

Meet the Characters



Brena

**A Bronze Age Woman,
living c. 850 BCE**

Just under 3000 years ago, Brena lived in a Bronze Age settlement near Runnymede Bridge.

What was life like for Brena?

By the Bronze Age, people had learned to work the land well. They grew crops, such as barley, flax and wheat, and raised animals. Their settlements grew and the fields were abundant.

Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a midden (a waste heap containing lots of day-to-day objects that have built up over time) near to Brena's settlement which suggests that this could have been a ceremonial site of some kind, with people returning here annually for a festival, for trade or maybe for ceremonies such as marriage. We will never know for sure, as there are no written records from the Bronze Age, and **archaeologists have to interpret the past using the objects that were left behind.**

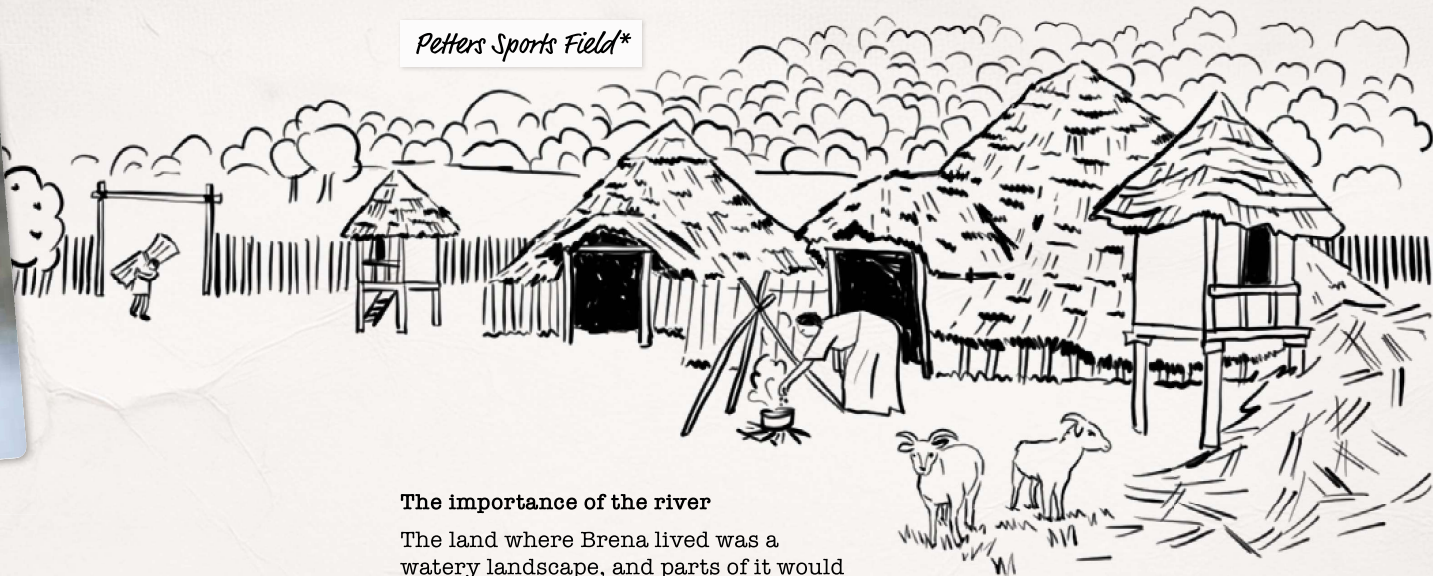
Quick check

When was Brena living near Runnymede Bridge?

What is a 'midden'?

Write down 3 key words or phrases that will help you remember Brena's story.

*Petters Sports Field**



The importance of the river

The land where Brena lived was a watery landscape, and parts of it would disappear and reappear as islands between periods of flooding.

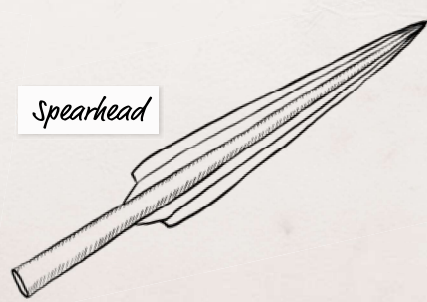
The proximity of the River Thames would have been important for transporting goods and people to and from this place, but evidence also indicates that water had a special significance in the Bronze Age. Archaeologists have found fragments of a sword and a Bronze Age spearhead which have been placed deliberately in the river, perhaps to calm its spirit, to ask for balance or protection. It's an offering that we cannot understand fully today, but which might have given people in the Bronze Age a sense of control over things that were beyond their control.

