

# The Swan Song



THE STAFFORD NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 13, FEBRUARY 2003

## 2003 EVENTS

### By our Weekend Pastimes correspondent

Well, the waiting is now over. For the first time, in full date order ... we have, this year's event list (details subject to change, alteration, last-minute cock-up, terms and conditions apply, see your nearest weapons dealer for special offers, not applicable to members under 5' tall in South Normanton).

#### 7–9 March: *Re-enactors market\**

At the Sports Connexion, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, near Coventry. See page 7 for a map, or got to [www.reenactorsmarket.co.uk](http://www.reenactorsmarket.co.uk)

#### 11–12 April: *Lincoln Castle*

L&M training weekend. Attendance depends on interest shown in the group. Please get in touch with a committee member if you wish to attend (names opposite).

#### 4–5 May (Sun–Mon): *Holdenby Hall*

Federation training weekend + battle. Venue is in Northamptonshire, not far from M1 j18. A chance to try out our camp layout and some new ideas for the season.

#### 10–11 May: *Cressing Temple\**

"The Templars Fayre." Roman and Tudor fayre. Not an event – for interest only.

#### 25–26 May (Sun–Mon): *Kenilworth Castle*

Living history and fighting. Event run by Fauconbergs.

#### 21–22 June: *Tutbury Castle*

Our first solo event. Living history in our own inimitable style.

#### 12–13 July: *Battle of Tewkesbury*

The usual market and big battle event. This

year we plan to put on more of a display around our camp.

#### 19–20 July: *Stafford/Belgium\*\**

The Battle of Shrewsbury at Stafford Castle. There is also an event in Belgium to which we have been invited.

#### 26–27 July: *St Aubin\*\**

Possible battle re-enactment at St Aubin, near Fougères (close to St Malo) in Brittany. See article on page 8. Negotiations are ongoing as to our part in this event, but we are hoping to make it into something more than just the usual run-of-the-mill.

#### 9–10 August: *Stoneleigh*

L&M display event. Near Kenilworth, just off A46.

#### 16–17 August: *Battle of Bosworth*

Our first mass attendance at this regular battle re-enactment for several years.

#### 24–27 August (Sun–Wed): *Dartmouth Castle*

Our only solo event for English Heritage. We will be running a murder mystery, then staying on for a couple of days extra. C15th.

#### ? September: *Battle of Blore Heath*

Usual end of season beer and battle. Last year the Sunday provided the best fighting of 2002 – let's see what 2003 will bring!

#### ? December: *Tamworth Castle\*\**

Possible post-Christmas day event.

\* = market or similar – not an event.

\*\* = event not confirmed at time of writing. Further information provided when available.

### WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?

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Pages 2–5: Feast 2003  
Pages 6–7: Stafford archives  
Page 8: The Battle of St Aubin  
Page 9: Brigandine sleeves?  
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#### The committee for 2003:

It might be useful for everyone to know who their committee is this year, and what they will be doing. Contact details provided where appropriate.

#### Chris Howell: Chairman

Mark Hewitt: Secretary, Webmaster  
tel: 01785 606625  
[M.A.Hewitt@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:M.A.Hewitt@staffs.ac.uk)

Darren Brown: Treasurer  
tel: 01785 620477  
[darren.c.brown@ntlworld.com](mailto:darren.c.brown@ntlworld.com)

Phil Howell: Event booking  
tel: 01889 502622  
[phowell@caerleon2000.freemove.co.uk](mailto:phowell@caerleon2000.freemove.co.uk)

Andy Howes: Event co-ordinator  
tel: 07734 738091  
[andrew.howes@ntlworld.com](mailto:andrew.howes@ntlworld.com)

Allan Harley: Event developer  
tel: 01773 540175  
[Allan.Harley@sca.com](mailto:Allan.Harley@sca.com)

Andy Horsfield: Logistics  
[scandal@suiveris.freemove.co.uk](mailto:scandal@suiveris.freemove.co.uk)

Dave Hemsley: Publishing, *Swan-Song* editor  
tel: 01773 528801/07816 609464  
[david@purpleardvark.freemove.co.uk](mailto:david@purpleardvark.freemove.co.uk)

Over the forthcoming year, Darren will be wearing a Rimmer-style hologram "H" so that he fits in with the new committee.

Next issue April.

