



A Tale of Threads and Steel: A Bayeux Tapestry Study Day with Dr. Tobias Capwell FSA Wednesday 14th October 2026

This study day comprises 3 lectures:

‘Understanding A Great Work of European Art: It Is NOT a Tapestry’

In the first talk of the day, we explore the essential facts of the Bayeux ‘Tapestry’ – what it is, when it made, and how, why such a monumental embroidery was made in the first place, and possibly who made it. We also look closely at how it works, in its telling of the grand drama of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, and in its form as one of the greatest works of sequential narrative art ever created.

‘Two Kings, A Bastard Duke, Some Knights, a Comet and a Dwarf: The Story Told by the Tapestry’

We would know very little about the late eleventh century in western Europe if the Bayeux Tapestry had never existed, or if it had been destroyed in the eighteenth century (which it nearly was). Moreover, we would know next to nothing about what the world of Anglo-Saxons and Normans actually looked like. The Bayeux ‘Tapestry’ is a unique visual record of cataclysmic historical events that shaped everything about our lives today – from the landscape of the country, to our system of government, to the language we speak every day. In this second talk we follow the story told in dynamic images blow by blow – from the end of the reign of Edward the Confessor, to the initial comradeship of Harold Godwinson and William of Normandy, through Harold’s short reign as King of England, to William’s invasion, conquest and establishment of a Norman royal dominion that endured until King Richard III was slain in battle in 1485.

‘The Gears of Conquest: The Norman Knight, His Armour and Weapons, and His Representation the Bayeux Tapestry’

The Norman invasion of England in 1066 is commonly understood as the stage on which the medieval knight made his spectacular debut, fighting on horseback with spear and sword, trampling ‘The Dark Ages’ under the hooves of his warhorse and ushering in ‘The Age of Chivalry’. Although there is some truth to this idea, the honest reality is more complex. Concepts of chivalry can be traced back into the warrior cultures of the Migration Period, while mounted armoured combat was practiced by the Romans and Carolingians, among others. Even so, the Norman way of knightly warfare was indeed new in many respects, as was their use of the image of the mounted knight in their art, foremost, in the Bayeux Tapestry. This epic embroidery employs the knight in armour as one of its most important visual elements. However, because Norman arms and armour is not very well understood by most historians, many of the subtleties of the ‘tapestry’ as a form of graphic storytelling have been overlooked or misunderstood. This final lecture delves deeper into the realities of war at the time of the Conquest in order that we may better appreciate the ways in which the Bayeux Tapestry was intended to be ‘read’ and understood.

Dr. Tobias Capwell is an independent scholar and leading authority on medieval and Renaissance arms and armour. In 1998, he completed his second master’s degree – a study of Norman arms and armour and their representation in the Bayeux Tapestry. Over the following three decades he completed his Ph.D. on late medieval armour in England, and went on to work with many of the world’s great collections, including the Imperial Armoury in Vienna, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Royal Armouries in Leeds. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Armourers in London. He is the author of many books on armour, weapons and tournaments, has curated numerous exhibitions, and frequently appears in film, television and online media.

Registration from 10am

10.30 – 11.30 Lecture one
11.30 – 12.00 Coffee
12.00 – 13.00 Lecture two
13.00 – 14.00 Lunch
14.00 – 15.00 Lecture three

Expected finish: 15.30

Coffee and a two-course lunch are included in the price of **£50**. *Please inform me if you require a vegetarian meal or have any allergies (see booking form below)*

Please return the Booking Form below to:

Gill Potts, 20 Creed Road, Oundle PE8 4QN – or scan and email to gillpotts25@gmail.com

Payment by Cheque payable to “The Arts Society Oundle”

or by BACS using Sort Code 54 21 22 Account 31157025

Reference – please put your surname, followed by BT (e.g.: Potts BT)

Gill's contact details: 07710 290984 gillpotts25@gmail.com

Booking Form - The Bayeux Tapestry

Applications must reach the Society by Friday September 25th 2026

Name:

Telephone numbers:

Email address:

Number of places required at £50.00 (member) or £60.00 (non-member) per person:

Names of Attendees not given above:

Payment method : Cheque or BACS *Please Circle your chosen method*

Please tick the box if you require a Vegetarian meal:

Any allergies: