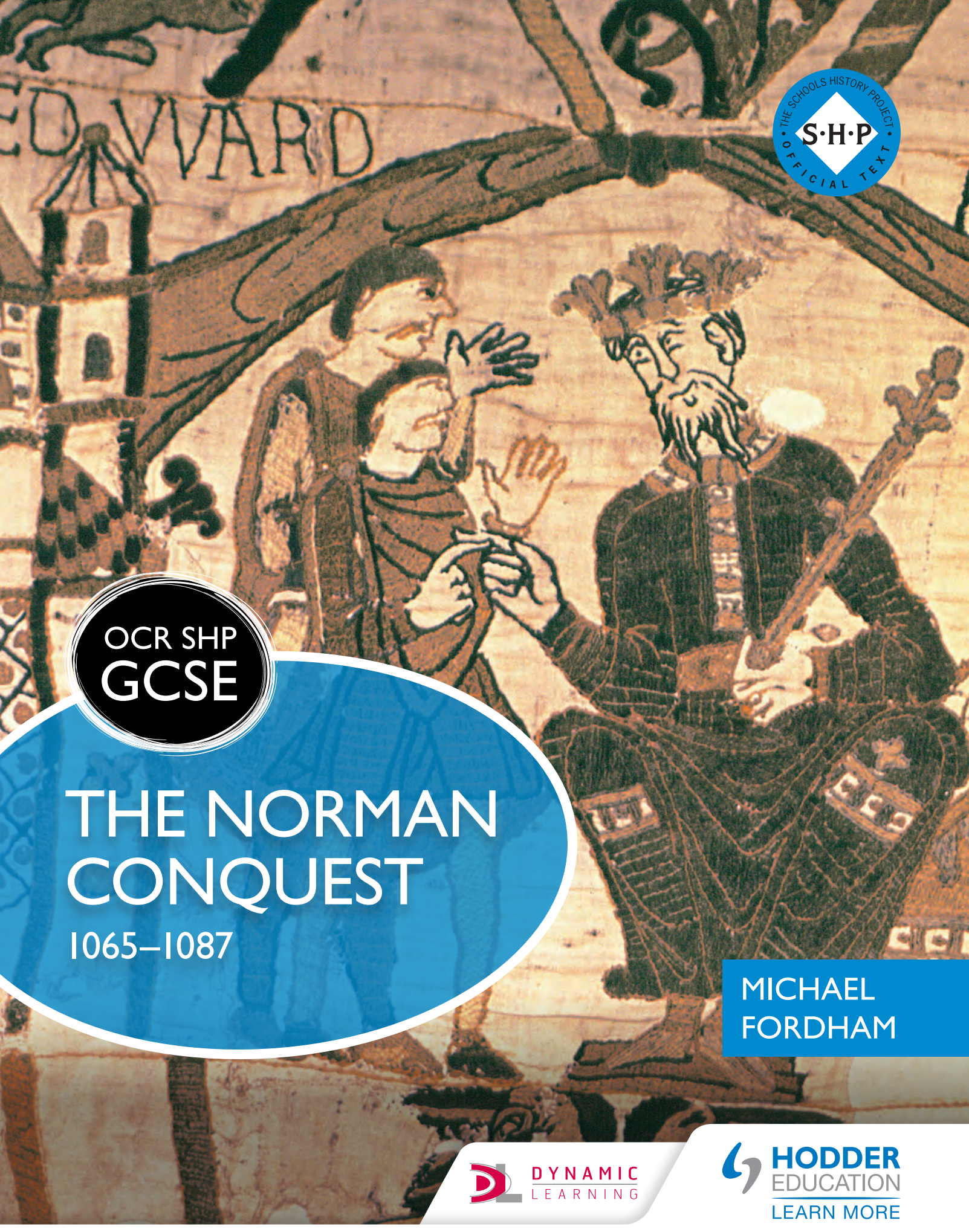


OCR SHP
GCSE

THE NORMAN CONQUEST

1065–1087

MICHAEL FORDHAM

THE SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT · S·H·P · OFFICIAL TEXT

DYNAMIC LEARNING

HODDER EDUCATION
LEARN MORE

CONTENTS

1

Too good to be true?

What was Anglo-Saxon England really like in 1065?

▼ Edward the Confessor and the healing of Michael, the cripple. An illustration from a manuscript written c.1240

The saintly king

This picture is taken from a beautifully illustrated manuscript written in the thirteenth century. The book tells the life story of Edward the Confessor, who ruled England from 1042 to 1066, in the years just before the Norman Conquest. He is the only English king who has ever been declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

This particular illustration was used alongside the story of how a poor Irish cripple called Michael once begged King Edward to carry him to the altar of Westminster Abbey. Michael was sure that he would be healed if Edward would only do this for him.

