily. Any archers care to hypothesize about this?

Not surprisingly, the main kind of pathology present on these individuals comprised fractures and other traumatic lesions. It is possible to differentiate between the different kind of weapon used from the type of

MEET YOUR ANCESTORS?

In this section, some of the individual skeletons from the Towton Battle are discussed with their wounds. In the majority of situations, due to the limitations of dealing with skeletons, it is often hard to state the cause of death. Therefore, unless the wounds definitely caused death, i.e. decapitation, cause of death will not be mentioned because the individual could have died from other causes, not just the injuries – infection being the most likely cause.

Towton 1

This was probably one of the last bodies to be placed in the mass grave, due to its location at the top.

We have an adult male, aged somewhere between 26–35 years old.

Four skull wounds are present, all wounds issued prior to death. The first wound consists of a large blade wound cut through the top of the skull, delivered from the front.

The second wound consists of another blades wound close to left ear, again administered from the front, this time from the left-hand side.

Diagram – anterior view

The third wound could well be the worst. It consists of a large blade wound, through the right upper jaw and palate and ending in the right lower jaw. It is believed that this blow was administered from the front right.

The final wound present consists of a blunt force wound on the left lower jaw and guess what? He was hit from the front again.

Poor guy – but luckier from some!

Towton 6

This young adult came off better than others. He is aged between 16–20 and only had two skull wounds issued

injury present on the skeleton.

The first kind were that produced by a blunt force. They are often variable in nature and are present as either crushing blows or wounds with a margin that relates to the weapon shape. The kind of weapons that would produce these kinds of injuries include hammers, staffs, maces and sword pommels.

The second kind were blade injuries. This type of injury leaves very characteristic marks on the bone. They result from a sharp force trauma and a characteristic eburnation or polishing is present on the would surface. They can be split into two main types: (i) the stab; and (ii) the cut. A stab wound is generally deeper than it is wide, and is often described as a puncture wound with eburnated margin. A cut wound is similar to a stab wound, but is wider than it is deep and the lesion has one burnished edge and one roughened edge. These injuries would have resulted from the use of swords, daggers and poleaxe blades, amongst others.

The third kind of wound is the lesion caused by puncture by a projectile. These are also fairly distinctive. Depending on the velocity with which the projectile hit the body, there are fairly distinctive entry and exit wounds, with often flaking around the wound. In situations like this, these wounds would have resulted from flesh-piercing arrows, crossbow bolts and bodkin arrowheads.

Looking at the postcranial skeletal material, there are a total of 43 perimortem blunt and sharp force injuries, with sharp injuries being the most common, numbering 37. The most common injuries present are those re-

sulting from parrying reaction; however, there are other injuries present that occur over the rest of the skeleton, including the neck, shoulder and buttocks.

The majority of trauma was exhibited on the cranium, however, the majority of which

Fig. 2 Towton 6, second wound.

required some kind of reconstruction to determine how many lesions were present. Twenty-six out of 28 craniums examined related to a complete skeleton. Nine of these individuals exhibited antemortem trauma, most likely inflicted from a previous battle. A total of 16 wounds of this nature were recognized, 7 of which resulted from a sharp force and 9 from a blunt force.

Cranial perimortem traumatic injuries were present on 27 of the craniums, with a total of 113 wound, of which 73 were from sharp wounds and 12 were puncture wounds.

The blade wounds tended to occur in the front and back of the head, and vary in strength of expression from small nicks to one that completely bisects the face. The blunt force wounds tended to occur more on the left side of the skull, which could indicate combat on foot, facing an opponent. One individual received three blunt wounds from a poleaxe spike in the superior-posterior aspect of the skull, which means

prior to death.

The first wound is a fairly minor one, consisting of a small nick just behind the right ear, and was probably inflicted from behind.

The second wound is the nasty one. This nearly bisects the skull vault and would have been administered from behind (see Fig. 2).

