

A SHORT HISTORY OF BRANDON AND...

HEREWARD THE WAKE

The year is 1070. A rather stout man, with flowing yellow hair and beard, is stood before one of William the Conqueror's castles. The man despises William and all he stands for. William is not a great fan of the man either, especially as the man is fighting a guerrilla war against him. The bearded man, and his followers, operate through the marshlands of the Fens. They surprise the enemy and disappear with little threat of being chased down. Any enemy brave enough to follow them into the marshland often get lost and are put to the sword. The Fens are so treacherous that some poor souls are even drowned when they put a foot wrong and slip into the murky water. But not this man, for he is a master of this land and uses it to his advantage ... this man is Hereward the Wake.

To counter the threat of Hereward, William quickly erects a castle at Brandon, Suffolk, and today the castle hosts his royal court. Hereward, hearing that William may be planning his next strategy, intends to capture details of those plans and has taken on the disguise of a potter. He wears clothing splashed with clay and carries various pots. Hereward, if nothing else, is very brave. He enters into the fortification and wanders through the enemy's camp, managing to get so close to William that he can hear his every word.

William is consulting with the Brandon witch, one of the first recorded witches in England. He proposes to build a wooden tower, take it into the Fens and put her atop of it, from where she will hurl curses and spells at Hereward and his men. Once she has done her magic, William will then launch his attack against what he hopes is a demoralised enemy.

When William eventually launches his attack, the outcome goes against him. Hereward's archers lie in ambush and let loose with flaming arrows. The arrows ignite reed beds and fire quickly spreads around William's men, causing panic. Many attackers flee and some drown under the weight of their armour and weapons. The witch's tower catches alight and in her frantic attempts to escape from it, she falls and breaks her neck. Her magic neither influenced the outcome of the battle, nor her survival. William has no option but to withdraw and be thankful to have survived this encounter. For now, Hereward lives to fight another day. His subterfuge at Brandon has paid him well.

*Based on the writings of an 11th century Norman noble man, Ivo Taillebois