Making Bronze

Everyone continued to make stone tools in the Bronze Age, but working with Bronze itself was a highly specialist skill. Trees had to be felled to create fires, over which copper and tin were melted and combined. The molten bronze was then poured into a mould, cooled and fixed. Specialist bronze smiths would travel between settlements and set up camp, trading new bronze for old. A hoard of bronze was found at a site near Runnymede Bridge called Petters Sports Field, buried deliberately, beyond the furthest fence of Brena's settlement. **Why do you think a bronze smith left this behind? Why did they never return?**



Bronze Age hoard

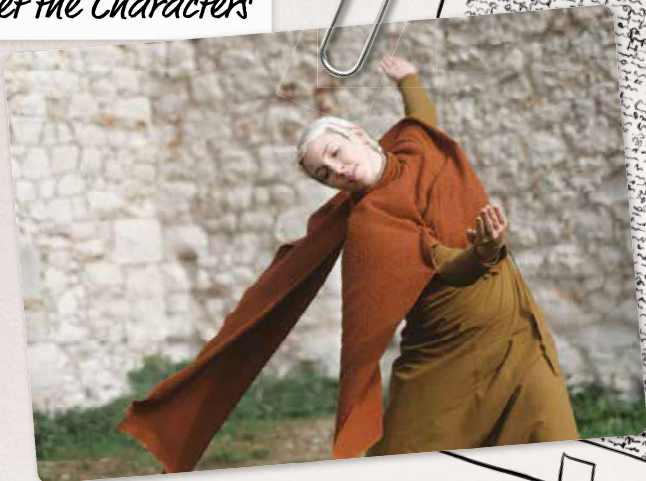


Spearhead



* Artist's interpretation of Petters Sports Field Bronze Age settlement, using a reconstruction by Surrey County Archaeological Unit

Meet the Characters



Agnes

A young nun living at St Mary's Priory, Ankerwycke (founded 1160, the Medieval period)

What was life like for Agnes?

Life at St Mary's Priory was quiet for Agnes, with only about six or seven nuns living there. The nuns of St Mary's sold wood from the farmland, ran a ferry near to the Priory, charging locals to cross the River Thames and kept sheep and pigs. From 1242, Henry III gave them permission to graze their pigs in the King's forest on the other side of the river.



Ankerwycke seal

The sealing of the Magna Carta

While Ankerwycke, where St Mary's Priory can be found, was a relatively secluded place, this was in stark contrast to life on the other side of the River Thames, which is known as Runnymede. It was here that camps were assembled for the sealing of the Magna Carta (or Great Charter) by King John in 1215. This crucial document represented an attempt to make peace between an unpopular King and a group of 25 rebel barons. It ensured that the King could no longer do what he wanted without question and is still regarded as a powerful symbolic document that initiated the idea of the freedom of the individual, even though it continued to be contested long after it was sealed.

Magna Carta with royal seal from King John



The voices of the nuns

Although it may seem like St Mary's Priory was a relatively quiet place, we know from interviews with the Bishop of Lincoln that were recorded at that time that there was a surprising amount of disruption. One of the young nuns ran away in 1197, claiming that she had been forced to join the Priory so that she couldn't claim her inheritance and the Pope himself ordered her to return.

By 1491, a Prioress called Clemency was in charge, and in spite of the fact her name means 'leniency' it seems that there was nothing kind or lenient about her. She did not look after the nuns or the St Mary's building very well at all, keeping money that was supposed to be used for repairs for herself, wearing fine silk, lace and jewellery while the other nuns didn't have proper clothes, blocking up the windows and

Thimble discovered during excavations at the site



not providing a good education for the young nuns. More nuns left, or ran away for different reasons, because of the mismanagement of the Priory for example, or in 1519 there is a record of one of the nuns running away to get married.