The saintly king lifted Michael onto his back and walked into the Abbey. As he did so, the blood from Michael's sores ran down the king's fine clothes. But as they approached the altar something remarkable happened: Michael felt life returning to his crippled legs and the sores on his skin were healed. When the king put him down, Michael could stand for the first time in years. The poor beggar and his king rejoiced together by running and jumping around the abbey and singing hymns of praise to God.

The story is very unlikely to be true, of course. It reveals more about how later generations viewed Edward the Confessor than it does about actual events in his life. The king seems too good to be true.

The 'Golden Age'

In the same way that stories about King Edward have been exaggerated, so too has the reputation of the nation he ruled. Some historians believe that England was passing through some sort of 'golden age' just before the Norman Conquest of 1066 and that this was brutally and tragically ended by the invasion and rule of William the Conqueror. This view was particularly popular in the nineteenth century. Novelists, poets, artists and some (but not all) historians wrote about England on the eve of the Conquest as a land of free people, who could enjoy their fair share of its considerable wealth and who enjoyed an early form of democracy. As you will learn, this image of pre-Norman England is also too good to be true.

Reflect

Which parts of the story of King Edward and Michael surprise you most?

The Enquiry

In this enquiry you will learn about:

1. Anglo-Saxon society – the people and how they lived.
2. Anglo-Saxon religion – the Church and people's beliefs.
3. Anglo-Saxon culture – the art, literature and buildings of the time.

In each section you should make two lists. In one you should note anything that might have made life in late Anglo-Saxon England seem 'golden' to people who are determined to find the best in it. In the other you should explain why this interpretation of Anglo-Saxon can be challenged. You will need to use evidence to support your explanations. Record your ideas in a table like this:

Aspects of late Anglo-Saxon life that might seem 'golden'	Reasons why life was not really so 'golden'

Record

Make the first entries in your table as described on page 9.

Use the sub-heading 'Anglo-Saxon society'.

Anglo-Saxon society in 1065

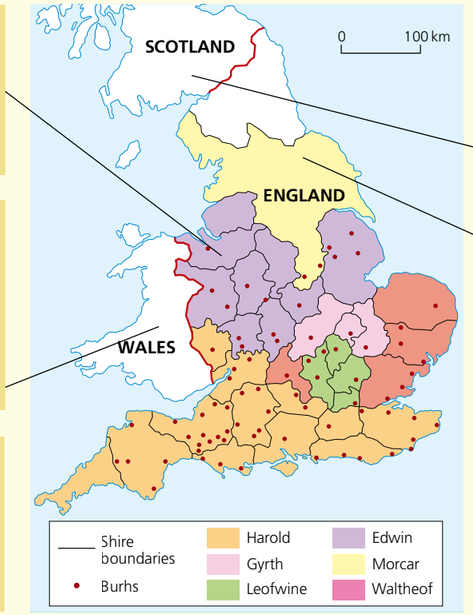
Origins

In 1065, the kingdom of England had only existed for just over a century. The character of different regions revealed how unsettled the land had been for centuries.

The people of the midlands and the south were mainly Anglo-Saxons. They settled there after arriving from northern Germany in the fifth century. Over time, they set up several different kingdoms such as Wessex in the south.

The people of Wales were descended from the British people who lived all over southern Britain until the Anglo-Saxons arrived. Wales had its own kings and kingdoms and was independent from England until the thirteenth century. The word 'Wales' is from the Anglo-Saxon word for a foreigner, outsider … or slave.

Cornwall, in the far south-west, still had many more of the ancient British people who had lived throughout the country until the Anglo-Saxons arrived in the fifth century AD.



Map of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom in 1065

Scotland was an independent country. The border region between Scotland and England was unsafe and unsettled. People made frequent raids into each other's land.

The people of the north and east of England were a mix of Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. The Vikings came from modern-day Norway, Denmark and Sweden and settled in the region north of the red line on this map after about 850 AD.

Reflect

How did fighting against the Vikings help England to develop?

The kingdom, shires and burhs

In the tenth century, the rulers of Wessex led their fellow Anglo-Saxon kings in wars to end Viking rule in the north and east. This co-operation eventually led to the emergence of one kingdom, England. By the time the last Viking leader was defeated in 954 AD, England was becoming a powerful and highly unified state.