# DUKE HARRY'S DIARY

*What have we been eating so far this year?*

## FEAST 2003 LLANGOLLEN YHA 17-19 JANUARY

An event in pictures ... thanks again to the So Solid (Cooking) Crew, especially Kathryn and Jo; and everyone who made an ass of themselves (sometimes literally) in the name of entertainment. Thanks to Allan, Jayne, Kate, Simon, Vicky and my editor for the pictures.

### FRIDAY NIGHT



(Above) Paul gives thanks for liittle giiiiirrrlls;

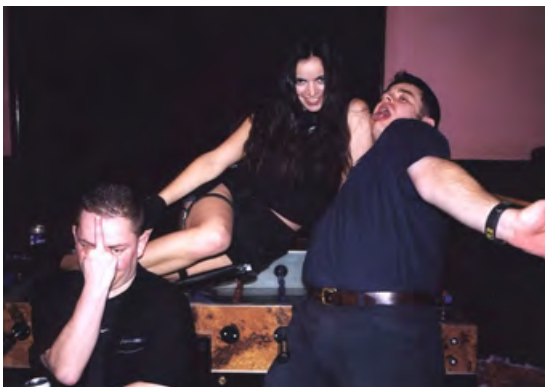
(right) Lara Russel + Lou Daxx;

(below left) Simons behaving badly;

(below) Amanda serenely ignoring all cameras.

### The Wrecking Crew At Large

### Llangollen YHA Feast 2003



The bottom corner  
(ahem)



# Duke Harry's Diary



## SATURDAY NIGHT



Finally, above, the answer to the age-old question: Does Petz swallow?

Thanks to the entertainers, including Sam "Jewel of Shropshire" and Mumsey "Belle of the East (Midlands)" for their patriotic R'n'B Dance of the Seven Fantasies.

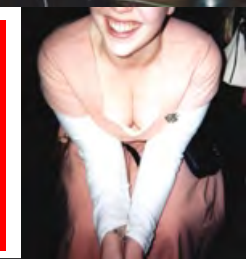
Simon Clegg: you might need surgery for that dislocated jaw.



# Duke Harry's Diary



I know of several people who aren't going to look at Allan the same way ...



# Duke Harry's Diary



NORMAL SERVICE  
WILL BE RESUMED AS  
SOON AS POSSIBLE

And that is it for the feast. I hope you enjoyed it. My retinue did, what they can remember anyway. Here's to a good season in 2003.

HARRE BOCKINGHAM

(Left) Sunday night and Buckingham's "residue". (Thanks to Amanda for the pun)

# Archives



My editor has been ferreting through his archives and has found these gems. I am unsure as to whether they should actually see the light of day, but I'll let you be the judge, as they say, of that.



Photos from the following events:  
*Battle of Tewkesbury* July 1991  
*Ashby-de-la-Zouch Castle*  
26–27 September 1992

*Harvington Hall*  
27–28 March 1993  
*Dudley Castle*  
Easter, 1993

I count seven active, or semi-active members of the present Wrecking Crew in these photos ...

See how many you can find (but no points for spotting Allan!).

All contributions to this section welcome.

## SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF 15TH CENTURY

## MILITARY LIFE RE-ENACTED IN ASHBY CASTLE

# The battle to keep history alive



**PRACTICE:** Brothers Mark and Guy Cuthbert hone their skills framed in a castle window

by Bob Walker

THE sights, sounds, and smells of military life in 1475 were vividly recalled at Ashby Castle.

Members of the Livery and Maintenance Living History Society brought to life the actions of a recruiting party during the reign of King Edward IV.

Called Mustering the King the two-day event re-enacted the work of a recruiting party training soldiers for the Duke of Buckingham's army as it planned an invasion of France to regain large areas of territory lost to the French crown.

**'The castle grounds provide a perfect backdrop for these kind of events.'**

Mrs Diane Coggins.

Two days of detailed reconstruction took place at the castle with Living History Society members recreating aspects of military life of the times.

Many skills at arms were performed with archery and swordplay thrilling the crowds.

An authentic recreation of a military camp was constructed on the castle grounds with society members sleeping under canvas overnight.

Giant cauldrons of stew were cooked over open fires, and a military "wedding" took place with an unwilling 12-year-old bride being betrothed to a 40-year-old soldier.

The two-day event ended with a skirmish between opposing military groups with cannon booming across the castle grounds.