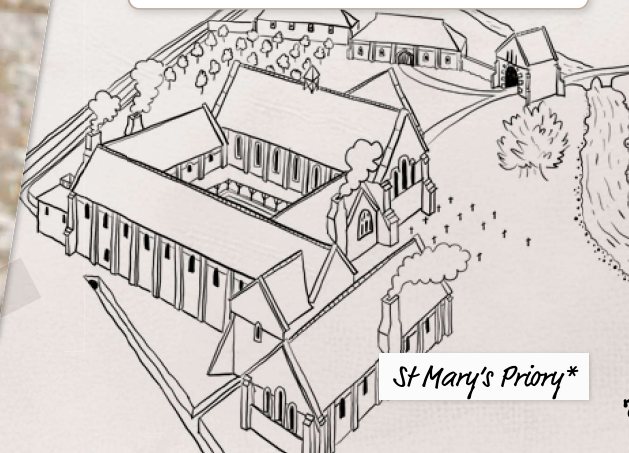
It is very unusual for us to be able to access such a lot of detail about the lives of young women living so long ago, and shows just **how important it can be to find written accounts of things that happened in the past**. However, objects found in excavations at St Mary's Priory like a dress pin and a thimble also provide **a direct link to the experiences of those people**.

Quick check

When was St Mary's Priory founded?

Which very famous document was sealed on the opposite side of the river?

Write down 3 key words or phrases that will help you remember Agnes' story.



*St Mary's Priory**

*Image based on an illustration created for the National Trust by Phil Kenning.

Meet the Characters

Eelyn

A servant at Woking Palace

Although we know there was a manor at the Woking Palace site as early as 1272, Eelyn worked there when it was owned by Lady Margaret Beaufort (in 1466-1471, during the Tudor period)

More about Lady Margaret Beaufort

Lady Margaret Beaufort was the mother of Henry Tudor, who went on to become King Henry VII. She had her only son when she was just 13 years old.

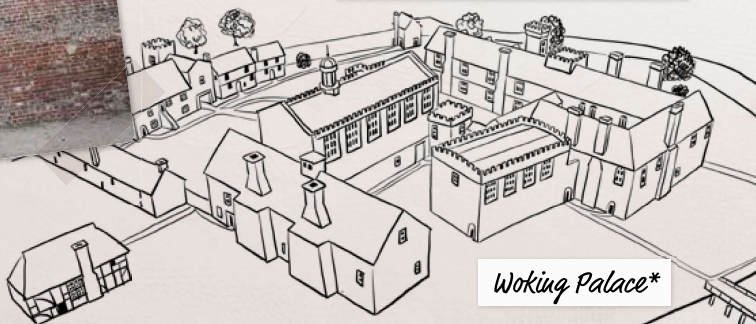
Lady Margaret was clever and politically shrewd. She had her hand in everything - helping prepare for the Battle of Bosworth (which was the event that secured the throne for her son), overseeing his coronation and then sadly his funeral, and also helping to plan the coronation of her grandson Henry VIII.



Evidence suggests that Margaret wasn't only concerned with politics. She knew how to enjoy herself. She liked cards, and had fools at court to entertain her. She was the wealthiest woman in Britain at one point and a true patroness, building churches, schools and founding two colleges at Cambridge University. It's no wonder that the earliest large scale portrait of an English woman, commissioned in 1510, was of her!



Artist's impression of a portrait of Lady Margaret Beaufort

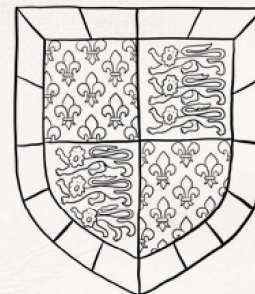


Woking Palace*

Why was Woking Palace important?

Some of the artefacts found during excavations at Woking Palace give a sense of how richly decorated and impressive this place once was, including Valencian floor tiles which would have been imported from Spain at great expense and a gold hat pin inlaid with a ruby fleur de lys design.

For Henry VII and then Henry VIII it was a favoured country residence, with plenty of sporting activities taking place there like hunting, hawking, bowls and jousting. The Palace was relatively close to London, easy to access via the River Wey (which was much more comfortable than travelling by road) and provided an ideal stop for the 'Summer Progress'. This was an annual opportunity for the Royal Court to travel out of London during the hot summer, when it would become smelly and dangerous due to the risk of disease.



Beaufort coat of arms



Ruby and gold hat pin



Valencian floor tiles

Quick check

Which powerful woman owned Woking Palace from 1466-1471?

What was the name of her son, the first Tudor King of England?

Write down 3 key words or phrases that will help you remember Eelyn's story.

What was life like for a servant in the Tudor period?

We cannot know for sure what Eelyn's life was like at Woking Palace, due to lack of written sources or objects related to the life of a servant there, but it is likely that Eelyn was very busy - cleaning, fetching and carrying, working in the kitchens - especially when members of the Royal Family were in residence.