Unlike France, where local lords ran large regions as if they were private kingdoms, English kings had strong, central control. Their land was divided into shires. In almost every shire there was one or more royal 'burh'. These were fortified towns that kept the local community safe. This system was weaker in the north east where Viking influences lived on, but in most of the country, the network of burhs developed, markets grew and trade prospered. Kings of England also supported trade by setting up royal mints in some burhs. These produced coins whose purity and value was trusted.

The system of shires, the success of trade and the steady supply of trusted coins made taxation in England far more efficient than it was in other European states such as France.

From 1003, the Viking invaders returned. This time they defeated the English. Between 1014 and 1042 the kings of England were Danes, but they kept the system of shires, burhs and royal mints as it worked so well. England was one of the wealthiest and most efficient states in eleventh century Europe.

The people

There were just under two million people living in the kingdom of England in 1065. The five main groups are described on pages XX and XX.

1. The king

Kings of England had considerable powers and duties:

- They raised taxes to pay for the nation's defence and for the upkeep of the burhs, roads and bridges to encourage trade.
- They had the power to issue new laws.
- They had to ensure that justice was served in local or shire courts.
- They owned more land than anyone else.
- Each king was expected to be a fine warrior.
- English kings, unlike those on the continent, also had responsibility for the Church.

The line of Danish kings who ruled England after 1014 died out in 1042 and the man who took the throne was Edward the Confessor. He was descended from the Anglo-Saxon kings who had been defeated by the Vikings in 1014. He never expected to become king and had spent 25 years of his early life in his mother's homeland, the Duchy of Normandy in France. He enjoyed hunting but he was no warrior. When he returned to England to become king in 1042, he concentrated his attention on Church affairs and left most royal duties to his closest advisers, some of whom were his French friends from Normandy.

2. Earls

The king's chief advisers were the earls. Together with leading bishops they formed the Witan, an advisory council that even had some say in who should take the throne when a king died. They owned vast areas of land where they acted as the king's agents. They had no private armies but they gathered and led the king's 'fyrd' (armed forces) in times of war. They also held shire courts twice a year.

For centuries these earls had come from well-established families but the Danish kings destroyed these. In 1065, there were five earls. Their lands are shown on page 10. Their families were quite new to the role. In the south, Harold, Gyrth and Leofwine were brothers. In the midlands and the north, Edwin and Morcar were brothers from a different family. Plots and murders had always been part of political rivalry between earls and the intense rivalry between these two families had almost caused a civil war earlier in Edward's reign. Earl Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, emerged as the richest and most powerful man in the kingdom. His sister, Edith, had married King Edward in 1045 and by 1065 Harold effectively ruled the country on his behalf.

In this manuscript from c.1050, the King of England sits on his throne and discusses royal affairs with his leading earls. Below them, thegns can be seen arriving on horseback at a royal burh.

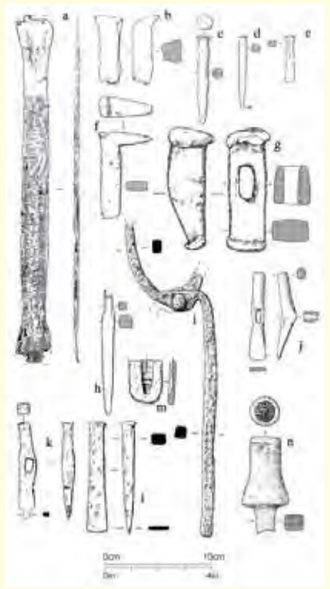
3. Thegns

Below the earls there were roughly five thousand thegns (pronounced 'thanes'). Their high status came from land ownership. A thegn needed to hold about 250 hectares of land. Some held even more and the richest one hundred might have direct contact with the king, but most just lived comfortably on their lands and carried out the king's work for him. They ran the local courts and collected taxes. They were expected to fight for the king if necessary. Although some created their own defensive burhs, they were not like the knights of France who had their own private castles.

Reflect

1. Identify the king, earls and thegns in the picture above.
2. From what you have read so far, what do you think were England's strengths and weaknesses in 1065?

▶ Cutting and collecting timber. From a manuscript made c.1030



▲ Late Anglo-Saxon artefacts found by archaeologists

a and b – punches for stone-work
c and d – shears
e – stone-worker's small pick-axe
f – tool for smoothing leather
g – tool for finishing edges on leather
h – comb for straightening raw wool ready for spinning
i and j – awls (strong needles) for leather work

4. Ceorls

Ceorls (pronounced 'churls') made up the vast majority of England's population. Some had special skills as carpenters or blacksmiths but most worked on patches of land in wide, open fields around village communities. They grew crops and kept animals. Timber provided building material and firewood.