Mrs Diane Coggins, Head Custodian of Ashby Castle, said the event was one of the most authentic re-enactments ever seen at the castle.

"The castle grounds provide a perfect backdrop for these kind of events," said Mrs Coggins.

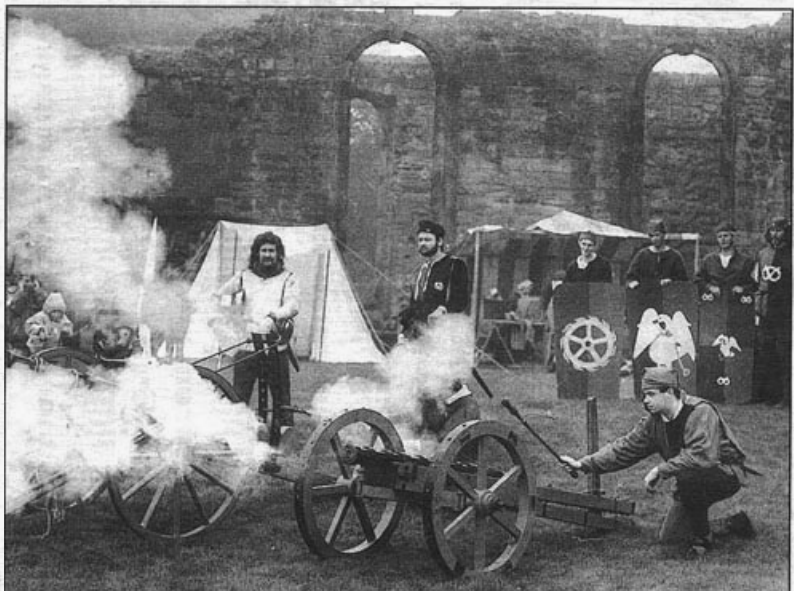
"This was one best events of its kind ever seen at Ashby Castle," she said.

Ashby Castle is one of few English Heritage sites still privately owned.

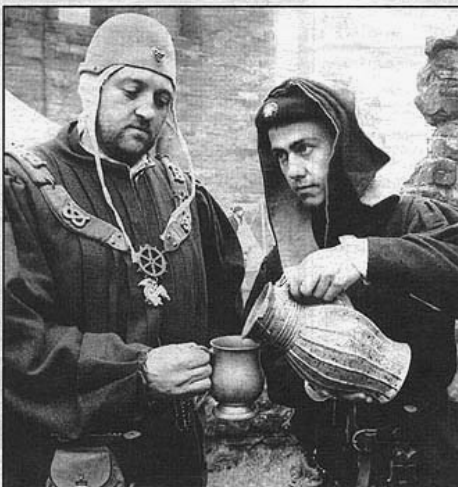
### Escaped

The Hasting family who occupied the castle as it came under siege for 12 months from Oliver Cromwell's forces in 1649 still to this day own the freehold lease on the castle.

When the castle walls were blown up by Cromwell's forces, the Hasting family escaped to Castle Donington Park which is now home to the Donington Race Circuit.



**BIG NOISES:** Members of the Livery and Maintenance Living History Society firing cannons at Ashby Castle



**REFRESHMENT:** Captain Paul Hitchin receives a cupful of cider from his "servant" James Wilson



**PERSUADER:** Billman Bill Withers recruits local peasant Steve Lees for the army by using the tried and true method of the times

## Mustering armies of the past

■ Mustering the King re-enacted military training for soldiers recruited to the army of the Duke of Buckingham in 1475.

■ Members of the Livery and Maintenance Living History Society recreated military life during the reign of King Edward IV.

■ While at camp the soldiers were trained in archery, swordplay, and the use of cannon and siege equipment.

■ While camping under canvas they enjoyed a traditional stew cooked from an original recipe of the times.

■ The stew, cooked in giant cauldrons, was a mixture of onion, mushrooms, fresh herbs, and several kinds of meat.

■ Maidens of the day were available for marriage immediately they were considered big enough to wear a veil.

## RE-ENACTOR'S MARKET 7-9 MARCH 2003



Opening times:

Friday 12-6; Saturday 10-5; Sunday 10-4.



Write-up by the *Leicester Mercury* 30 September 1993. The *Mercury* is famous for its ability to misreport things, but hasn't done too badly here.