Diagram – posterior view
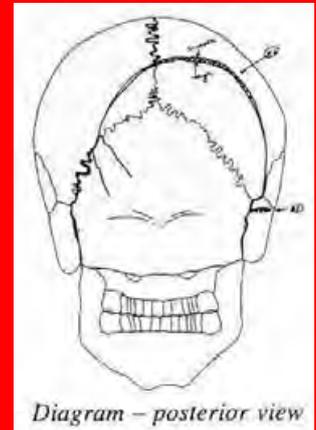
Towton 8

This is one of the old fogeys of the sample, as he's aged 46–50 years. He suffered from a middle-ear infection and plenty of activity related wear on the front incisors.

Only one traumatic injury is present. It was created from a blunt force weapon and is located behind the left eye. Due to the fact that at least 13 flakes of bone have separated from the rest of the cortex (upper surface of the bone), it probably resulted in severe damage to the brain.

Diagram – left lateral
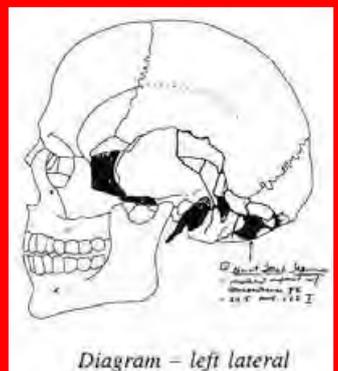
Towton 9

This is an interesting case due to the only skull wound present.

This individual was a robust and stocky male, aged somewhere between 36 and 45 years old.

It is believed that this individual was struck by the beak of a medieval war hammer because the square puncture wound matched perfectly

Concerning the ghost of Robert the son of Robert de Boltby of Kilburn, which was caught in a churchyard.

I must tell you that this Robert the younger died and was buried in a churchyard, but he had the habit of leaving his grave by night and disturbing and frightening the villagers, and the dogs of the village used to follow him and bark loudly. Then some young men of the village talked together and determined to catch him if they possibly could, and they came together to the cemetery. But when they saw the ghosts they all fled with the exception of two. Of these, one, called Robert Foxton, seized him at the entrance to the cemetery and placed him on the kirkstile with the other cried manfully, 'Keep him fast until I come to you.' The first one answered, 'Go quickly to the parish priest that the ghost may be conjured, for with God's help I will hold firmly what I have got until the arrival of the priest.' The parish priest made all haste to come, and conjured him in the name of the Holy Trinity and in the virtue of Jesus Christ that he should give an answer to his questions. And when he had been conjured he spoke in the inside of his bowels, and not with his tongue, but as it were an empty cask and he confessed his different offences. And when these were made known the priest absolved him but charged those who had seized him not to reveal his confession in any way; and henceforth as God willed he rested in peace.

It is said, moreover, that before his absolution he would stand at the doors of houses and at windows and walls as it were listening. Perhaps he was waiting to see if anyone would come out and conjure him and give help to him in his necessity. Some people say that he had been assisting and consenting to the murder of a certain man, and that he had done other evil things of which I must not speak in detail at present.

that he would have been lying on the floor at the time (see Fig. 3). Only two projectile injuries are present, which is surprising given that we know that longbows were used in this battle (like most mediaeval battles). Both injuries result from arrowheads, one a flesh-piercing one and the other an armour-piercing one.
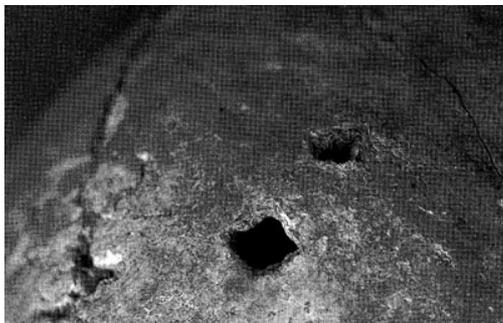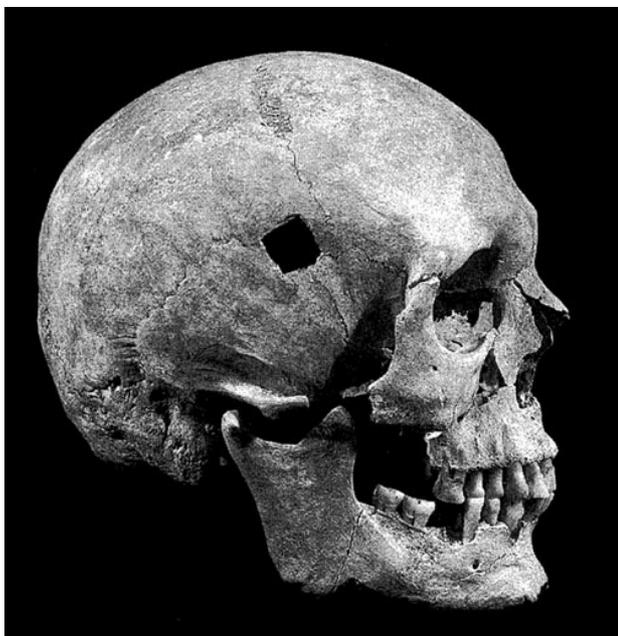
Conclusions