The better-off ceorls lived mainly in the eastern shires. They owned some land and a house of their own. However, most ceorls had to pay rent and do work for the thegn whose land they lived on but they were free men in the sense that they were no one else's property. They had to serve in the king's 'fyrd' in times of war and they were also expected to share in the work of keeping roads and bridges in good order. They were trusted to take part in local decision-making and trials in local courts. Some have seen ceorls as the backbone of a freedom-loving early form of Anglo-Saxon democracy. But their rights and freedoms were at their strongest centuries before, when the Anglo-Saxons still lived in Germany. They had been eroded over the years and by 1065, ceorls were far less independent than in earlier times. They were becoming more tightly bound to serve the thegn on whose land they lived and worked, and who protected them.

5. Thralls or slaves

At the base of Anglo-Saxon society were the thralls or slaves. In most of Europe, slavery had died out by 1000 but it survived in England. Unlike ceorls, these people were the property of a master. They were not free to seek work elsewhere. Like animals, they could be branded or castrated. They formed about 10 per cent of the population of the country at this time although the proportion was much higher in western shires. Some thralls were captured in war or were criminals. In times of famine, parents might sell a child into slavery. Anyone born into slavery, remained a thrall.

Very little written evidence survives about the lives of the 'ordinary' Anglo-Saxons. Historians rely mainly on artefacts found by archaeologists to discover how these people lived. But a valuable written source is *Aelfric's Colloquy*. This is a school book, written c.990, to teach Latin. It is filled with invented characters discussing their work. Here, a thrall describes his daily routine:

> I go out at daybreak, goading the oxen to the field, and I join them to the plough; no winter is so harsh that I would dare to lurk at home for fear of my master … Throughout the whole day I must plough a full acre or more … I must fill the stall of the oxen with hay, supply them with water and carry their dung outside. Oh! Oh! The work is hard. Yes, the work is hard because I am not free.

Reflect

How might the artefacts above help historians interpret the lives of ceorls and thralls?

Women

Historians have disagreed about the nature and quality of women's lives in late Anglo-Saxon England. The evidence is certainly confusing. Here are some statements about Anglo-Saxon women that have been used in books and articles on this subject. They are all true but they more or less cancel each other out.

- Women had the legal right to own land and property. They lost this after 1066.
- Sermons from the time accuse gangs of men of buying women slaves, raping them and selling them on.
- Women had the legal right to leave a husband who committed adultery.
- Almost all written evidence about Anglo-Saxon women relates to higher status women known as 'ladies'. Skeletons of Anglo-Saxon women of lower status suggest that they must have done a lot of hard manual work such as churning butter, chopping wood and working in the fields at harvest time.
- The women were in charge of 'double-monasteries' where monks and nuns lived, worshipped and prayed alongside each other.
- There were laws that set out fines for any sexual harassment of women.
- Five per cent of all the land in England was owned by women in 1066. Almost all these women were related to the earls.
- Cases of divorce were very rare indeed in Anglo-Saxon times.
- Women were in charge of their household stores and money. They did little work in the fields.
- 'Double-monasteries' had more or less ended by 1000.

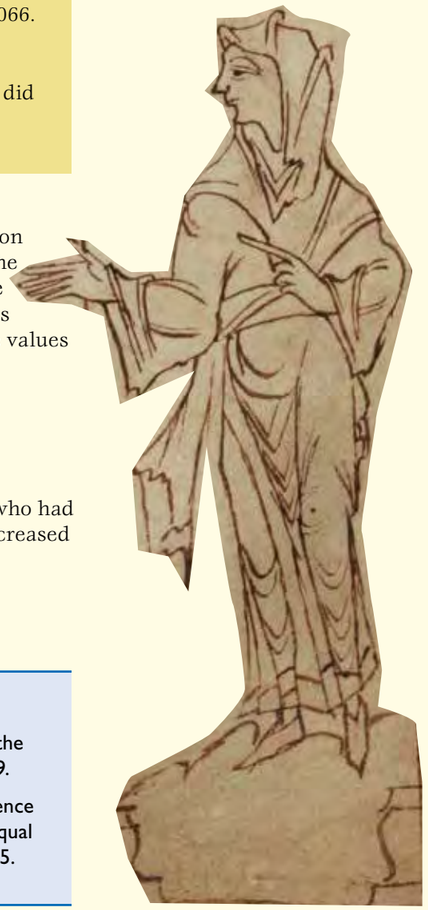
The value of life

Under Anglo-Saxon law, every person had a cash value that depended on their social group. This was called a 'wergild'. If someone was killed, the person responsible would not be put to death if he or she could pay the correct 'wergild'. Values were expressed in shillings. (One shillings was roughly the value of a cow.) One eleventh-century document listed the values as:

King = 18,000 shillings	Thane = 1,200 shillings
Prince = 9,000 shillings	Ceorl = 160 shillings
Earl = 4,800 shillings	Thrall = No value

The value of a woman was exactly the same as the value of a man who had the same status in society. If a woman was pregnant, her value was increased by 50 per cent.