Although it says *Livery and Maintenance*, in reality it was mainly a Stafford Household event, in keeping with the leadership's illusions of grandeur of the time.

Note the ingredients in the stew: "several kinds of meat" ... hamster, badger, hedgehog? ... well, the reason they don't say is because we didn't know either. Dark culinary days indeed. Those who joined recently, think yourself lucky!

# THE BATTLE OF ST AUBIN, 1488

By Allan Harley

For your education and enjoyment we bring you a lesser-known battle from our period. The battle of St Aubin du Cormier was the last and most bloody battle in the fight to retain Breton independence from France. This is one that we may be re-enacting later in the year.

## Background

In 1487, Francois II, the aging Duke of Brittany, fought for Breton independence against his French overlords. This resulted in a defeat for the Bretons and control resting with the French crown. Neither side was satisfied and a year later a French army descended on Brittany to eradicate the dukedom once and for all.

Francis appealed to many nations for help, one of which was England. Edward Woodville raised a force of around 700 men from the Isle of Wight to come to the Bretons' aid. We can find no definite record of the composition of his forces, but one source gives 300 archers and 100 men-at-arms at St Aubin (around 300 were lost to skirmishes with the French once they arrived at St Malo), while we also know that in 1486 he had taken 200 men-at-arms and 100 archers on crusade to Spain to fight the Moors (see separate article). They landed at St Malo and marched to join the Breton army camped at a place called La Rencontre (the meeting), situated to the north-west of St Aubin.

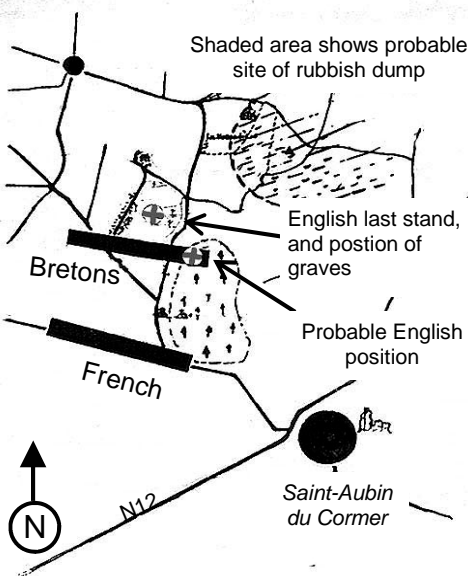
The Breton army was a mixed force of approximately 11,500 men, which included around 3,500 Gascons and Spanish, 800 Germans and Flemish, the English troops and their own, under overall command of Marshall Jean de Rieux. Many of the Breton troops were poorly equipped and trained.

The French had an army of 15,000, which included 5,000–6,000 Swiss pikemen, and a fearsome artillery train, under overall command of Louis de Tremoille.

## The battle

This can be divided into a number of phases.

*Phase 1:* The Bretons and Allies were drawn up in battle array with the English troops on the right of the line, the Germans and allies in the centre and the Breton troops on the left. As a ruse a number of the peasant Breton archers (around 1,700) were given English liveries to wear, to try and capitalise on the reputation of the English. At midday the French started moving into position from out of the woods opposite. This was the time for the Bretons to attack before the French could form an array themselves but the opportunity was missed, possibly because the Breton commanders believed their soldiers could only defend. After some time the French organised themselves and deployed their troops.



*Phase 2:* The French, seeing the "English" on both flanks, advanced on what they considered the weaker centre. As they came into range they were met with a withering arrow storm that forced them to withdraw and reconsider their options.

*Phase 3:* The French brought all of their artillery forward and opened a furious cannonade on the allies' line, especially the centre. The commander of the mercenaries in the centre seeing the casualties his men were taking ordered them to withdraw to shelter from the bombardment, leaving a hole in the front line.

*Phase 4:* Seeing the hole, an Italian captain threw his men into the gap, causing confusion in the Breton ranks (for his

reckless bravery he has the distinction of being the only senior commander on the French side to be killed). Many of the Breton rearguard, their most inexperienced men, turned and fled, making the gap even bigger.

*Phase 5:* The battle was joined at close quarters all along the line, but the advantage was with the French. Battle cries echoed across the field – St George from the English, St Samson from the Bretons and St Lau from the Swiss. The numbers and the confusion of the mercenaries' retreat began to tell as the Bretons on the left and the English on the right were forced back and further away from each other.

