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## Press release: Revealed – hidden history of the East Sussex 'French Connection'

Monday 7 October 2013

The 'entente-cordiale' lives on in a new exhibition which traces the historic links between East Sussex and Normandy.

The two areas have a long, shared heritage, from the Norman invasion of 1066 to the growth of cross-channel tourism over the last century.

These, and lesser known links such as the sheltering of religious refugees, piracy and smuggling, are explored in the exhibition, The French Connection, which launches at Hastings Museum on Saturday 12 October 2013.

The three-month exhibition forms part of the Arch Expo project, an EU-funded partnership between East Sussex County Council and the Département de Seine Maritime, which aims to explore and celebrate the links between the two areas.

Cllr Chris Dowling, county council lead member for community services, said: "Despite being separated by the English Channel, the histories of East Sussex and Normandy are closely entwined.

"Everyone knows about the Battle of Hastings, but through the thousand years which have since passed, the two areas have shared social, cultural and economic links, in wartime and at peace.

"This exhibition offers a fresh twist on some of the stories we are all familiar with as well as unearthing a fascinating insight into the lesser-known episodes in our history."

Exhibits on display are derived from the archives of the East Sussex Record office, the Departmental Archives of Seine Maritime and the museum collection.

The exhibition, which includes a programme of events for schools, will be officially opened by Cllr Emily Westley, Hastings Borough Council lead member for leisure and amenities.

She said: "It's very fitting we are working so closely with our French colleagues for this exhibition, which opens at the start of Hastings Week, marking the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, which took place on October 14 1066.

"I'm really looking forward to opening the exhibition, and am sure it will prove popular. I'm especially pleased that young people have not been forgotten, with the programme for schools running in conjunction with the exhibition."

Exhibits include:

- A tooth recovered from the coffin of Gundrada, wife of William de Warenne, founder of Lewes Priory
- Exhibits highlighting the impact of the introduction to the Wealden iron industry by the introduction of the blast furnace by French workers
- Documents recording how Rye served as a refuge for French Protestants fleeing persecution in Normandy
- A smuggler's cosh and a letter of 1735 from a would-be witness having second thoughts at testifying for fear of the notorious Hawkhurst smuggling gang
- Early travel diaries, including Henry Shiffner's of Dieppe as being 'miserably poor, houses dirty and irregular with a great number of beggars' and Frances Sayer's description of the under construction Brighton Pavilion as 'a very foolish undertaking'
- Plans of bathing machines, which protected swimmers' modesty when entering the water
- Exhibits, including a film clip of the 1970s, showing the rise of Newhaven as the major ferry port as Sussex

The exhibition runs from Saturday 12 October 2013 to Sunday 19 January 2014. More information is available [online](#) or by calling Hastings Museum on 01424 451052.

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