▼ An Anglo-Saxon lady from an eleventh-century manuscript



Reflect

1. Do you agree that the statements in the yellow box 'more or less cancel each other out'?
2. What is your own conclusion on the nature and quality of Anglo-Saxon women's lives?

Record

Continue to add notes to the table you started on page 9.

In particular, look for evidence about how free and how equal English people were in 1065.

Record

Start the second section in your table as described on page 9. Use the sub-heading 'Anglo-Saxon religion'.

Anglo-Saxon religion

Leading the Church

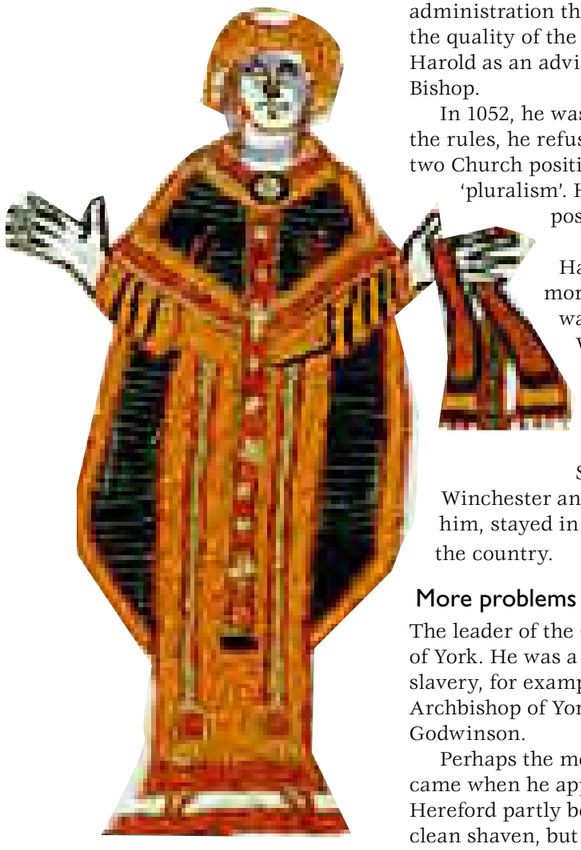
The Anglo-Saxons of the eleventh century were Christians. In England, the leader of the Church was the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1065 this position was held by Stigand. This picture of him was woven into the famous Bayeux Tapestry. It gives his name in Latin.

Stigand became a priest as a young man and by 1047 he was Bishop of Winchester. He impressed people more for his skills of efficient administration than for any spiritual gifts. He did little to try to improve the quality of the Church or its priests. Instead he served the King and Earl Harold as an adviser and enjoyed the wealth that came with the position of Bishop.

In 1052, he was promoted to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Against all the rules, he refused to give up his post as Bishop of Winchester. Holding two Church positions at once and being paid for both was called the sin of 'pluralism'. He was also accused of 'simony', selling off other Church posts to the highest bidder.

Stigand kept his influence because he had the support of Harold Godwinson, the Earl of Wessex. As you know, Harold more or less ruled the country on behalf of King Edward and was the second wealthiest man in England after the King. With Harold's support, Stigand gained land in ten shires and became the third wealthiest man in the land, making generous gifts to churches and monasteries.

In Rome the Pope, who was Head of the whole Roman Catholic Church, was deeply upset. He insisted that Stigand could not be Archbishop until he gave up his post at Winchester and came to Rome for an official blessing. Stigand ignored him, stayed in England and spent his time helping Harold Godwinson run the country.



▲ Archbishop Stigand from the Bayeux Tapestry c. 1075

More problems with priests

The leader of the Church in the north of England was Wulfstan, Archbishop of York. He was a more spiritual man than Stigand and spoke out against slavery, for example. But, like Stigand, he broke the rules by being both Archbishop of York and Bishop of Worcester. He, too, was close to Harold Godwinson.