*Phase 6:* Finally the Bretons gave way and the French pursued them unmercifully, massacring all that were too slow to get away (between 5,000 and 6,000 were killed), bringing the battle to an end. This was a bloody fight as 1,500 French casualties were reported after the battle, a ratio of 1 in 10 of the winning side!

*Phase 7:* For the English troops, though, the fight had not yet done, they had fallen back onto a low knoll and were surrounded. The archers would have used their bows from behind the billmen until their arrow supplies ran out. Then, throwing down their bows and battling on with bills, axes and swords, they held out gloriously for several hours until Woodville was felled and they were overwhelmed. It is said that of all the English there only one survived, a lone page by the name of Dickon Cheke, who returned to the Isle of Wight with the sad news. The English troops are reported to be buried in a dip near the lane leading to the ruins of the Chateau Girondais.

## Today

That was the first battle of St Aubin in 1488, but now there is second battle to stop the French government from using the site as a rubbish dump. If we are able the group may organise an event (26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July) at the site in Brittany and try to raise awareness of what is happening as we did previously with Blore Heath. Watch this space for more details.



# GARDES-BRAS: REMOVABLE SLEEVES FOR BRIGANDINES?

By Amanda Greaves

Research by historians has revealed that contrary to earlier belief, brigandines were widely used on the 15<sup>th</sup> century battlefield.

Few examples survive in comparison to ordinary plate armour, but both written and pictorial sources suggest they were often worn not only by foot soldiers, but also by professional men-at-arms and gentry.

The 'typical' brigandines, both surviving examples and those in certain period illustrations, appear to be sleeveless, and most replicas made for re-enactment are worn this way.

However, evidence suggests that at least some brigandines were accompanied by separate arm defences of a similar construction.

So far as I know, such arm defences, or *gardes-bras* (lit. arm-guards, arm protectors) have not been reconstructed by present-day armourers, or at least not for the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Brigandine-type arm and leg defences, and coats of plate, are known to have existed in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, and perhaps even earlier.

I always warn against the use of period illustrations as sources, seeing as they may contain armour or clothing conventions which must have been purely fantasy, and sometimes depict ordinary soldiers wearing extremely expensive armour identical to that of the wealthy nobility.

However, numerous French and Flemish illustrations (sorry, but English pictorial sources for anything in our period are comparatively rare) appear to show sleeved brigandines. One of the

most clear and interesting is the sketch of Burgundian archers and spearmen (c.1480) by the Master of WA in Bruges. This illustration is reproduced in a number of books including *The Arms and Armour of the Medieval Knight* (p.132), by David Edge and John Miles Paddock.

At least two of the archers in the picture and at least one soldier with a glaive have defences on their shoulders and upper arms which appear to be constructed in the same way as a brigandine. The rivet pattern is similar to the brigandines they are wearing. The illustration reveals that no mail shirts are being worn, whereas other illustrations, such as the *Beauchamp Pageant* (also of the 1480s) tends to show mail shirts worn under sleeveless brigandines.

Written reference to what I understand to be brigandine-style arm defences comes in a weapons dowry of 1449. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, sent a truly impressive dowry for the wedding of James II of Scotland to Mary of Guelders. In addition to the payment of 60,000 crowns plus wedding expenses, and throwing a completely far-out party with a gigantic lion statue dispensing wine from its paw, Philip sweetened the deal by throwing in a good many cart-



Detail from painting "The adoration of the magi", showing some of the elite Scottish archer guard of Charles VII of Burgundy.

loads of state-of-the-art weapons.

Anyway, among this lot, were 50 brigandines covered in black fustian, and 33 *gardes-bras* of the same colour. Writing in the *Royal Armouries Yearbook Volume 6*, Kelly DeVries concludes, as I do, that although we do not know for sure what these *gardes-bras* were, they appear to be matching the brigandines, and are probably made in the same way. They are likely to have been pointed to the main body of the brigandine. It is possible that they were normal plate arm defences with a cloth covering. Indeed the Anglicised term "gardbrace" refers to a plate pauldron reinforce, but in the original inventory, the *garde-bras* are mentioned in close conjunction with the black brigandines, and no other plate armour is listed.

DeVries concludes that the black fustian brigandines, unlike a larger number of non fustian-covered brigandines in the same dowry, were perhaps intended for special show purposes, or to equip an elite guard for the queen.

Other period illustration appear to show brigandines with fixed short sleeves.

