

Re: HASTINGS – MALFOSSE – AGAIN

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.archaeology/2004-12/0296.html>

From: Bryn Fraser (bryn_at_finhall.demon.co.uk)

Date: 12/09/04

Date: Thu, 9 Dec 2004 08:15:21 +0000

In message <b8Rtd.21\$Wv2.14@newsfe4-gui.ntli.net>, Martin Reboul
<martin.reboul@SPAMFUKvirgin.net> writes

>

> "Martin Reboul" <martin.reboul@SPAMFUKvirgin.net> wrote in message
> news:bDbtd.9\$TO3.6@newsfe5-win.ntli.net...

>>

>> "Paul J Gans" <gans@panix.com> wrote in message

>> news:cp24br\$ncq\$1@reader1.panix.com...

>> > In soc.history.medieval Michael W Cook <nuffspam@hotmail.com> wrote:

>> > > On 6/12/04 6:14 am, in article cp0tcm\$cdq\$13@reader1.panix.com, "Paul J

>> > > Gans" <gans@panix.com> wrote:

>> >

>> > > In soc.history.medieval Michael W Cook <nuffspam@hotmail.com> wrote:

>> > > > On 4/12/04 9:32 pm, in article cotae4\$alb\$1@reader1.panix.com, "Paul J
>> Gans"

>> > > > <gans@panix.com> wrote:

>> > >

>> > > Snip

>> >

>> > >

>> > > > >

>> > > > > > But your dogs **are** adorable, and very well trained.

>> > > > >

>> > > > > > I dare say they could tell us things about Hastings

>> > > > > > (Battle, actually) that we never did smell out.

>> > > > >

>> > > > > > ----- Paul J. Gans

>> > > >

>> > > > > Probably, although as you saw yourself they are more

>> > > > > interested in the

>> > > > > rabbits or locating a fox.

>> > > >

>> > > > > It's quite staggering really that nobody has used any of the modern

>> > > > > techniques in archaeology at Hastings, to at least try and follow up

> on

>> > > > > what

>> > > > > we already know or find some evidence.

>> > > >

>> >>>>> *I thought Lawson's book was good in that he did actually discuss the*
>> >>>>> *suspected grave pits etc, but what we need is for someone to actually*
>*do*
>> >>>>> *some digging, or at least some geo-physics.*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>> *Maybe I could get Monty to start digging a pit for us, he*
>> >>>>>*seemed quite*
>> *keen*
>> >>>>> *to get down into Oakwood Gyll ; -)*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>> *Aha! He's on your side about that... ; -)*
>> >>>
>> >>>> *He's no choice ; -)*
>> >>>>
>> >>>>> *The trouble is that decent archaeology is expensive. Not*
>> >>>>> *expensive in terms that a large business would understand,*
>> >>>>> *but expensive for academicians.*
>> >>>>
>> >>>>> *For sure, it's also time consuming, back breaking work and seasonal.*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>> *My thinking is that the Anglo-Saxon grave pits are not far*
>> >>>>> *from the battlefield. Who would bother dragging a couple*
>> >>>>> *of thousand bodies a large distance?*
>> >>>>
>> >>>>> *Exactly, the majority would have been thrown into mass pits, dug*
>*somewhere*
>> >>>>> *on the battlefield or very close to it, on the higher ground.*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>> *That is, if they were buried at all.*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>> *The Normans would have buried their dead without doubt, but most of the*
>> >>>>> *Saxons I'd have thought would have been left, once their bodies*
>> >>>>>*had been*
>> >>>>> *cleaned of anything useful. Some would have been taken away and some*
>> *further*
>> >>>>> *pits could have been dug by locals, but I think that unlikely really as*
>> >>>>> *Battle was a sparsely populated area until the abbey arrived.*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>> *Orderic mentions that on his visit to Stamford Bridge the battlefield*
>*was*
>> >>>>> *easily identified for all the weathered bones still lying*
>> >>>>>*around. Battle*
>> *of*
>> >>>>> *course had the Abbey shortly after Hastings, so the monks would have*
>*swept*
>> >>>>> *the area collecting any such remains for burial.*
>> >>>>>
>> >>>>>>
>> >>>>>> *The Norman dead *might* have been moved further, but likely*
>> >>>>>> *not too much further. I'd not be surprised if they were*
>> >>>>>> *on the Abbey grounds somewhere.*