Perhaps the most unusual example of Harold's influence over the Church came when he appointed a man called Leofgar to be the new Bishop of Hereford partly because he had a moustache! Priests were supposed to be clean shaven, but Leofgar kept his fine moustache as that was the sign of an Anglo-Saxon warrior. Leofgar believed he was a soldier at heart. Harold appointed him to Hereford because he wanted someone there who would defend the nearby border with Wales. Once appointed, the new bishop gathered an armed force of thegns and rode into Wales, only to be killed in his first battle.

Below the archbishops and bishops were the thousands of priests who worked across the nation. Compared with most of Europe at the time, many English priests were poorly educated. The Pope also criticised the English Church for allowing its priests to marry, something that had been discouraged on the continent for hundreds of years. In the eyes of the Pope, this was another sign of backwardness and low standards in the English Church.

Reflect

What does the story of Stigand tell you about the condition of the Church in Anglo-Saxon England by 1065?

Missed opportunities

The Church in England had not always been seen as backward. In the previous century it had seen some of the most impressive Church leaders in Europe but their influence had not been allowed to flourish.

St Dunstan

Dunstan was a monk from Somerset who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 960. He spent hours in prayer but also devoted himself to art. He was highly skilled as a musician, an engraver and as an illustrator. The image shown here was almost certainly drawn by him. It shows the figure of Christ. Many believe that the monk kneeling humbly at Christ's feet is a self-portrait of Dunstan. He could hardly have been more different from Stigand: when a powerful Anglo-Saxon lady left Dunstan a fortune, he spent it all on improving the monasteries of England.

As Archbishop, Dunstan set the English Church high standards.

▼ The figure of Christ, from a tenth-century manuscript

- He worked to end pluralism and simony so that Church leaders would never be corrupted by wealth.
- He worked to improve the education and commitment of the priests, monks and nuns.
- He insisted that priests should not marry.
- He organised the rebuilding of many churches, abbeys and monasteries, often helped by donations from local thanes or earls who wanted the monks and nuns to pray for their souls.

Soon after he died in 988, English Church leaders declared Dunstan to be a saint.

St Alphege

The work of Dunstan lived on after his death through other monks whose lives he had influenced. One of these was Alphege who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1006. He too was a deeply Christian man. He would have continued the Church reforms of Dunstan but he became Archbishop just as England was again suffering from raids by Vikings. In 1011 Vikings destroyed much of Canterbury, captured Alphege and beat him to death with animal bones.

It was the war and disruption caused by this wave of Viking raids that ended the great achievements of the late Anglo-Saxon Church. The Danish kings who ruled England between 1014 and 1042 were Christians and they did support the Church, but it never recovered the strength that it had in 1000.

King Edward

The English Church missed another opportunity to reform itself in the reign of King Edward the Confessor. Having spent his early life in Normandy, Edward knew the standards that the Church was setting itself on the continent. He brought Norman priests to England when he became king. One of these, Robert of Jumièges, became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1051 and he set about improving the Church, despite resistance from English priests. The image on page 11 is from a manuscript that Robert created to train monks in high-quality illustration.

In 1051–52 there was a power struggle in England. The Earl of Wessex objected to the rising power of Edward's foreign-born friends. It is likely that Wessex also learned that Edward had recently promised to let William Duke of Normandy take the English crown when he died. By 1052, Edward lost the power struggle and was forced to replace Robert with Stigand as the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

Reflect

In the eleventh century what were seen as signs of high standards in Church life?

The character of the English Church

One reason why the English Church was so different from the rest of western Europe's is that it had a history that blended different Church traditions and styles.

Roman Catholic and Celtic traditions

In the lands that we now call Italy, Germany and France, the Church had spread from Rome. Over many centuries this Roman Catholic Church developed its own ways of working and its own styles of art, with an emphasis on saints and angels. This Roman Catholic Church was brought to England in 597 and Anglo-Saxons, who had been pagans before then, became Christians over the years that followed. Naturally they adopted the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church too.

In the north of England, however, a different Christian tradition had been spread by missionaries from Ireland. The Church there had its own forms of worship and it had also developed its own artistic traditions. Its images avoided using straight lines and preferred to show elaborate patterns made up of interlaced bands rather like the interwoven stems of plants.

The illustration on the right is from an English Church manuscript that was made c.1012, just before the standards set by Dunstan, Alphege and others began to decline. It is written in Latin and it is the opening page of one of the Gospels, the part of the Bible that tells the story of Jesus. It blends the Roman Catholic and the Celtic traditions.

▲ The opening page of Mark's Gospel from an early tenth-century manuscript

Reflect

What signs can you see that this Bible illustration blends Roman Catholic and Celtic art?