We do know that a number of Scots were certainly equipped with them in 1449! And the fact that similar defences are drawn in 1480 suggests that *gardes-bras* were still being used – perhaps their use had spread to England in this time as well?

With the recent interest in brigandines in the group, perhaps someone will be bold enough to try some *garde-bras*?



Detail of painting by Gerry Embleton, in Embleton, G., (1995) *English Longbowman 1330–1515*, Osprey Warrior Series 11, based on the painting "The adoration of the magi" by Jean Fouquet, also reproduced in the same book, page 24. Shows clearly the fabric covered short sleeves and the brigandine-like rivet pattern.

# Group News & Views

## NEW LIVERIES

We are intending that everyone who is able should have a new livery during the course of the year. We want to present a unified look, as befitting members of the retinue of one of the 15th century's premier dukes.

First thing to note is that the new livery should be of the short- or long-sleeved coat style, with the colours halved, instead of quartered as at present, with red on your left and black on the right.

Master Howes has a good example of the new style, although with a yellow knot instead of white. Master Brown has a good example of the coat style, albeit in English white/red livery.

The pattern on which Andy's livery was based could be made available should any-



Side view: the contrasting edging is not essential. These pictures have been altered to show white knots, as the livery should now be.



Rear view.

one need it. Get in touch with *SwanSong* (david@purpleaardvark.freemove.co.uk) and we will see what can be arranged. In addition, it is possible that Andy's mother could be persuaded to make a few liveries – price in next issue or contact Andy.

At the same time, we will be purchasing embroidered knots for the front, as mentioned in *SwanSong* 12 and on the website, and larger knots for the back. A swan will also be available, which could be placed on the leading sleeve, for instance (see separate article).

The silver knot. The embroidery will be done in a silver metallic thread, which has not reproduced well.



## BULK BUYING

We all know that re-enactment can be a very expensive hobby – just look at the price of good plate armour. However, there are ways of reducing this burden, and one of them is by purchasing items in bulk.

Master Howes has already proved that this is possible by negotiating a reduced price for archers' brigandines from White Rose (£350 instead of £375, dependant on receiving 4 orders – 3 so far).

Master Harley is gauging interest in trying to negotiate reduced prices on other items – shoes, sidearms, accoutrements, armour, whatever you need, we can bulk-buy it if enough people are interested.

So, *before* you make any new purchases, we suggest that you contact Allan and discuss what you want.

At the moment, we are talking about buying new polearms from a supplier in Derby – he has made a few of the newest polearms in the group, and has proved willing to discount. If you want to start the new season with a shiny new weapon, contact Allan ... (hmmmm ...).

If you are interested in the brigandines, contact Stephen Lunn on 01246 475782 and mention Andy Howes, or see his catalogue at [www.whiteroseapparel.co.uk](http://www.whiteroseapparel.co.uk) (we have two ordered in red and black so far!).

Allan can be contacted on: 01773 540175  
e-mail: [Allan.Harley@sca.com](mailto:Allan.Harley@sca.com)

During the committee meeting of 2 February, a number of things were discussed, regarding the future direction of the group, how we present ourselves to the public, and what we intend to be doing during this year and into the future. The more immediate items are reported on this news page.

## KNOTS AND SWANS

Anyone who was at the AGM at the feast will recall the tense voting over the knot colour ... however, the issue is now settled: they will be silver/white.

To recap: we will be buying small knots in silver (see picture), larger knots (for the back of the livery) and swans, for delivery in April. It is hoped that the small knots will be ready in April, with the large knots following in May.

Every group member – male or female – will be given one small knot once they have paid their membership fee. These can be reserved for the new liveries, or sewn on to any item of your choice – it is up to you!

The knots and swans will be created on a black backing sheet, which can be carefully cut away to sew the badge to clothing.

Once the badges are delivered they will be available directly from Darren Brown, or from him at events. More information will be given as soon as they are delivered.

### Prices:

(The prices are approximate, and depend on the number we decide to order.)

Small knot £5  
Large knot £11  
Swan £10

### Rocky Horror Picture Show

Is celebrating its 30th birthday with a tour and is playing at Nottingham Royal Centre on 12–17 May 2003. We hope to take a group out one evening (Friday?). Tickets £19–£24.50. Please contact Dave Hemsley if you fancy joining us! (Clothes optional.)