

The Swan Song

THE STAFFORD NEWSLETTER

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HISTORY IS IMPORTANT!

In defence of the study of medieval history

By Sue Green

Charles Clark was reputed to have described the study of medieval history as ornamental and lacking usefulness. Mr Clarke denies he made these comments stating in the *Guardian* on 12/5/03 that '... the best justification for state funding is that universities are the main means of enabling our society to understand itself (including its history and culture) better'. His stated views are therefore diametrically opposed to those previously reported.

Where would we be without knowledge of our medieval history? Well for a start we wouldn't be in a position to restore and preserve medieval buildings and artefacts. Without this understanding all such objects would have no relevance and would be reduced to purely an art form. How would this help our heritage and tourism industries? Re-enactment would be well nigh impossible without recourse to research.

History is also important in giving a country a sense of pride and national identity. By knowing where we've come from and how our ancestors thought, lived and interacted with other countries we build up our own sense of belonging which guides us in our future interactions. We may logically assume a close relationship with our near continental neighbours, the French without knowledge of Agincourt and the English Kings' claim to rule of France – how would this further EC relations if the French knew



2003 or 1453? Well, obviously 2003, but without historical research, none of this would be possible.

their history better?

Even as a pure form of academia, study of history teaches us to research independently, use academic libraries, impartially interrogate contemporary source materials, construct a logical argument, write a cohesive thesis, work as part of a research team and present our work to others.

The philosopher and cultural critic George Santayana said that 'Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them'. Hopefully this heated debate resulting in Mr Clarke's denial will teach politicians not to attack the study of history in future!

What's in this issue?

I apologise unreservedly to anyone who tries to download this issue and whose computer locks up, cracks up, crashes, bombs, smokes a pipe, sulks in a corner, breaks out in tears or otherwise throws a wobbly, but there were so many excellent photographs taken at Holdenby that I had to cram as many in as I could. I made the file sizes as small as possible, but I fear that this will be quite large ... well, here goes anyway.

Thanks to the newly appointed (and possibly blissfully unaware of this) official *SwanSong* photographic God, Tony Roe, Buckingham's Retinue now has a portfolio of authentic-looking photographs worthy of the best. I'd say that some of them would not look out of place in Gerry Embleton's *Medieval Military Costume*, although that is probably a rash claim! (Incidentally, this is an excellent book, heartily recommended to everyone in the group; indeed, it has already been plundered for at least three arming doublets.)

So what have I got for you? Well, firstly and mostly, a report on Holdenby (pages 2 until the end of time); more archive photos; a report on the origins of 'our' knot; an article on Buckingham's castle at Maxstoke, which is due to open its doors on 15th June for the only time this year and is well worth a visit; and a little bit of news on the events at Tutbury (21–22 June) and Tewkesbury (12–13 July).

Contributions this month from Tony Roe, Sue Green, Tee, Simon Lane, Darren Brown, Allan Harley and Chris Howell. Thanks to them all.

Next Events: Tutbury (21–22/6), Tewkesbury (12–13/7), Stafford (19–20/7), Stoneleigh (9–10/8).

DUKE HARRY'S DIARY

Who have we been beating up so far this season?



The Wrecking Crew At Large

**Holdenby House
3–5 May**



The start of May saw my troops descend onto the lands surrounding Holdenby Hall, a fine estate in Northamptonshire. Other Lords had summoned their household troops to accompany us for a training weekend to display their might and skill.

Many of my regular soldiers attended, along with a few old faces come back to the fold; they have been much missed. The youngest member of my group was welcomed into my retinue this weekend, young Mistress Bethany.

Camp was, for once, set up during daylight hours on the Saturday, and despite being early in the day and before the consumption of any alcoholic beverages, one of my soldiers, Master Roe decided to 'vote' himself out of any fighting by having an argument with an iron wedge and a hammer.

The Sunday sun eventually enticed my retinue out of bed, some nursing sore heads from over-indulgence around the camp fire the night before. The schedule consisted of morning drill to allow my soldiers to practice their killing techniques for later in the day. The majority of my ladies did explore the estate and fellow camps to check out the opposition. Master Brown decided that the archery practise session was not testing the skill of my archers so a different butt was used. Then it was time for my soldiers to demonstrate their skill at arms against the other Household troops. The Battle has been described by Master Lane.

Entertainment was provided on Sunday Evening by Masters Harley, Hemsley and

Potter in long shirts, to some unseen musical box. This sight is sure to be etched into all minds for a long time, many still undecided as to whether this is a good thing or not.

