

A personal selection of Wessex, British Isles and world history.

A new year and a new J&T to help you through those January blues.

“Ring out the old, ring in the new, Ring, happy bells, across the snow: The year is going, let him go; Ring out the false, ring in the true.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson

MEDIEVAL RENAISSANCE MAN¹

John of Salisbury (1110s - 1180) was born at Old Sarum (Salisbury wasn't built at this point) from Anglo-Saxon roots and presumably educated by the Church. The first we know of him is crossing to France around 1136 where he studied in Paris with the great philosopher Peter Abelard (of Abelard and Heloise fame).

His writings give us real insight into the University of Paris. In 1137 he moved to Chartres where he studied grammar, rhetoric and logic. He also studied the classics under a disciple of Bernard of Chartres who emphasised the works of the great Latin writers, a huge influence on John's own writings. In 1140 he returned to Paris to study theology whilst working as a tutor to young noblemen.

In 1148 he was living at an abbey in Troyes and was present at the Council of Reims in 1148 under the auspices of Pope Eugene III. Here it is believed that he met the great St Bernard of Clairvaux who introduced him to Archbishop Theobald whose secretary he became and was with him in Canterbury for seven years during which time he was sent on numerous missions to the Vatican. It was here that he met Thomas Becket and also Nicholas Breakspear who became Pope Adrian IV.

In 1159 he published his two greatest humanist works, the *Policraticus* and the *Metalogicon*. A Humanist is someone who

believes in living a good, ethical, and meaningful life based on reason, compassion, and scientific evidence, without necessarily relying on religious faith. The Humanist's modern strap-line is *Think for yourself, act for everyone*. The phrase *Standing on the shoulders of giants*, comes from the *Metalogicon* where he quotes Bernard of Chartres. The books are a study of political and educational theory, very much ahead of their time.

After incurring the king's disfavour he moved to Reims and stayed with his friend Peter of La Celle, now Abbot of St Remigius. In 1170 he led the delegation charged with preparing Becket's return to England. He was in Canterbury when the archbishop was assassinated. In 1174 he moved to Exeter where he was made Treasurer of the cathedral.

In 1176 he was made Bishop of Chartres where he spent the rest of his life, though he did find time to attend the Third Lateran

Council. He coined the phrase *Theatrum Mundi* which no doubt is where Shakespeare got his idea for *All the world's a stage*.

As well as a window into the times in which he lived, John's 'Ciceronian' approach to philosophy kept him away from extremes and ensured his practical common-sense approach that made his writing very influential.



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THE OTHER NORMAN CONQUEST²

The 11th century saw Normans migrating to Italy to fight as mercenaries. The Tancred family from the Cotentin joined a revolt against their Byzantine rulers and carved out a small province for themselves under Count William Iron Arm. Robert Guiscard was the sixth Tancred son and followed his brothers to Apulia. After various adventures in which he earned a reputation for being both overbearing and wily he settled in Apulia and succeeded his brother to become Count. With brother Roger he made several forays into Sicily with mixed results: they captured Messina but on one occasion having to leave the siege of Palermo when their camp became infested with tarantulas.

Roger was made Count of Sicily in 1071. The Saracen emir of Syracuse held out until 1086. Guiscard was recalled to Apulia where the Byzantines had captured Bari. It took four years to dislodge them and then the various Lombard enclaves had to be dealt with. Guiscard



came to an arrangement with Pope Gregory VII over papal holdings in the south of Italy. He then went on to attack the Byzantine empire but had to return to support the Pope who was being besieged by Henry IV. Having lifted the siege and rescued the Pope he travelled to Dalmatia where he occupied Corfu and Cephalonia. Here Robert died of a fever and was succeeded by his son Roger Borsa. His eldest son, Bohemond, was declared technically illegitimate but became one of the leaders of the First Crusade.

Roger's descendants would create the Kingdom of Sicily that lasted until 1198. Through Constance, the daughter of Roger II, the Norman blood passed to the Hohenstaufen, Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI who was made King of Sicily in 1198. The Normans unified the kingdom making it multicultural and building many fine palaces. The Norman palace of Palermo is shown right.

IN MEMORIAM³

What have the following in common? Lincoln, Grantham, Stamford, Geddington, Hardingstone, Stony Stratford, Woburn, Dunstable, St Albans, Waltham, Cheapside, and Charing.



You probably guessed it, they were all sites of the magnificent crosses erected by Edward I in mourning for his wife Eleanor of Castile who passed away in Harby, Nottinghamshire, whilst on a royal progress with the king in November 1290. Waltham and Charing now carry the suffix 'cross'. The body was taken to Lincoln for embalming and the crosses marked where the cortege rested on its journey to London - 180 miles in 12 days. The monuments are not crosses but are situated at cross-roads. The Geddington cross is shown right, unusually it is triangular.

There are only three left, Geddington, Hardingstone and Waltham Cross. The most ornate is situated outside Charing Cross station but alas this is an 1865 reproduction. The original cross was further along The Strand. Eleanor was buried in Westminster Abbey at the feet of her father-in-law Henry III. Her heart was buried at the Dominican friary of Blackfriars along with that of her younger son the Earl of Chester who died in 1284. Burying hearts separately was not at all unusual and in Salisbury Cathedral there is a miniature tomb containing the heart of one of its bishops.



