



Hilltop Cloud

Time Travellers Club

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www.hilltopcloud.co.uk

Dear Club Member,

Ask a member of the general public to name a historic textile, and I suspect this would be the first name that sprung to mind.

The Bayeux Tapestry isn't actually a tapestry at all. It's a 70m long embroidery, and was worked in England. The length of fabric depicts the events of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, and culminates with the battle of Hastings, where Harold, the Anglo Saxon king was defeated by William the Bastard. The title "Conquerer" is a much later one. William was the son of the mistress of the Robert, Duke of Normandy. His father never married, so despite his illegitimacy William became Duke, and managed to claim the English throne.

The tapestry itself is worked in wool (crewel) yarn on a plain linen background. The threads would of course have been handspun, as would the linen threads that were used to weave the cloth the embroidery is worked on. Those threads would have been dyed using natural dye stuffs, and then a team of women would have worked the embroidery.

The most famous scene of Harold, with an arrow in his eye isn't authentic. The arrow is a later repair, but needle holes in the cloth reveal something was originally in the place of the arrow. In a 1729 engraving of the tapestry the arrow is absent.

The tapestry is on display in a Bayeux museum in northern France. It probably ended up in the French town, despite being an English work of art, about an English historical event because it was commissioned by William's half brother Bishop Odo. He acted as regent in England when William was in Normandy after the conquest, and commissioned Bayeux Cathedral. The survival of the tapestry through 1000 years, several wars, and the French Revolution is something of a miracle.

If you can't make it to France to see the real thing then the Leek Embroiderers, led by Elixabeth, wife of Thomas Wardle, created a stunning reproduction that was finished in 1886. It's now on display in Reading Museum. Wardle has featured in TT club letters before... he was the person who worked with William Morris to create the natural dyes Morris used in his designs. There are a number of other reproductions on display around the world, and it really is well worth looking at in person. No computer screen can do it justice.

Happy Spinning,

Katie