>>>
>>> >Local traditions tend to originate from an incident or event which became
>>> >revered to such an extent and thought so important they are given a name.
>>> >This is then passed on from generation to generation along with the story
>of
>>> >the incident or event, often being blown out of all proportions. Clanchy
>>> >discusses this in a roundabout way in "From memory to written record"
>>>
>>> >However, I digress, Searle goes on to say:
>>>
>>> >"Yet a ditch filled with bodies suggests a Malfosse of a different sort.
>>> >It may well be the site of a mass grave, the knowledge of which came to
>>> >light in the hundred years or more following the battle, and had been
>>> >identified with the no doubt authentic disaster of the narratives of the
>>> >battle....."
>>>
>>> >She then describes the name Malfosse being given to the land after
>>> >reclamation projects and arable cultivation in the late 12th C, which the
>>> >Battle Chronicler describes as being "Partly tilled".
>>>
>>> >She follows on:
>>>
>>> >"The bones and accoutrements that would have come to light in such
>>> >a ditch,
>>> >as the district was brought under cultivation, would have made the
>>> >identification with the famous scene irresistible, I think, to monks as
>>> >impressed with their romantic connections as were those of late 12th
>century
>>> >Battle."
>>>
>>> >As I said, she then offers no explanation as to why and how such
>>> >bones came
>>> >to be buried such a distance from the battlefield if they weren't from a
>>> >Malfosse type incident.
>>>
>>> >Of course it could have been the bodies of those who were slaughtered in
>the
>>> >pursuit by the Normans, who were then gathered up and dumped in a pit.
>>> >However, most academics believe that the Normans wouldn't have bothered
>>> >burying the Saxon dead, and certainly wouldn't have wasted time searching
>>> >for bodies and then dragging them to one place for burial.
>>>
>>> >Personally, I think Searle is wrong, and there can really be only one
>>> >explanation for remains of bodies being found in this area, and that the
>>> >Battle Chronicler is correct in associating them with Malfosse.
>>>
>>> >Well, I'd guess that they are certainly associated with
>>> >some major event. Perhaps a medieval football riot?
>>>
>>> >But the point remains as you say. I don't know of any
>>> >major battlefield grave pits (for that is what they

>> > usually were) that are far from the site of the battle.
>> >
>> > To load and cart a thousand dead bodies (a rough
>> > estimate of Norman casualties would be grizzly work
>> > for a large number of carts and oxen, had those been
>> > available, which I doubt.
>> >
>> > So your interpretation seems to be the most plausible
>> > and certainly is a working hypothesis.
>> >
>> > The grave site at Wisby is an example, and the number
>> > of dead are much less than at Hastings.
>> >
>> > The site
>> >
>> > <http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/>
>> >
>> > contains a fair amount of information on a number of
>> > medieval battles in the UK. Burial information is
>> > also sometimes given. Their conclusion is that the
>> > most common place for burial was the center of the
>> > battlefield.
>> >
>> > This would minimize the amount of corpse-carrying
>> > involved. Corpses decay fairly fast, especially
>> > in sunlight. Since burial of the Norman casualties
>> > must have been delayed until at least the next day
>> > if not longer, it must not have been a pleasant
>> > task.
>> >
>> > Of course, the nobility would have been removed
>> > first and packed up to be sent home. The grunts
>> > went into the pits.
>>
>> > Has anyone done any serious archaeology on this area (i.e. resistivity, GSR
>> > etc)?
>> > If not, why not?
>>
>> > My efforts to get someone to look at the Barnet gravepits have come to naught
>so
>> > far.
>>
>> > I've found them – what more do they want? Do I have to get a shovel out and
>do
>> > it myself? I'm not a bad digger, but 2000+ bodies is more than I fancy
>> > unearthing alone!
>>
>> > Anyone want to help – they may be in rather good condition in that heavy
>clay...
>> > surely *somebody* is interested?
>

sci.archaeology: Re: HASTINGS – MALFOSSE – AGAIN

>*Still no takers...*

Even when I lived on the site I was not tempted... All those springs...

>

--

Bryn