From the number of cranial injuries present, one could make an assumption that not many of these individuals were wearing helmets. There is also a minor number of projectile injuries, which is surprising, considering how the battle was enacted. It is possible that the individuals we are examining resulted from the rout down in the stream, as opposed to being from the first stage of the battle, with the arrow volleys.

The site report tries not to make any assumptions or conclusions about the nature of armour and weapons, but, due to some of the injuries present, we know how efficient mediaeval weapons were. There are no other excavations to compare this burial pit with.

The site report does include chapters on the different kinds of weaponry, but no discussion is really presented about how the battle could have been enacted from the injuries present on the skeletons.

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Fiorato, V., Boylston, A. and Knusel, C. (eds) (2001) *Blood Red Roses: The Archaeology of a Mass Grave from the Battle of Towton, AD 1461*. Oxbow Books.

with a contemporary example from the Leeds Armoury Museum (Fig. 4).
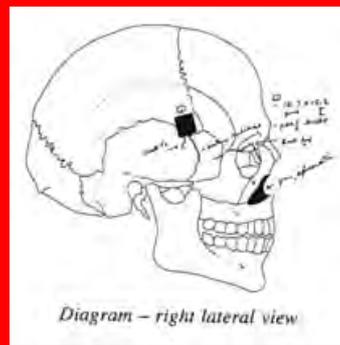
Diagram – right lateral view

Towton 23

This individual was the shortest adult male in the sample. Ageing criteria have determined an age of approximately 26–35 years.

This unlucky individual was unfortunate enough to receive three blade wounds – two form behind and the third one from above and behind, all located on the back of the skull.

However, he was probably finished off with a crushing blow behind the left eye and ear, also resulting in a broken jaw. Unlike the other blows, this one was administered from the front left-hand side.

The final injury present on the skeleton was a blade wound in the back of the left shoulder blade, again administered from behind.

'Death and the maiden' (1517). Hans Baldung-Grien.

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ued well into the Christian era. Feasting with the dead could not easily be stamped out.

Jacobus of Serugh, who died in 521 AD, advised Christians to prepare a banquet for the dead by all means, but in the church, not by the graveside. Thus it became the love feast or agape which originally accompanied the feeding of the spirit via the Eucharist, but, by the early middle ages, became an annual commemoration of the dead person – a 'deathday' party akin to our birthday parties. It was held by the side of the grave and the dead person was believed to be there in spirit, and so a place was set for them at the table. Guests addressed the empty chair as if the dead person occupied it. They were offered food and drink with the blessing. Food was then handed out to the poor as pittances. This meal was sometimes preceded by the

Eucharist but often was not and the clergy showed their disapproval by staying away. It would quite often degenerate into drunkenness and gluttony. It even extended into the professionals of the Church. The rules of Eynsham Abbey near Oxford, instructed monks to commemorate the anniversary of the death of its abbots each year by setting a place for him and offering him food, 'like a living monk', A pittance of old beer was also given to the poor. The funerary feast never disappeared entirely. Wakes are still held in Ireland. Friends and relatives of the deceased gather by the open coffin to eat and drink, and address the dead person as if alive. Even today, it is usual to serve a meal or buffet and a drink to the mourners at a funeral.

Bibliography

P Binidski. *Medieval Death*.

WORD SEARCH

In the following grid we have hidden the names of families involved in the Wars of the Roses. The list is to the right of the grid. How many can you find? There is no prize!