Monday was very similar to Sunday, but slightly cooler. Morning drill had the addition of Buckler Ball (a cross between rugby and bill-fighting), which created more injuries than the battle did on either day.

All in all, the second gathering of the season was very successful and set a good precedent for the rest of this season.

Harre Bockingham

Tony 'Fingers' Roe, early contender for the Dimpner award, demonstrates what happens when, literally, your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing ...

**'IS THAT CHILD
REAL?'**

Member of the public



The Four Billmen of the Apocalypse in action.

Duke Harry's Diary

The first half decent scrap of the season at Holdenby for me was an event of which I have mixed feelings. It was good to see a fairly good turnout of re-enactors, a large camp and much going on of interest, in fact I must say that it was probably one of the most impressive historical camps I've seen, and one which I hope we can learn from. On the down side the battle lacked imagination and consisted of all the elements that make 15th century skirmishing so dull. There was the usual gaggle of shinys, sword gods and complainers topped with a tired script and lack of rehearsal. Will this period ever progress the field of battle display? Or are we doomed to be overwhelmed by the massed ranks of the EMA and their bizarre interpretations and aims? (rhetorical).

Not to be too despondant, the fighting did have its moments: Alan being struck by Willo so hard that he was literally launched and has now joined the crew of the ISS to conduct research into Rizla wrapping in low gravity environments, which I'm sure will be of great benefit to future mankind; our column was outstanding again and managed to burst an opposing schiltron; and the Buckingham's generally kept up their reputation and raised our profile a little. Master Hadfield amongst many others sustained great injury in a game of buckler battering and still managed to hobble onto the battlefield in great pain (and off again very shortly after). I would hope that his Grace ban such sports along with foote ball so that he may have soldiers left to array.

The evening's entertainment perhaps was unusually quiet until Masters Harley, Hem-sley and Potter performed the dance of the sugar plum fairy drawing in crowds from far and wide. We expect to see H H & P putting on many more such pieces but preferably not bare arsed in future.

All in all an enjoyable weekend under fair skies and a good omen for things to come.
Simon Lane



We could *hear* that there were people behind Allan's car as we did the sand dance, but thanks to Master Roe's photograph, here they are revealed.

Please please *please* would one of the people with sewing machines run Adam up a pair of opaque brais. Please



'CLEGGY, DO YOU WANT THIS DOUBLET? IT'S GETTING A BIT SHORT IN THE ARMS FOR ME'

Master Frogley



Seconds before the column hits the shieltron you can almost taste the tension in the square.



Duke Harry's Diary



(Above) A perfect picnic for a perfectly sunny day. If only we'd had a couple of bottles of chilled Chablis ...

(Below) Kate made the mistake of trying to leave early. Bad move ...

(Below left) Campfire singing made a welcome return – if only we had more than one set of song sheets, and more than one person who knew the tune ...



'WHAT'S THAT SWORD?'

Child

'IT'S A DAGGER'

Master Green



Duke Harry's Diary



**'WHO SHALL WE CHEER FOR?'
FOR?'
'THE YORKISTS, BECAUSE
GRANDMA CAME FROM
YORK'
pause
'ISN'T IT STRANGE THAT
THE TWO COUNTIES WERE
FIGHTING EACH OTHER?'**

Heard in crowd



'WE'VE GOT THE POLES'

The van drivers, after forgetting the old awning canvas



'CAN I LOOK AT YOUR SWORD?'

Child

'IT'S NOT A SWORD, IT'S A DAGGER'

Master Green



Duke Harry's Diary

Duke Harry Productions presents ... 'Bob at war'
or 'What do you do when you've broken the line and have noone left to fight?'



Step one Find your lone billman.

Step two Enlist help.

Step three, etc. KILL KILL KILL!



Duke Harry Productions presents ... 'Phil at Play'
or 'How to score a goal in buckler ball without breaking your fingers or twisting your knee ...'



Step one Pick up the buckler and run.

Step two Sidestep tinny. Simon demonstrates how to politely restrain someone.

Step three Simon says 'no, I insist'.



**'IT'S JUST LIKE
MY SWORD'**

Child
'...'
Master Green

Step four An advanced Talhoffer technique here: 'Spin yourself round using someone else's sword point to score a goal'.

More buckler ball. Not quite sure where the buckler is though.



Duke Harry's Diary

CAPTION COMPETITION



Answers on the back of a self-addressed e-mail to the editorial address (on the back cover).



'LOOK! I'VE GOT ENOUGH ROOM IN MY CLEAVAGE TO SWING A CAT!'

As said by Louise (?!?) I knew she was an odd girl...



(Right and above far right) It's face-pulling time again in the Buckingham camp.

