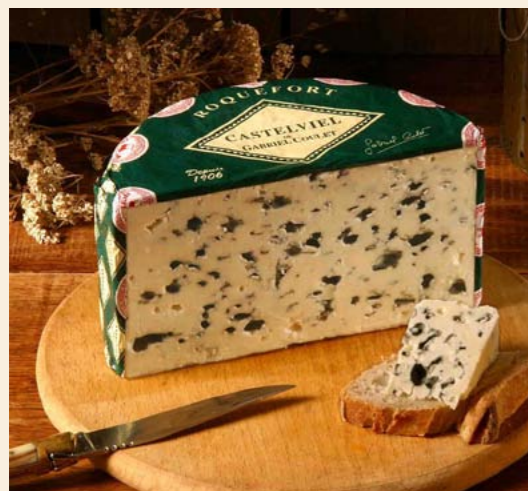



CHEESE
of the month



Roquefort

Along with Stilton and Gorgonzola, this is one of the greatest blue cheeses in the world. And with more than three million per year being cured at Roquefort-sur-Soulzon, in the Aveyron, it is France's second most popular cheese after Comté.

Roquefort's birthplace lies in the Combalou mountains where, in prehistoric times, seismic shifts led to a series of caves. Vertical faults and fissures in the caves, known as fleurines, are up to 100 metres high and provide natural ventilation. The caves serve as an immense storage area that maintains a constant temperature of 9°C and humidity of 95%.

The blue mould found only in these caves is called *Penicillium roqueforti* and it lives in the soil and ferments the cheese. In 1411, Charles VI granted the people of Roquefort the monopoly of ripening the cheese in their caves, as they had done for hundreds of years. In 1925 they were awarded an AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée), but imitations were soon to follow.

Some 60% of Roquefort is made by one company, the Société des Caves et des Producteurs Réunis, but many Roquefort aficionados hunt out an alternative producers like Carles, Vieux Berger, Gabriel Coulet, Combes, Le Vieux Berger and Vernières Frères. Authentic Roquefort will always be wrapped in foil with a red sheep emblem.

Made from the unpasteurised milk of Lacaune sheep, it has an affinage (maturation) of between four and nine months. It has virtually no rind and melts in the mouth to leave a flavour of mould and salt which, when mature, can be very strong. Damp and crumbly, it is best eaten after a meal but goes equally as well with pasta or salad. Try it with a robust red wine like Châteauneuf-du-Pape or a dessert wine like Sauternes.

Photo above: © WikiCommons/Digitalyeti

See the Apocalypse Now!



Apocalypse Tapestry. © WikiCommons/KimonBerlin

Death, destruction, earthquakes, floods and dragons galore. No, it's not the promotional blurb for a Hollywood blockbuster, but gory scenes from the magnificent Apocalypse Tapestry.

The tapestry is an illustration of the Apocalypse based on the visions of St John, from the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. The text, written at the end of the 1st Century, tells of the prophetic visions of St John and the struggle between good and evil.

The tapestry also illustrates the historical, political and social context of 14th Century France at the time of the 100 Years War between France and England – a period of famine and plague.

Few tapestries survived from that period, but the oldest existing one – the Apocalypse of St John – is housed in a purpose-built hall in the Château d'Angers, in the town of the same name.

The Apocalypse was a popular theme in medieval Europe and the appeal of good against evil (illustrated by battles between angels and demons) went down well. Dragons, burning cities, death and destruction all add to the stunning visual experience. An interesting aspect of the tapestry is its portrayal of the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse (Death) as a rotting

corpse rather than as a living person, which was a more common portrayal in France at that time.

Commissioned in 1375 by Louis I, Duke of Anjou and brother of King Charles V, it took seven years to make, which was pretty quick for a work of this size. It is made entirely of wool and originally comprised six tapestries, each measuring 23 metres long and six metres high. It is now around 100 metres long and 4.5 metres high.

Each piece starts with a major figure, followed by two rows of seven scenes between a strip of sky and a strip of earth, with its main colours being blues and reds. In the gallery where the tapestry is displayed, each panel is surrounded by a white frame and the scenes run from left to right, starting at the top.

The tapestry presents three series of seven plagues. First comes the opening of the seven seals in the Book of Revelation, where each broken seal corresponds to a plague. The first plague is the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Then, when the seven trumpets sound, the natural elements rage (the second piece). The series of plagues is completed in the fifth

piece, when seven angels pour vials over the Earth.