▲ The opening page of John's Gospel from an early eleventh-century manuscript

The English language

Another sign that the Church was different in England is shown in this image. Like the one above, it is a page from one of the Gospels. Unlike the page above, it is written in English or rather 'Old English' which is the form that was spoken around the year 990 when this was made. Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church insisted that the Bible should only ever be written in Latin so that its accepted meaning should not get lost in translation. Reformers such as Dunstan agreed, but it is a sign of the independence of the English Church that monks continued to write Bible extracts in the normal language of the people.

For hundreds of years after the Norman Conquest, the Church punished anyone who translated the Bible into English. This changed under Henry VIII when he set up the Church of England in 1534. Soon afterwards, a Bible in English was placed in every church in the country. The Archbishop of Canterbury who helped Henry make this change was Thomas Cranmer. For a while, Thomas Cranmer owned this 'Old English' Gospel and signed his name 'Thomas' at the top of the page.

Reflect

Why do you think Thomas Cranmer wanted to own this Gospel?

An Anglo-Saxon stone cross at Gosforth, Cumbria, c.900

The religion of the people

Very few English people could read. Gospels like those on page 16 and other documents were for priests, monks, nuns or the wealthy and highly educated rulers of England. As so often in history, it is very hard to know what went on in the minds and hearts of the poorer people who made up the majority of the population.

Worship

We do know that in some parts of the country they gathered to worship around large stone crosses like the one shown here. In these places they may have had a simple shelter but they had no permanent church building. The English Church was more rural than it was on the continent. Some quite important Church centres were quite remote and they served as a 'hub' from which priests would visit outlying villages to lead the people in worship. It was only later, after the Normans arrived, that each village had its own stone church.

We also know that the Church all over England was proud of its own local traditions. It was another of the complaints of the Pope in Rome that the English had too many saints who were usually local people who were highly thought of after their death. In theory, new saints could only be made by the agreement of the Pope, but the English ignored this ruling.

Reflect

This stone cross was made in the north of England where Celtic Christianity was strong. How might you guess this from its decoration?

Behaviour and belief

The English people may also have ignored or failed to live up to the Church's teachings in other ways. Records of sermons preached at the time when St Dunstan and St Alphege were trying to improve the Church have some serious criticisms of standards of behaviour. People seem to have been fond of binge-drinking, over-eating and indulging in sex, especially on what were supposed to be holy days in the Church's calendar. One sermon said that the success of the Vikings' invasion in 1013 was God's punishment for the sins of the people of England.

Sermons also criticised people for belief in witchcraft and spells. In the days before the Anglo-Saxons became Christian they had deep-seated beliefs in creatures such as elves and goblins that could do harm. In Bible illustrations of stories about the devil and demons, these are sometimes shown in forms that look very much like the elves from older pagan stories. They were often believed to be the cause of illness and rings like this one are sometimes found. It dates to about XXXX. The symbols around the edge and on the inside have never been deciphered and historians believe that they are probably a spell or chant that was believed to ward off the evil spirits that might make someone unwell.

Reflect

Some historians say that the sermon that criticised the behaviour of the English at the time of the Viking invasion proves that people were not deeply religious. Others disagree and say that a sermon of that type is sure to exaggerate. What would your own interpretation be?

▲ An Anglo-Saxon ring, c.900

Record

Complete the entries in your table as described on page 9.

Record

Start the second section in your table as described on page 9. Use the sub-heading 'Anglo-Saxon culture'.

Anglo-Saxon culture

The Alfred Jewel

▶ The Alfred Jewel – an impressive piece of Anglo-Saxon art

In 1693, a ploughman working in a field in Somerset noticed something golden shining in the upturned earth at his feet. When it was cleaned, the gold shined even brighter and the intricate shapes and patterns of the metalwork were found to hold an enamel image of a man carrying what seem to be two long-stemmed plants. Around the edge some words are engraved in Old English: 'ALFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN'. This means 'Alfred had me worked (made)'.

Within a few years, the jewel had been handed over to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford where it has been kept ever since. Most experts now believe that the jewel was once attached to a long and slender wooden pointing-stick that would once have been used to identify words and images in old manuscripts. It probably belonged to a monastery. Some believe that it was one of several such pointers that were sent around the country in 890 by Alfred the Great, the King of Wessex who started the English fight-back against the Vikings at the end of the ninth century. In the opinion of many, it is the single most impressive work of art from Anglo-Saxon times, a sign of their remarkable skills.

Reflect

Do you think an object made c.890 can be used as evidence of a 'Golden Age' in Anglo-Saxon England on the eve of the Norman Conquest?