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E R D S C P Y T N D M E O C S T U K G L F
I T R K S U F C E L O D D E P C S T Y A D
V U L S L E W T W A R W I C K S E R O B N
M D E W L O S U T O T E R C K E U O W F N
E O N R H G F C F L O R E I S B B E D W P
P R I O R S K F L C N D U E S S V I C P M
L L O R R E A Y U P C N V I W R E L A A R
I R B H M T E T P S M U L I A E C W P E U
S T A Y S B H B M W E A P F L L E A T C T
F G H T E V P U U A S L H L R L B S E A L
P I N R H T L C M E V A I C A T E S B Y A
L M T I R U C K E B I V C N U C P A E R N
P E R A T C L I F F E A S H U A G H E R D
E X O B I S O N E N O R F O L K E F F I R
R E F N I W A G O O N I L W E R R B O U N
P R U O S T S H A T I G N A D T F R A L E
T R A V I R C A N S G E A R N I F T K Y C
E X E T E R E M R A I N A D O D D Y R N F
D E B R A L T U R P R A I N R P E E N R K
T O R M G E A S P K L Y N L O V E L L R S
R G O C U S E M E C N E R A L C A N L E T
N U R T O X F O R D E R A S T I C A L M E
P E S H U T H A C O N G E N M S T T T P O
G Y K E H A P P Y C H R I S T M A S A L L
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Beauchamp Beaufort Buckingham Catesby Clarence Exeter Gloucester Grey Hastings Howard Lovell March Morton Nevill Norfolk Northumberland Oxford Paston Percy Ratcliffe Rutland Salisbury Suffolk Stillington Stanley Stafford Shore Tudor Warwick Woodville

ANAGRAMS

Okay, as everyone else has done you good articles on death here is a set of anagrams of words connected with the process of dying in the medieval period (and the answers!). Unfortunately I couldn't make them all into words:

RED CAVA

GIFFEY

HATED

CADEY

T MOB

YOUR RAPT G

CLIER

ODBY

DEED CASE

VARGE

COME POSED

TRIPIS

GOTHS

WEAK

LE RANCH

Nearly all these words appear somewhere in the articles already written. Answers can be found at the bottom of the last page. *Sue*

Here endeth the Death bit.
Have a good Christmas!

Group News & Views

ENGLAND'S MILITARY LEADERSHIP

One of England's blessings is that she has never had an *offizierkorps,* or 'officer class' which was beyond civil control. I would advise reading H. L. Gray ('Incomes from land in England in 1436', *English Historical Review,* **XLIX**, 1934) and T. B. Pugh (*The Magnates Knights and Gentry in 15th-century England*) for an analysis of the 'officer class' who would have commanded and officered any military force in the 15th century. Trained in the use of arms, they would have raised soldiers and lead them on campaign. Giving the following figures:

- 50/60 Magnates income £1000 p.a. or more
- 200 richer Knights income £100 p.a. or more
- 1, 000 lesser Knights income £40 p.a. or less
- 1, 200 Squires income £20 p.a. or less
- 2, 000 Gentlemen income £20 p.a. or less

To our eyes, these incomes are ridiculously small. There was much less reliance in money than there is today, and many of the daily needs would have been supplied by the estate or farm. A yearly income of £1000 would have been a vast fortune, while £20 would still have been a comfortable income. Chief Justice Fortescue recorded that many a well-off Yeoman was prosperous on an annual income of £5.

These figures do not include the 'Captains' who cannot reliably be numbered. They were still important people in the military hierarchy, although they were seldom belted and dubbed knights. Some of them may have come from the numbers of Squires or Gentlemen, but some came from the rank and file, being promoted much as is a modern Sergeant-Major on account of their powers of leadership and outstanding personalities. Often they devoted their lives to war, and were highly skilled in the military art. Persons such as Matthew Fulk and Osberne Mundeford are mentioned in the pages of this work, and typical Captains will be found in Shakespeare's play 'King Henry V' in the persons of MacMorris, Fluellen (Llewellyn), Jamie and Gower. Wherever they came from, they were tried and trusted soldiers of great ability.