The third piece shows the story of the two witnesses and that of the woman escaping from Satan, who is represented by a dragon accompanied by two acolytes. The fourth piece shows Satan tempting mankind. His elimination, the destruction of Babylon and the arrival of the Heavenly Jerusalem on earth (symbolising Paradise) are portrayed on the fifth and sixth pieces, illustrating the happy ending to St John's Revelations.

The tapestry has been through many trials and tribulations during its 600-plus years. After more than a century in the possession of the dukes of Anjou, it was bequeathed to Angers Cathedral in 1480 by the last Duke of Anjou, King René. By the end of the 18th Century, the tapestry was regarded as being rather old-fashioned and there are varying accounts of what happened to it after that.

Its sheer size was said to be a problem so it was trimmed to fit the cathedral's walls. It then went up for sale but when there were no takers it was dumped in an old storeroom. During the French Revolution many such works were lost, either through neglect or sometimes being burned to recover any gold and silver

threads. Luckily for us, the Apocalypse Tapestry survived, apparently to be cut up and used variously as rugs and horse harness covers, to cover holes in the cathedral's walls and even to protect orange trees from frost!

In the mid-19th Century, however, its true value was appreciated once more and in the 1840s the Bishop of Angers bought the remaining tapestry fragments and returned them to the cathedral, where work began on restoration. It was finally moved to the neighbouring château in 1954.

So finally a happy ending. Following a series of catastrophes afflicting humanity, Christ finally emerges triumphant. The Apocalypse of St John has been interpreted in many ways over the centuries. You may well have your own ideas by the end of your visit...

Photo Top Right: Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse. Right: The Beast of the Sea © WikiCommons/KimonBerlin



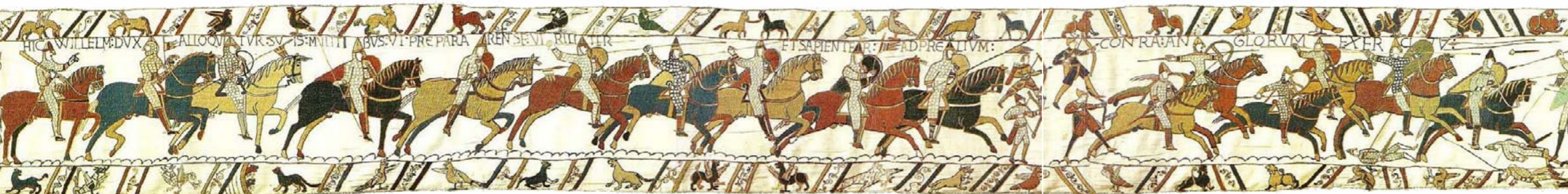
MORE INFORMATION

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OPENING TIMES:
2 May – 4 September:
Open daily 9.30am – 6.30pm.
5 September – 31 December:
Open daily 10am – 5.30pm.
CLOSED 1 May, 1 & 11th November,
25 December.
Last entrance 45 minutes before closing.

PRICES:
Full price €8,50, reduced price €6,50.
Free admission: Visitors under 18 (with family and excluding school groups); 18-25 (citizens of the European Union and non-European regularly resident in France); Disabled visitors and their guest or helper; Unemployed individuals.

Audio guide (available in five languages, including English): €4,50, couple (two guides) €6, disabled and under 18s €3.



A Date Never to be Forgotten

1066. A date that changed the course of British history and the one conflict you can be sure almost every British student and adult alike can recount, along with the two main protagonists.

It was, of course, the Battle of Hastings. The last time any foreign power was to conquer England. And probably the greatest source of information on that battle that survives today sits in a 70-metre long glass case in a town in northern France: the Bayeux Tapestry.

While the average English person might claim to know quite a lot about 1066, that knowledge is not often based on historical fact. Most of their information comes from

the tapestry, a colourful depiction of how William the Conqueror and his Norman army invaded England, defeated King Harold and claimed the ultimate prize: the throne of England.

Even today, 950 years after the battle, the tapestry is still alive with controversy, myth, lies, spies and even an occasional bit of pornography! Probably the most important pictorial image of the 11th Century, it's a priceless work of enormous skill, unique in the world, and a vital piece of historical evidence of a key time in Britain's past.

