

The Comet and the Tapestry

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Halley's Comet (1P/Halley) is one of the best known and researched extraterrestrial visitors near Earth, appearing approximately every 75 years. The ball of dust and ice has an elliptical orbit that extends beyond Neptune at its farthest and around the sun at its nearest. Historical accounts are as old as 240

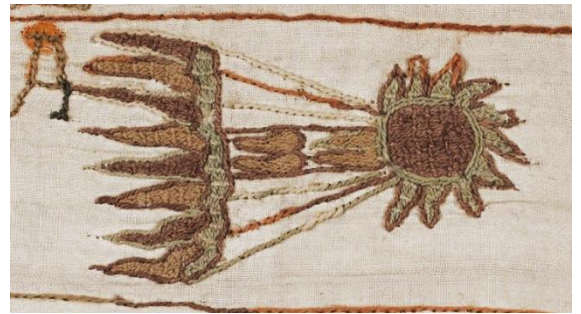


Image of Halley's Comet from panel 32 of the Bayeux Tapestry. X 0.7

1705 that periodic visible comet sightings were of the same object.

The comet last visited Earth's orbit in 1986, but one of the most historically interesting visits was in 1066, notable as the year of the Norman conquest of England. A chronicle of events prior to and during the invasion exists in the exquisitely embroidered Bayeux Tapestry. The tapestry is 230 feet long and 20 inches tall, believed to have been created soon after the Norman conquest and probably made in England. It is now preserved in the Bayeux Museum (bayeuxmuseum.com) in that city of Normandy in northwestern France.

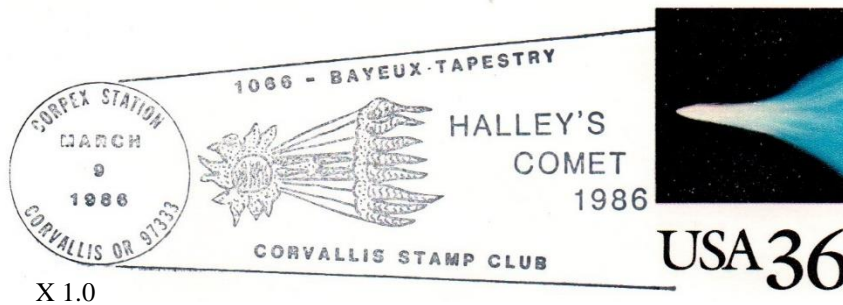


Imperforate example of 1986 stamp of Bhutan showing an image of the comet from the Bayeux Tapestry and a portrait of Edmund Halley. X 1.7

The celebrated appearance of Halley's Comet in 1986 brought with it

many commemorative stamps worldwide. Images ranged from modern scientific themes to those of the Bayeux Tapestry depiction.

The United States aerogram of 1986 featured an image of the comet, and the example at left has a commemorative pictorial cancel showing a reversed image of the comet from the Bayeux Tapestry.



X 1.0

The best representations on stamps of the comet in the context of the tapestry depict a broader image of panel 32.

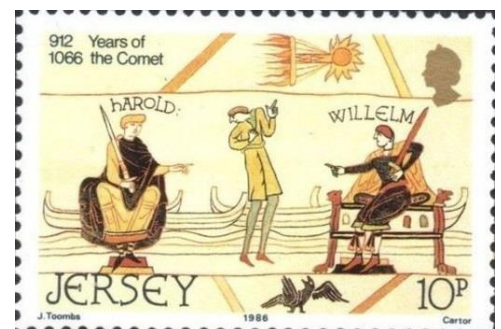


X 1.4

The 1986 stamp of Montserrat at left shows the context of the comet (labeled "Stella" or star) image. At left, people are observing and pointing to the comet. At right is Harold II, king of England. Contemporary accounts indicate that the comet was viewed as an omen – in retrospect a bad one for Harold, who was killed at the Battle of Hastings after nine months as king.

Although several countries issued stamps with this image, neither France nor the United Kingdom did. Both had previously issued Bayeux Tapestry commemoratives, but non showed this signature event.

The closest to recognition by the United Kingdom is the 1986 stamp of the British Crown Dependency, Bailiwick of Jersey (at right). Sadly, this is a collage of images from panel 12 (William), panel 22 (Harold), and panel 32 (man pointing at the comet with comet overhead). The first two are from the reign of Edward the Confessor; Harold was Earl of East Anglia and William was Duke of Normandy.



X 1.5

Halley's Comet will return to us in 2061.