

OUR NORMAN MEAL

25 members met for the Annual General Meeting on Friday 12th January 2018. The Committee was re-elected as a body and the programme for 2018 was announced. Members and parishioners were thanked for the tremendous effort and time put in to the successful centenary events for the winning of the Victoria Cross by Captain Henry Reynolds in 1917.



The AGM was preceded by a meal based on food which may have been eaten in Whilton Manor House in Norman times. There was a choice of casseroles with the main ingredients of pheasant and pork (wild boar!) or venison, both accompanied by a wide variety of medieval vegetables, and eaten with bread; potatoes had not yet been introduced. This was followed by various pear pies and cream. The Norman Conquest led to the introduction of Forest Law throughout England, bringing serious restrictions and punishment on those who hunted game illegally in the wooded and wild "forest" areas. In Saxon times there had been more freedom to hunt. The Normans re-introduced both rabbits and pheasants, which had become very scarce since their first introduction by the Romans. Rabbits were now in private warrens and pheasant and deer hunting preserved for the privileged.

Although the Normans brought pears as part of their heritage, these were hard and much less attractive than modern varieties which benefit from hundreds of years of breeding, especially since the 19th century. The Normans saw pears as a hard, cold fruit, which required long slow cooking and "warming" with wine or spices. Ovens for cooking pastry were not available in ordinary cottages, which still had a central fire and no chimney. Pear pies were thus also a taste for the rich.

We ate this food by candlelight, using spoons and knives, as forks had not yet come into use.

On Friday 16th February members of the society had the opportunity to visit Althorp and hear Lord Spencer introducing his new book, "To catch a king", recording the adventures of the future Charles II as he escaped from Cromwellian forces. A number of people came away with a copy of the book signed by the author.