The closest precedent for the Eleanor crosses, and probably their inspiration, was the series of nine crosses known as *Montjoies* erected along the funeral route of King Louis IX of France in 1271. Eleanor's reputation was not all good so in part the crosses emphasised her love and support for her husband which in retrospect came to be seen as her prime quality.

Now as you know there is nothing that we like better than an unexpected link. In 1276 Edward and Eleanor were in Glastonbury Abbey for the *re-internment of Arthur's and Guinevere's bones*. At first I did not believe it but it turns out to have been a real event. Glastonbury was thought to be the *Isle of Avalon* from the Arthurian legend and in 1191 the monks claimed to have found their bones along with an inscribed cross. Now, if you are a sceptic, you could be forgiven for thinking that after a disastrous fire, something was needed to restore the abbey's prestige and encourage pilgrims. I suppose it is no worse than the revered bits of the true cross that were collected by cathedrals, or in Salisbury's case, part of the Virgin Mary's cloak.

THE WELSH MARY ROSE⁴

The Newport Medieval Ship was found by chance, buried under thick silt on the banks of the River Usk in 2002. It's an extraordinary find, even compared to other salvaged historical shipwrecks, as it has been dated as far back as the late 1450s. Here's more on what makes the Newport Medieval Ship, as revealed in Sky HISTORY's *A Ship Through Time*, a major contribution to maritime archeology - hosted by Sean Fletcher.



One tried-and-trusted way to ascertain the age of timber is to measure the width of its growth rings. This technique - known as dendrochronology - established that most of the ship's timbers were likely to have been felled around 1449. The same study also revealed this wood to have come from northern Spain's Basque region. The artist's reconstruction pictured above is by David Jordan, courtesy of Newport Museum & Art Gallery.

However, a later, more advanced analysis - this time using oxygen isotope dendrochronology - brought the ship's likely construction date forward to the late 1450s. Cask pieces in the ship confirmed it to be a merchant vessel used for transporting wine - likely from the Iberian Peninsula to the Bristol Channel.



When the ship was rediscovered, the remains of a large surrounding cradle were found with it. Furthermore, some of the ship's own pieces were dated to the late 1460s. It all constitutes evidence that, around this time, the ship was temporarily berthed at Newport for repairs.

This renovation work was apparently not completed before the cradle collapsed on the ship's starboard side. The vessel would then have been quickly submerged by mud and water. Various missing pieces - including decking and masts - from the ship suggest that workers salvaged what they could from it before leaving it to its fate.

What type of crew did the Newport Medieval Ship have? It is likely to have been overwhelmingly Portuguese. This conclusion has been drawn from the large number of Portuguese coins - not to mention ceramics of distinctly Portuguese style - retrieved from the ship's innards. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily follow that the ship was also under Portuguese ownership. While it may well have been at some point, its demise in Newport suggests that, by then, a powerful British figure had taken the reins. Could this individual have been Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick - popularly known as Warwick the Kingmaker?



LEGALLY SPEAKING⁵

A standard legal textbook was *Abridgment des plusieurs cases et resolutions del Common Ley* (An abridgement of many cases and judgements in Common Law) by Henry Rolle. The language is known as *Law French* and is a relic from the Norman invasion of 1066. Although English had replaced French in the 14th century, the legal eagles three hundred years later were still using the archaic Norman in case reports and legal text books - how very English. Not surprisingly there are many legal words that come from French such as jury from juré, parole and attorney from *attorné*. The office of Attorney General first took on a political element in 1461, when the holder was summoned by writ to the House of Lords to advise the government on legal matters. This was also the first time that the office was referred to as the office of the "Attorney General". The custom of summoning the attorney general to the Lords by writ when appointed continues unbroken to this day, although until the appointment of Lord Williams of Mostyn in 1999, no attorney general had sat in the Lords since 1700, and no attorney general had obeyed the writ since 1742.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

The Perpetual Almanack of Folklore by Charles Knightly (Thames and Hudson 1987) recommends for 1st January: Nothing should be taken out of the house today - not even rubbish - and especially do not lend fuel or matches, or pay bills, lest you lack fire and money during the coming year. If it is absolutely necessary to carry something out, be sure to bring something in first - preferably a coin, concealed outside on the previous night.

give New Year's gifts (or hogmanays) to your friends and neighbours. A lucky present is an apple stuck with cloves and rosemary or holly, and in Wales the Calennig apple should be studded with wheat, oats, nuts and evergreens, floured and gilded, and provided with a tripod stand of holly or rowan skewers. The usual Scots hogmanay is a fine three-cornered oatcake or shortbread with Yule-kebbuck or Christmas cheese.

1. Taken from a variety of sources including John of Salisbury Policraticus by Murray Markland (Frederick Ungar 1979). Illustrations: John of Salisbury teaching philosophy, frontispiece miniature of the Policraticus by John of Salisbury, circa 1520-1525 and The beginning of the preface to Denis Foulechat's French translation of John of Salisbury's „Policraticus“ in the manuscript Paris. The famous miniature shows King Charles V of France. Both courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
2. Wikipedia and various publications. Pic Norman palace of Palermo courtesy of Wonders of Sicily UNESCO sites.
3. Geddington Cross courtesy of Lofty at Wikipedia - GNU free documentation license.
4. Welsh Mary Rose courtesy of SKY History A Ship Through Time with Sean Fletcher.
5. Taken from A Place for Everything by Judith Flanders (Picador 2020).