

Norfolk Group's Study Day - November 18 2000

Aspects Of Chivalry And Kingship

The Norfolk Group's Annual Study Day was well organised with regular breaks for food, drink and trips to the toilet! The Georgian Assembly House in Norwich is central and spacious, and the restaurant was across the hall from our ground floor venue in the gorgeous Music Room. The speakers all kept to time and allowed for questions at the end of each session. There wasn't much on Richard unfortunately as this year's theme was the origins and meaning of chivalry in relation to kingship and war, giving us a fascinating insight into how medieval war was practised and won. But the speakers and the organisation of the event made it a very enjoyable day.

We found our guesthouse easily on Friday evening and the landlady made us a welcome pot of tea, then we unpacked and explored Norwich. I wanted to find the Assembly House ready for Saturday, get some fresh air - plenty of that as it was very cold and windy! - and see all the wonderful Christmas lights. We were within easy walking distance of the town centre which is full of lovely shops and all very compact with many narrow roads, churches and old buildings, and a big market in the middle. It was packed solid on Saturday. Good job we had a table booked at the Assembly Rooms for lunch as we wouldn't have got in anywhere otherwise. Bill went out in the afternoon to listen to the football and stretch his legs and said the queues everywhere were horrendous. Derby County won for a change!

There were three talks about chivalry and kingship from Matthew Bennett, Dr Matthew Strickland and Dr Michael Jones. I'd heard of the speakers so it was interesting seeing them live. We had coffee or tea to welcome us, and a chance to meet people before the Chairman of the Norfolk Group, David Austin, introduced the first speaker.

Matthew Bennett set the scene with the origins of chivalry and military professionalism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Heraldry was introduced in the twelfth century to identify knights in battle and at tournaments, where they practised how to fight and learnt the rules. My dictionary defines chivalry as "medieval knightly system with its religious, moral and social code", and "ideal knight's characteristics, courage and courtesy".

Initially tournaments were like mini wars, with numerous knights taking part simultaneously. Later the same group of knights could be fighting a battle together, so learnt at the tournament how to fight as a team. Tournaments were likened to Formula One motor racing today. Many knights went round all the arenas, to gain experience, prize money, and ransom money if they were the victors of the melee. Knights needed a licence to fight at the tournament which provided useful income for the crown. But it was also risky and many knights died.

Tournaments were a spectator sport, attracting an international audience. Ladies attended and gave their favours to their chosen knight. The crowds would shop at the stalls of the traders attracted by the presence of lots of customers, or just watch and socialise. By the fifteenth century tournaments had evolved into a competition between two famous knights, and were also known as jousts.

After a coffee break Dr Matthew Strickland examined Edward I's conduct of the Anglo - Scottish wars between 1296 - 1307, subtitled *Braveheart Revisited*.

Edward I is another king with a bad reputation, because he had William Wallace hung, drawn and quartered in 1305. Strickland observed that Wallace had refused the peace and pardon offered him by

Edward, so he was classed as an outlaw when captured, although Wallace had never sworn allegiance to Edward. Edward thought the Scots were his subjects who had broken their vow of allegiance to him. He'd given the Scottish crown to John Balliol in return for Balliol being his vassal, then war broke out between the two countries, so Edward considered the Scots to be traitors.

Edward I captured Berwick, which Margaret of Anjou returned to the Scots, and Richard re-captured for Edward IV. Edward I had offered peace to the town and had no reply. The law of war says that if your offer of peace is refused, and you capture the town, you can kill all the inhabitants, women and children included. The inhabitants had insulted the king by baring their bottoms at him, so he was angry. He made a display of creating new knights, traditionally done before launching an attack, as it gives a town extra time to surrender. But his navy saw the activity, misjudged it and launched an attack, so Edward also sent in his troops. Many Scots were killed but there is no evidence that everyone was. In fact the chronicles say that the garrison, women and children were allowed to depart a few weeks later, and the captain of the garrison joined Edward's army.

At the siege of Stirling in 1304 Edward wouldn't let the garrison surrender until he'd tried his new siege engine. They held out for three months but Edward eventually won and the garrison begged forgiveness, which was granted. This was the honourable thing to do and Edward had an audience of his wife and other women to consider.

After a lovely lunch in the Assembly House's restaurant we returned to hear Dr Michael Jones, (author of "The King's Mother", a biography of Margaret Beaufort), describe the twilight of chivalry during the wars of the roses, and the impact of Sir Thomas Malory's "Morte de Arthur".

Malory was a Warwickshire knight. He wrote the book while in jail from 1468 to shortly before his death in 1471. He seems to have been involved in a Lancastrian plot, and was also accused of rape and burglary. He may have been in the Tower when Henry VI was

imprisoned there. The book was published by Caxton just before the battle of Bosworth. Henry VII's first son Arthur was born in Winchester, as Malory said Winchester was Camelot.

Jones thought that Malory probably started the book in the 1450's as it's too long to have been written during this last jail sentence. He'd been in prison before, emerging in 1462 to fight for Edward IV.

Malory describes the reconciliation of Arthur and Lancelot in his book. Edward tried to reconcile various Lancastrians after he became king, including the Duke of Somerset. He even went so far as to give Somerset his own colours at a joust, which Somerset won, but later Somerset betrayed him.

Sir Humphrey Neville, who was always loyal to Edward IV, called his son Lancelot. *His* son was named Arthur.

After a break for tea we had the chance to question all three speakers together, before the meeting closed.

It was a very enjoyable and well organised day in very pleasant surroundings, and I recommend it to anyone as a good day out. The Norfolk Group work very hard to make this a successful day. This year the theme is "History's Wicked Uncle" (who can that be I wonder?) Make a date in your diaries now for Saturday 10 November 2001. One of the speakers will be Alison Weir, so it should be a lively event!

We stayed at Kingsley Lodge, 3 Kingsley Road, Norwich, about ten minutes walk from the Assembly House. Sally Clarke made us very welcome, and it's a very comfortable no-smoking bed and breakfast. Telephone 01603 615819, or e-mail kingsley@paston.co.uk

Pam Benstead