

## Paul Harding - The Normans in Worcestershire.

Paul Harding, dressed as a Norman peasant, introduced himself and told us something about his work as a freelance historian. He explained that 1066 was a key date, as three significant battles were fought in that year: Fulford or Gate Fulford, near York; Stamford and 'Hastings' (actually fought 5 miles away at Battle) all by Anglo-Saxons against Vikings. Paul also explained that the Normans were Viking Norsemen who had settled in Normandy.



Paul then proceeded to elaborate on various aspects of Norman life, such as armour; fortifications; the feudal system and sumptuary laws; the 'Power Pyramid'; clothing; housing; food and its preparation; The Domesday Book of 1086; Norman families in Worcestershire and aspects of writing and recording.



He paid particular attention to the City of Worcester, giving details of the siting of the Norman castle and Cathedral, and the medieval hospital dedicated by Bishop Wulfstan. The Hospital, on the site of the present Commandery, is said to have been founded possibly in 1085, and served as an almshouse as well as a place of hospitality for pilgrims and other travellers.

Paul stressed the importance of Bishop Wulstan, who was the only Anglo-Saxon Bishop in this period. This was a high honour as the King, William the Conqueror, generally mistrusted all Anglo-Saxons, and placed only Normans in high office, both in secular and sacred posts. Such was the reputation of Bishop Wulstan, especially in regard to the miracle of Thomas of Eldersfield, (this miracle helped to canonise Bishop Wulstan into St Wulstan) that 'Bad King John' ordered in his will that on his death he be buried in Worcester Cathedral, between the effigies of the local saints Oswald and Wulstan. King John's tomb can still be seen in Worcester Cathedral today with stone carvings of St Oswald and St Wulstan on either side.



He also brought with him many artefacts, which he used during the talk and then invited us to handle and examine during the coffee break. Far from being a dry talk, there were frequent bursts of laughter as Paul, a very good communicator, engaged us with his entertaining, amusing and lively presentation, at the same time displaying a detailed knowledge of the Norman period.

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