WHAT CAN A LOST FILM TELL US ABOUT HOW PEOPLE REMEMBER HASTINGS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

English Heritage has found rare colour film showing the first large re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings. The event took place in 1966, 900 years after William the Conqueror defeated Harold Godwinson in 1066. Around 500 university students dressed as Normans and English soldiers and fought with wooden weapons on the original battlefield near Battle in East Sussex. The re-enactment was not very accurate. Some costumes were made from sacks, the weapons were painted wood and the two sides apparently became involved in real pushing and shoving. About 30,000 people watched. The film was made by local electronics expert Alan Wootton and was recently rediscovered by his son, who had helped on the day as a child. English Heritage has turned hundreds of reels into a short film. The modern re-enactment still takes place every year, but with much stricter safety rules.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The film shows that people do not simply remember history by reading books. They also act it out, celebrate it and sometimes turn it into a story about national pride. The contrast between the 1966 event and modern re-enactments raises questions about accuracy, entertainment and how people imagine the Norman Conquest.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“How different should a historical re-enactment be from the real event?”

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/oct/06/rare-footage-first-battle-of-hastings-re-enactment