But that does not, however, mean its version of events is a totally accurate one...

For a start, it's not a tapestry! It is actually an embroidery made with at least eight coloured wools. It contains hundreds of images divided into 58 scenes, each describing a particular event, and is joined into a linear sequence allowing you to 'read' the entire story from first scene to last.

The tapestry seems to look at this piece of history from a Norman perspective, attempting to justify the invasion launched by William the Conqueror to claim what he believed was rightfully his – the throne of England. Harold's image is that of a double-dealer, following his about-turn on a previous promise to help William succeed Edward as England's monarch.



Scene 57 of the Bayeux Tapestry: The death of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings. © Wikicommons/Myrabelle

Is this Harold?

The main event, the battle, is there in all its grisly detail. Dead and wounded, dismembered bodies – both Norman and English – are everywhere. The tapestry comes into its own here with its feeling of movement. Horses galloping, archers letting fly and swords and spears everywhere you look.

But one of the most striking images – and probably the most famous – is the one showing King Harold dying with an arrow through his eye. We all know he died that way, don't we? But is it true?

The inscription reads 'hic harold rex interfectus est' with the name Harold written above a soldier with an arrow in his eye. But the words interfectus est (has been killed) appear to refer to a second soldier being hacked down by a mounted Norman swordsman.

Which of the two figures was meant to be King Harold? We will never know.



MORE INFORMATION

Tapisserie de Bayeux, Centre Guillaume le Conquerant, 13bis Rue de Nesmond, 14400 Bayeux.

Tel: 02 31 51 25 50
Email: tapisserie@marie-bayeux.fr
www.tapestry-bayeux.com

Opening times and prices are available on the website. Audio guides (available in 14 languages) are included in the entry price.

NEXT MONTH: *Great gardens for you to enjoy, Le Mans at the double and... more lovely cheese!*

Mick Austin is a freelance journalist based in the Pays-de-la-Loire. He has had his work published in several expat magazines and newspapers and has also written the Mayenne Tourist Board's only English-language brochure. He also runs a gîte business at www.gitefortwo.com.

DID YOU KNOW ?

A Frenchman is set to become the youngest European in space. Thomas Pesquet, 38, from Rouen, has been chosen for a long-duration mission to the International Space Station (ISS).



Pesquet, the tenth French astronaut to head into space, is scheduled to join the ISS in November 2016 as a flight engineer and return six months later, in May 2017. He was in the European Space Agency's 2009 astronaut group that included the UK's Tim Peake, who is currently circling Earth on the ISS.

Thomas Pesquet training at the NASA Johnson Space Center

An avid private pilot in his spare time, Pesquet was selected in 2004 for Air France's flight training programme. He went on to become a commercial pilot for the airline, where he started flying the Airbus A320 in 2006. Having logged more than 2300 flight hours on commercial airliners, he became an instructor on the A320.

He was selected as an ESA astronaut in May 2009. To help ready him for a space mission he received technical and operational training in Europe, Russia and the USA – on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft, on the US and Russian spacesuits and on Space Station systems.

He will meet up for Expedition 50 with NASA astronauts Shane Kimbrough and Peggy Whitson and Russian cosmonauts Andrei Borisenko, Sergei Ryzhikov and Oleg Novitsky. Whitson is one of NASA's most experienced astronauts, having already completed two missions totalling 192 days in space and completing six spacewalks lasting more than 39 hours.

Follow Pesquet's progress via: thomaspesquet.esa.int



On this month



Jeanne d'Arc at the Siege of Orléans

1815 until he finished runner-up to the Duke of Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo. His cause of death has long been debated. It was originally thought to be from stomach cancer, but rumours spread of possible arsenic poisoning.

May 15, 1889:

The Eiffel Tower is opened to the public, even though the lifts were not yet working properly. The tower was an instant success and almost 30,000 visitors made the 1710-step climb to the top before the lifts entered service 11 days later. By the end of the Exposition Universelle (world fair) in October there had been 1,896,987 visitors.

May 7, 1945:

German Chief of Staff General Alfred Jodl meets with his Allied counterparts at 2.30am in a small schoolhouse in Reims. Ten minutes later he signs an unconditional surrender and the war in Europe is over.

May 5, 1821:

Napoleon Bonaparte dies in exile on the island of Saint Helena, aged 51. He was twice emperor of France, from 1804-1814 and then again for three months in