Often during the War in France they were put in charge of the garrison of a town. They should not be omitted from the ranks of capable military officers, even though they were normally to be found in junior ranks fighting alongside their soldiers.

Taken from an article from Wargames Research Group: Clive Barker and 'Saint Gerry'.

'THE BIG DEBATE I'

On the group's Internet forum (http://www.bucks-retinue.org.uk/bucksboard.html) the latest hot debate is on roles, kit levels and what the phrase 'Retinue' means in terms of what image we are aiming for. Andy Howes started it by suggesting that we think about our event personas.

In the interests of the debate being open to the whole group, not just the ones who regularly read the forum, I have copied the highlights of the debate here. Entries have been edited for reasons of space, as well as grammar and spelling. The full text would be just too long! Apologies to those whose words have been edited out.

The article to the left, supplied by Allan, might be useful in setting the scene when it comes to debates on kit levels within a 'Retinue'. It can be taken on its own merits or in conjunction with the debate here.

If anyone wishes to make any points in the newsletter, or write an article on the subject, I will publish them in the next issue of *SwanSong*, which will come out after the feast. *David Hemsley*

Andy Howes (start date: 2 December 2004)

Just thinking about next year and some of the things that I would like to try ... when we muster for instance I would like to be asking the same questions that appear on the muster rolls .. eg. name, profession, locale and what you're armed/armoured with. This would only be for when MOPS are around and maybe when we are just drilling rather than getting reading to fight ... dunno yet.

First of all your thoughts?

Secondly give me some idea of what you would be (this would also be useful for the public when they ask you questions). For example:

Master Howes (or Hewes, Houes, Haewes etc), Petty Captain (we aren't using Vintner any more) to Captain Howell of the Stafford Household. One time Reeve, Bailiff and Law Clerk and son of a well-to-do Wool merchant of the Staple. Armed with three quarter harness, sallet and bill and is able to use it (i.e. it fits me ... think of the Bridport muster).

Alex

Master Clark, apprentice to Master Tyrrell, our Lordship the Duke of Buckingham's personal armourer. Armed with a Sallet, Burgundian Arms and Breastplate and a Glave/Spear/Bill (dont know what the hell it is, its a bit of a mix)

Cleggy

Well, seeing as I wear my father's cognisance:

The son of a minor, impoverished knight in the north country, a minor vassal of His Grace of Buck-

ingham. Armed with, bill, glave, falchion, dagger & axe. Equipped with partial armour, e.g. sallet, bevor, chains, mitts & plackart, & jack (& a bad attitoood!)

Nev

Master Potter of the Shire (giggles) of Lincoln, son of a fairly wealthy merchant dealing mainly in copper and brass wear, taken into his Grace's service first at his manor in Bourne, Lincolnshire, from where I was recruited into his Grace's retinue under Captain Howell by a one time soldier of his Grace's employ, a Master Cuthbert, now resident somewhere in the north. Armed with two polearms, partial armour (breast and back munition arms, mitts), kettle hat and bevor.

David H

Some questions come to my mind about this idea:

1. Are you mustering a retinue – we'd all be known to the officers, wouldn't we? […]

2. Knowing nothing about who was recruited or how for such things as garrison duty and personal retinues, what's the likely geographical spread of soldiers in, say Stafford castle garrison? Would they be all locals, or could they be from all over the country? […]

3. Can you give any guidelines as to the sort of family I ought to be from? That is, if I'm part of the duke's personal retinue, am I more or less likely to be a son of a prosperous merchant, a minor noble or a pig farmer, for instance? If I choose 'professional archer' what IS that? Where socially would I most likely have come from?

Andy Howes

Hmmm, some fair points raised with respect to the questions.

I was principally interested in the idea to start with and to get people to think up something thats fairly reasonable and accurate.

We are trying to portray a retinue rather than a militia etc, therefore my view is that there would be a fair smattering of more wealthy soldiery and most of them would have jobs or roles within the Stafford household in a number of capacities.

In this respect I see both rich and poor mixing together but geographically from different parts of the Staffords estates. If we have been called to-gether 'arming for warre' as such then there is a good chance that we wouldn't know each other and so a muster roll becomes more useful.