Some servants would have slept in the attics of large Palaces, others at the foot of the beds of their masters and mistresses. When hundreds of people travelled with the Royal Family out of London on the Summer Progress, some would have to sleep in stables and barns, and anywhere they could find.

Meet the Characters

Albert

A soldier at Witley and Milford Camps during World War I (1914-1918)

What was life like for Albert during World War I?

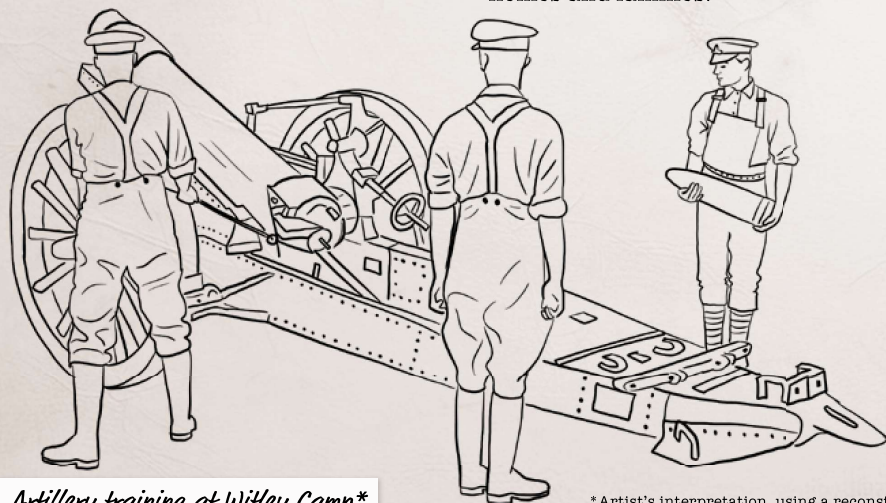
Just over 100 years ago, the landscape of Witley and Milford Commons was very different. Three training camps for British and Canadian soldiers were established in November 1914 to accommodate troops as they waited to be deployed from Portsmouth to France - sometimes there were 20,000 men in the camps at a time.

Not all of the people living locally were happy about this, as the camps put pressure on the local community, with extra people to feed, more noise, more disruption.



The camps acted as a kind of 'holding space' and the men were kept busy until it was their time to leave. There were animals to look after (including horses and donkeys), route marches, mock battles and all kinds of training - musketry, preparation for trench warfare - even a 'Gas School' on site, to prepare soldiers for what to do in the event of a gas attack.

The soldiers had downtime too and could visit the shops of 'Tin Town', join in with sporting events and there were even concerts in YMCA huts in the camps. Sometimes local people would attend these too, which would have helped to remind the soldiers a little of their own homes and families.



*Artillery training at Witley Camp**

* Artist's interpretation, using a reconstruction by Surrey County Archaeological Unit

Who was Wilfred Owen?

In 1916, Wilfred Owen, who had been teaching in France before he returned to England to enlist in the army, arrived at Witley Camp following 8 months of initial training. Although it wasn't until after the war that Owen's poetry became more widely known, he was writing poems as early as 1904, and definitely when he was at Witley Camp.

Owen was first deployed to France and to the horror of the trenches in 1916, but was sent back to England and to a special hospital in Scotland for a time, to receive treatment for shell shock. Sadly, after returning to active service again in 1918, fighting bravely and receiving the Military Cross, he was killed just a week before the Armistice.

A spoon belonging to Canadian soldier John Baxter



How do we know about other soldiers who passed through the Witley and Milford Camps?

Archaeologists found many everyday items when excavating the site, such as a boot, a shaving brush and a mess tin (a type of tin used for cooking and eating food). A spoon that was discovered in the mud was found to have a service number stamped into the handle, and this meant it could be traced back to the soldier who once held it, a Canadian soldier called John Baxter. Although seemingly insignificant, **these items link back directly to the individuals who owned and used them**, and help to tell their story, just like those found in the Bronze Age midden excavated close to where Brena lived, near Runnymede Bridge.



Various objects found during excavations at Witley Common - cutlery, a pipe, a comb and a bottle.



Quick check

What kinds of things did the soldiers do at Witley Camp?

Which of the famous poets from World War I stayed at Witley Camp for a short time?

Write down 3 key words or phrases that will help you remember Albert's story.