Face pulling was of course an internationally contested sport in the 15th century, the competition of 1460 being won by the first Duke of Buckingham for his, in the opinion of the judges, 'very realistic death grimace'. Unfortunately, he was not able to contest the 1463 competition in Burgundy, owing to 'advanced decomposition'. The prize on this occasion was won by Antoine 'the slightly tarnished Bastard' of Burgundy.



Once Upon A Time In The Staffords

Do You Have A Low Forehead?
Do Your Eyebrows Meet In The Middle?
Do Your Knuckles Drag On The Ground?
Do You Like Firing Large Lumps Of
Wood Across Battlefields?



Join
The Staffords



More rooting on dusty shelves (well, that's another story, not to be told here) and in murky folders marked 'not to be shown to children' threw up these gems. They probably shouldn't even see the light of day.

(Top left) An interesting fax sent to Mark Hinsley circa 1993. If anyone can shed light on who ... why ... eh?

(Top right) Gwydir Castle, 2nd May Bank holiday, 1993 (yes, 10 years ago). James (King Dickon) Wilson and Malcolm in typical 'Osprey Men at Arms' pose.

(Middle right) Darren Brown at Stafford Castle in May 1994. Compare Darren's kit with the picture on page 5 to see how much kit standards have improved over the last decade.

(Left) St Albans, 1994, again. Allan ... what are you doing?

(IMAGES COURTESY OF DARREN BROWN AND DAVE HEMSLEY)

Once Upon A Time In The Staffords



Tony Roe, presumably trying to cut his toe nails.

Gwydir, May 1993.

(Above) Stafford Castle, May 1994. Unused publicity shot. Tony, Mark, Allan, Paul and others. Why in all that is holy did someone bring a lantern to a fight?

(Below) Gwydir, May 1993. Attempting to guess the weight of the baby.

(Right) Tatton Old Hall, August 1992. Paul—Flag—Sword. Say no more ...

(Bottom right) Scarborough 1996. The year we weren't playing German mercenaries and were allowed to fight in red and black.



WHENCE THE KNOT?



The origins of the Stafford Knot



Some years ago, Mark Hinsley passed on to me a photocopied leaflet, concerning the origins and use of the knot badge that we know and love. I am unsure as to the publisher of the leaflet, although it may be from Maxstoke Castle. The information is taken from the research of John Bradley (former William Salt Librarian) and J.H. Oxspring (retired Chief Education Officer of Staffordshire).

What is the knot?

The knot is a heraldic badge, one of many family symbols popular from the 14th–16th centuries as a supplement to the family coat-of-arms in situations that did not require the complete arms. It could be given to servants to show employment, or retainers as a token of allegiance, forming part of a livery; in conflict allowing mutual recognition or acting as a rallying point, in peace showing off the wealth and power of the sponsor. It was also applied to many other things – for example, on furniture, fireplaces, doorways, or even tombs and memorials. Company logos or football team colours, for example, are used in similar ways today.

The knot today

Many people will tell you today that it is the ‘Staffordshire’ knot. They are wrong! This is an understandable mistake as it has been used by the county of Staffordshire, on police helmets, on the cap badges of the North and South Staffordshire Regiments and even before that by local yeomanry and militia. It remains the ‘Stafford’ knot, however.

First evidence

The earliest concrete evidence of the use of the knot is on a seal impressed in 1428 (the seal is in the British Library). The seal is that of Anne, Countess of Stafford, widow of both Thomas, 3rd Earl of Stafford (d. 1392) and Edmund, 5th Earl of Stafford (d. battle of Shrewsbury, 1402). Anne was the daughter of Thomas of Woodstock, a younger son of Edward III. She died in 1438/9.

The second seal (pictured) is on a deed from 1437, in which a chaplet of knots surround the arms of Joan, Lady of Wake, daughter of Hugh, 2nd Earl of Stafford, wife of Thomas Holand, Earl of Kent and Lord Wake. When Joan died in 1443, Humphrey, Earl of Stafford (and Duke of Buckingham in 1444) was her principal legatee.

As Anne and her sister-in-law were elderly widows when the surviving examples of their seals were impressed, it seems likely

that the designs were fixed much earlier, perhaps around the beginning of the century. That the only family connection between the two ladies is a Stafford one, it seems likely that the knot was used by the Stafford family soon after 1400.

Possible earlier evidence

A Stafford knot is carved on the vestment of the effigy of canon William Langeton (d. 1413) in Exeter Cathedral. He is described as a cousin of Edmund Stafford, Bishop of Exeter (d. 1419), a descendant of Edmund, 1st Baron Stafford (d. 1308). Although the exact relationship between the two has not been established, that he was buried alongside his bishop suggests a sufficiently close association to make it reasonable for his effigy to bear any heraldic badge used by his superior.