However, realistically, I think men from the same area would be probably kept together … more for logistics than anything else.

Incidentally, although this was for the fighting stock of our group, I don't see any reason why the other folk shouldn't equally have some idea what their job/role would be in a military camp and their 'civilian' job too.

I'm hoping this will lead to a little more background interest and give people a reason to have certain other props.... My view is that if people do think about their background, then that will lead to some other skills and props that not only provide interest to the MOPS but also to everyone else....

So ... we are in need of a number of jobs to be filled and are currently desperate for a carpenter amongst other things.

David H

[…] those of us playing gentlemen and minor nobil-ity will probably have brought one or two men with them (who may be employees, may be peers, could be family), probably have a horse, maybe two, probably have a squire/groom, possibly have a cart, I guess will have brought some provi-sions ...

Nev

[…] it would not be uncommen for a master crafts-men to have a number of journeymen at varying levels and two or more apprentices who the jour-neymen would help train. This does of course de-pend greatly on the wealth and status of the mas-ter in question […]

Cat

This is all very well for the blokes, but what about us women?

Vikki

From this it would appear I'm Mistress Clegg and married to a minor noble. Perhaps I should start bringing me posh kit to events.

Darren

Unless you just want to be his mistress?

David H

[…] Would a gentleman bring his wife on campaign? We know from the Paston letters that Margaret stayed at home to look after the estates while John Paston I was away. More likely that he would bring a servant, or possibly have picked up a mistress!

Nev

This raises an interesting point, are we a retinue on campaign or a retinue merely moving between parts of the Stafford estate? My point being if we are moving between say duties at one castle to another its likely we would have our women-folk with us be they wives, mistresses, daughters, de-pendants, etc. The other question I'd ask is this, wouldn't it be common to have unmarried women in the camp performing jobs such as seemstress washer women, etc., or married women of higher status travelling with the retinue for protection?

Cleggy

[…] where does 'gentry' end & 'nobility' begin? I would have thought I would be of the gentry rather than the nobility...?

[EDITOR'S NOTE: There is a side discussion run-ning from here, based on Cleggy's last question. I don't have space to include it!]

Cat

Nev has an interesting point. I've recently finished reading Great Medieval Households and the amount of traveling was quite considerable. Anne Stafford travelled extensively during the Wars of the Roses (she's Harry's aunt). I think it's quite feasable that we could portray a household on the move.

I think it would be fun to as it would be a side of medieval life not many of us have explored before and could be a good plot line for a whodunnit?

[EDITOR's NOTE: Discussion now on sumptuary laws and social classes. Also omitted for space.]

Simon Lane

[…] I think Cat's idea on being a household on the move rather than moving to a conflict is a great idea since it opens up the flexibility of what we can do. […]

Andy Howes

[…] The main idea here is for people to have some understanding of what it is they would do within a camp and be able to play it effectively, convinc-ingly and most important of all, have some fun whilst doing it.

This includes the non combatants as already stated in my posting and would be an excellent basis to form storylines for future events.

I think the key here is to maintain a balance that provides us with a convincing mixture of low- to medium-level class of characters.

Its almost as if we should draw up a list of jobs/roles and for people to apply for them? This would obviously have to depend on a level of kit and/or availability of the job.

One caveat here, I'm not for one minute expecting 'pretend social status' to be used to make anyone do something they don't want to […].

Nev

[…] If we start 'assigning' jobs/status to people we might (and this is purely speculative) find that problems arise when those portraying lower status characters want to get better/higher status kit which either means they're stopped from wearing it during the day […] or we have to find someone else to portray that role.

Sue

There are going to be some events (eg, the battle events) where it will be important to maintain a story of a retinue and for everyone to have such a role and keep to it all day. It wouldn't be appropriate in these circumstances for people to wander around in higher status kit without an apparent function within the group.

However, there are other events (e.g. Festival of History, etc) where there is less of a need for a background story and differences in kit would not need to be specifically explained. […]

Darren

I think if you want to get 'posher kit' you have to come up with a new 'role' to fit the kit.

This 'role' doesn't have to be involved with any role playing or plot, but fits in. I think more thought could go into ordering new kit, like 'what am I at-tempting to portray?'.

