

Beat: News

After 950 years, Battle of Hastings plays out again

UK

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USPA NEWS - Arrows flew and swords clashed as thousands re-enacted the Battle of Hastings on its 950th anniversary on Saturday at a sold-out event marking a bloody day that changed the course of English history.

The victory in 1066 by Duke William of Normandy, known as William the Conqueror, over Anglo-Saxon King Harold was the start of the Norman conquest which transformed England's language, laws, customs and architecture.

A re-enactment takes place annually at the site of the clash, in a small town called Battle near the port of Hastings, but interest in this anniversary year has been exceptionally high, according to English Heritage, which runs the site.

Celebrations included displays of falconry, medieval music and spectacular battle scenes re-enacted by thousands of enthusiasts in chain mail armed with clubs, swords, lances, battle-axes and bows and arrows.

Some media had speculated beforehand that the atmosphere at this year's event could be even more passionate than usual following the shock vote to leave the European Union on June 23, which has polarized the nation.

The Norman conquest tied England's political destiny to that of the continent for centuries, and in a seminal eurosceptic speech in 1988, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher drew a parallel between its impact and that of modern European integration.

The Battle of Hastings' place in the national psyche was sealed by the hugely popular 1930s spoof history book "1066 and All That", which said: "The Norman conquest was a good thing, as from this time onwards England stopped being conquered and thus was able to become top nation."

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