The problem here is the branch of the Stafford family of which the bishop was part had separated from the main family line around 100 years before, suggesting that the knot was in use much earlier than the seals discussed above (and indeed before the adoption of heraldic badges became popular).

Other uses of the knot

In Wingfield, Suffolk, there is the tomb of Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, and his wife, Catherine de Stafford, sister of Joan, Lady of Wake. de la Pole was killed at Agincourt in 1415 and although the date of his wife’s death is not known, the tomb would have been constructed around the time of the seals above. There are Stafford knots carved on the arch of the tomb, not the tomb itself, and as it is known that the tomb was moved later in the 15th century it is possible that the knots could have been added later.

A stained glass window in Nettlestead church, Kent, incorporates knots, probably added between 1425 and 1439 when Reginald de Pympe, a dependent of the Staffords (the Staffords owned Tonbridge Castle nearby), rebuilt the church.

The tomb of Edmund Stafford, 2nd Earl of Wiltshire (d. 1499) (grandson of 1st Duke of Buckingham), at Lowick in Northamptonshire, incorporates knots amongst its carvings.

Carvings in domestic buildings include Maxstoke Castle (acquired by the Stafford family in 1438, see separate article), Kirby Hall and Thornbury Castle.

Wear it with pride (whatever the colour)!



The seal of Joan, Lady of Wake, daughter of Hugh, 2nd Earl of Stafford, dating from 1437 (top). The line drawing shows the knots more clearly.



Allan in his new arming doublet, one of several either made, or being made in the group. An article on the making of the editor’s new one will follow in a later issue. Articles on construction of actual items of kit are always welcome, especially with photos.

MAXSTOKE CASTLE

On Sunday 15 June, Maxstoke Castle, near Coleshill, in north Warwickshire, will open its doors for the only time this summer. The castle, which is still a family home, is moated and has 4 acres of gardens as well as many historic rooms. The owner, Michael Fetherston-Dilke, will be using the proceeds to raise funds for the Jubilee Sailing Trust, an organisation that has restored two tall sailing ships and stages trips for disabled and community groups around the British coast. Admission will be £4 for adults, £2 concessions, and the castle will be open between 11 am and 5 pm.

The history of this castle is of particular interest to us, because between 1438 and 1521 the castle was owned by the Dukes of Buckingham. It is because of this connection that I would urge all members of the retinue to take advantage of the opening and visit Maxstoke on the 15 June.

But what of the history of the castle – how did Stafford come to get it, and how did his great grandson lose it? The following potted history is compiled from a booklet written by the current owners and information supplied by Darren Brown.

Early days

In February 1345, Edward III granted to William de Clinton, Earl of Huntingdon, a licence ‘to crenellate a dwelling place for the use of John de Clynton, nephew of the Earl of Huntingdon’. This was at Maxstoke. John inherited the castle on his uncle’s death in 1354. (An earlier member of the de Clinton family also founded Kenilworth Castle.)

Maxstoke is not a castle, as such, it is more a fortified manor house, and does not compare in scale or construction with the massive fortresses built elsewhere. It is not built to stand prolonged sieges, but is adequately defended to fend off the sort of lightly-armed attacks as were common in the 14th century (and occurred in many parts of the country during the Wars of the Roses). In style, it represents a transition between the true castles of earlier times and the undefended houses of later period.

A simple exchange

In 1438 John, Lord Clinton, exchanged Maxstoke for two manors in Northamptonshire (Whiston and Woodford) belonging to Humphrey Stafford, then Earl of Stafford. Apart from the loss of an outer wall with defensive turrets encompassing three sides, and over the moat a bridge replacing a wooden drawbridge, the castle outwardly appears today much as it did when Humphrey first saw it in 1438.



The days of the dukes

Humphrey Stafford was, after the royal dukes, one of the richest landowners in Britain. He used Maxstoke as his base in the Midlands and stayed there frequently. Although there is no evidence of him making any significant changes, he did plate over the main doors, decorating the northern leaf with the Stafford knot (still visible), and the southern with the arms of his wife, Anne Neville, daughter of the Earl of Westmoreland.

In 1458 there was a double wedding at the castle when his daughter Catherine⁽¹⁾ married John Talbot, eldest son of the Earl of Shrewsbury, and his son, John, married Constance, daughter of Henry Greene of Drayton, Northamptonshire⁽²⁾.