Personally I think we should be get-ting better kit, not necessarliy 'posher' kit. You will look better in new 'well cut' kit in good material regardless of what 'station' you are.

By kit I not only mean costume but accessories as well. Someone wear-ing peasant clothing with a 'jewel-encrusted dagger' is wrong just as much as a noble dressed like a tradesman.

David H

Compiled from several sources:

Roles – ideas based on what works elsewhere:

These can be fluid – people do not have to play the same persona all the time although with the exception of women who change to fight it would be better (easier?) to stick to one for the weekend.

Roles only really apply for weekend

when public there – exception perhaps being cooking but posh people would have an obligation to help with all of those things when public not there.

Watches – three watches for men so all men would be busy. (We have tried this. It would be good to be kept up with.) […]

There should be various stations:

(1) for women: sewing/washing, cooking, entertainment (drinks, games, music […]) and gentry – who even if sitting should be prepared to talk about what they might be doing (and not round the campfire – if you're going to wear the clothes then you should be prepared to accept some of the restrictions that go with that).

2) other ones – which might include female hangers-on, wives, archers (scope for a range of social roles depending on age and status here), men at arms(or whatever you call them) – for those that don't have the amount of plate, clothes, desire to play posh people this could include armour area, knights – the commander types, their squires – something for the younger members who can't fight yet. This would also include gentry women and their hangers on including children, nursemaids, servants... ostlers – horses, etc.

Each station would have a head of sorts – head archer, master cook and so on. These people would be in charge of their area and people including set up and take down of props tents etc. These roles could again be fairly fluid – same person does not remain head cook for ever.

The problem is that someone needs to be in charge of allocating roles etc. The captain? The committee?

One idea is that people should indicate areas of interest for perhaps the season and then roles could be allocated within that – if we find that all the women want to be posh then it's time for personal charm and bribery along the lines of but how could we live without your cooking, washing etc ... but/or take it in turn!

Nev

Interesting approach to the problem and I do like the idea as it seems to be an extension (or rather a more formal extension) of what we do already. The only potential stumbling block I can see is, as pointed out, [is] who picks the 'leaders' (for want of a better term) of each group, personally I think it needs to be left to the captain of the day […] at least then the 'leader' can be picked from the attending membership on the day.

Allan

As suggested previously if more historic role-play is what people want then we need to have a structure to each event day to stage set show and tell, and other talks (thus removing the 'please can you talk about arms and armour forever syndrome' with a timetable.

Other groups follow set rules – you must be in the society for at least 3 years then you can stop being midden clearer, I would be interested in knowing how you put any such structure into place without ordering people. In actuality it isn't enough to have good kit, you need to have done research.

What would be nice is to know how many people within the group (and I mean the Buckinghams) feel we have too much posh, or even if the mix is wrong, and if so where and how?

The way for an individual or group to evolve is always to look what is being done well, what can be improved and what can be added/taken away. To improve events not just for the public but also for ourselves.

Also for employers, whether EH or anyone else we must be unique in what we do otherwise why should they hire us?

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Allan's question about 'posh kit' opened a whole new aspect to the debate – important, but I'm now running out of space …]

Nev

[…] we keep using the phrase 'posh kit' what do we actually mean by posh? At what level does an item become posh? this is something else we're going to have to contend with if we go down this route, where are the boundries?

Darren

I want to add, make sure your accessories match the level of your kit.

Someone in the 'sack of shite' clothes with an elaborate dagger looks wrong, as does someone dressed as a gentleman with no pouch or a sword without a scabbard.

Its not only clothes, but the overall look.

THE HAPPY ENDING

Having indulged in rather a lot of macabre prose and gruesome and graphic graphics, it seems entirely overdue to feature a little bit of happy optimism in these pages, and this I shall now do with a couple of pictures of a rather more positive nature.

The first shows the latest addition to the growing list of future re-enactors, Katherine Elizabeth Scott-Sargeant, born 14/09/04. Oh, and that's her mother, Jenn, with her.

I am unsure whether this actually qualifies as a gruesome image … Marcus in Malta, apparently 'working'. Nice work!