Humphrey was killed at the battle of Northampton in 1460 and, since his first son and heir Humphrey had died at the battle of St Albans, the title of the castle passed to his grandson, Henry, still a child at the time, now 2nd Duke of Buckingham. Anne remained in residence at Maxstoke until her death in 1480, whereupon possession finally passed to Henry.

In 1483, after his ill-advised rebellion, Henry was executed by Richard III and the castle was forfeited to the Crown. In 1485 Richard visited the castle and ordered parts of the building taken down and carried to Nottingham Castle, but died at Bosworth before the order could be carried out fully⁽³⁾.

King Henry VII restored Maxstoke to Edward, 3rd Duke of Buckingham, still a minor at the time, with custody of castle and estate granted to Margaret Beaufort (Henry’s mother). After he attained his majority in 1499, Edward paid little attention to Max-

stoke, and concentrated on building Thornbury Castle. In 1521 Edward was charged with high treason by Henry VIII and executed, with the castle once again forfeited to the Crown.

A new era

With Edward’s death, the association of Maxstoke with the Stafford family came to an end. On 20 October 1521 the castle and its grounds were granted to Sir William Compton, a close friend of Henry VIII, in return for military service. In 1597 his grandson sold Maxstoke to Sir Thomas Egerton for £4,000, and he in turn sold it 18 months later for £5,500 to Thomas (later Sir) Dilke of Coleshill, whose descendants have owned it ever since.

Now you know about it – isn’t it about time you visited?

Notes

1. The date here is from the Maxstoke guidebook. Another source, found by Darren, gives Catherine’s wedding date and place as 1467, Shrewsbury.
2. John was later made Earl of Wiltshire, and died in May 1473.
3. The castle had another lucky escape during the Civil War, when on two occasions the Council of State considered slighting it, but in 1651 took £2,000 from the owner as security instead.

Group News & Views

TEWKESBURY

The committee discussed the idea of raising the standard of our display at Tewkesbury to incorporate 'Arming for Warre', i.e. give us our own independent display before the battle, and give everyone something to get involved with, rather than sitting round all day waiting for the fight to begin.

If you have been to Tewkesbury before you will know that it can be a little dull waiting for the battle. This year we would like to make the weekend more interesting by keeping the camp fully authentic and having a few people in the camp to talk to the public, like we do at any normal event. We can also do some training and drill before the battle, this will sharpen our skills and demoralize the opposition. There will however still be plenty of shopping time, so don't worry.

We intend that this will happen for a fixed period of time in the day and will not disrupt people's enjoyment of the event but enhance it to show others how much better we are.

This can only happen with group agreement, so please let the committee know your views before the weekend.

That's it for another month!
Event reports, photos, stories, research, findings, jokes, etc, always needed. Send them to Dave Hemsley:

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Next issue, July(-ish).

'TREACHERY AT TUTBURY'

To add to our wide repertoire of events we are going to try something new: a trial with members of the public playing the jury. In amongst our normal but excellent variety of set pieces, e.g. drill, archery, arms and armour, etc., there will be the opportunity to indulge in some roleplay. Based on the assault on Humphrey Stafford and the death of his son and events leading from this, including an exciting but violent finale.

Allan is writing the script for this, but if you want to know more, I suggest begging, borrowing (but not stealing, *SwanSong* can never condone theft – unless it is another group's standard, of course) or buying the excellent tome *The End of the House of Lancaster*, by R.L. Story, published by Sutton (second edition, 1999, ISBN 0-7509-2007-6).

In this you will find background details of the Stafford–Harcourt feud (on 22 May 1448, Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton and son Richard were involved in an altercation with Sir Robert Harcourt on the road to Coventry. Richard was killed by one of Harcourt's servants, and two of Harcourt's servants were then killed by Stafford's (pp. 57–8).

There were similar feuds throughout the country, and two of interest in southern Derbyshire, fairly close to Tutbury: Blount–Longford and Vernon–Gresley. Of these, Longford and Vernon were retainers of Humphrey, Duke of Buckingham (pp 150ff).

MEMBERSHIP FORMS

Don't forget to complete your membership forms and send them to Darren or Mark with your membership money. So far we have received only about half the forms, and Kenilworth will be our third event.

SwanSong can't promise great threats of excommunication or physical discomfort, but be warned that there will be a lot of 'tut-tutting' and dark frowns if you leave it until the feast to pay 2003's membership fee.

Forum address

Don't forget the Bucks' Web Forum for discussion, jokes, kit sales and much more; everyone is welcome to join in:

<http://www.1485.org/bucksboard.html>

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POSTSCRIPT ... A HARD DAY'S KNIGHT