Engraving

Some of the finest art produced in Anglo-Saxon England involved engraving. You have already seen how they engraved the stone cross on page 17 and the borders of the Alfred Jewel on page 18. Here are two more examples.

The Fuller brooch

This is the Fuller brooch, named after the person who owned it for many years. Like the Alfred Jewel, it was made at the end of the ninth century. It is a brooch made of silver. It represents the five senses:

- Sight is shown in the centre where a man stares out at us with his eyes open wide.
- Taste (above and to the left) has his hand in his mouth.
- Smell (above on the right) has his hands behind his back as he stands surrounded by tall plants.
- Touch (below, to the right) is rubbing his hands together.
- Hearing (below and on the left) lifts a hand to his ear.

▲ The Fuller brooch, c.890

Anglo-Saxon objects like this are very rare. Precious metalwork and books decorated with gold and jewels were stolen from England, first by the Vikings and then by Normans. Even later, Anglo-Saxon religious art was often destroyed when Henry VIII dissolved (ended) the monasteries.

Even if we have no examples from the eleventh century, we have evidence that Anglo-Saxon England was still famous for its metal work and engraving skills at that time. In the 1050s, an English chronicler from the abbey at Evesham praised the Abbot there as a great craftsman in metalwork. One Norman chronicler mentioned how foreign merchants travelled to England from Italy and beyond to buy works made by English craftsmen. He described English men as 'outstandingly skilful in all the arts'. He added that English women were highly skilled at weaving with gold thread and at embroidery. We can see this in the Bayeux Tapestry which was embroidered by English women on the orders of their new Norman masters. Fine brooches such as the Fuller brooch were obviously worn with beautiful gowns and cloaks.

Reflect

Some art experts believe that the figure in the Alfred Jewel on page 18 may also represent the sense of sight. Would you agree?

A case

Anglo-Saxons also did delicate engravings in other materials. This small case is about 23 centimetres long and has a sliding lid. It is made from walrus ivory. The top and sides have been carefully engraved by hand with figures such as dragons, lions, birds of prey as well as human hunters. The base shows scenes from archery and farming. It may have been made to hold quill pens or perhaps a musical instrument.

Reflect

What does this case, with all its engravings, suggest about life in Anglo-Saxon England?

An Anglo-Saxon case. Late eleventh century.

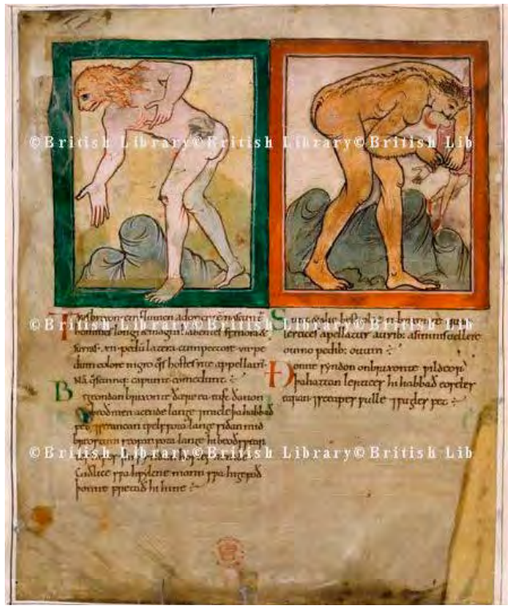
Literature

Almost all the examples you have already seen from books made in Anglo-Saxon times are from Church manuscripts (see pages 4,5, 6, 8 and 9). In this section you will learn about other literature that remains from Anglo-Saxon times.

Science

The image of men collecting wood on page 5 is not from a religious document. It is from a calendar that is found in a curious semi-scientific manuscript written around the year 1000. It contains a map of the world, information about astronomy and a description of far off places called 'Marvels of the East'. This image shows two of the many strange creatures that were believed to live in the east. One is half man and half lion. The other is a giant, eating a human being.

The 'Marvels of the East' was originally created in ancient Greece and was then kept alive by the Romans. This version is written in Anglo-Saxon Old English.



A page from an eleventh-century manuscript showing 'Marvels of the East'

▲ A page from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This entry describes the first Viking raids on England. It is from a copy made c.1050.

Fiction

The most famous Anglo-Saxon work of fiction is 'Beowulf'. This is a poem that is over three thousand lines long. It was first written down sometime between 700 and 1000. It is set in Scandinavia, the home of the Vikings and it tells the violent story of how a warrior named Beowulf hunts down and slays a monster and then the monster's mother. Even if it was not originally written in late Anglo-Saxon times, the poem was certainly still popular then. Like most literature from the time, it would have been spoken out loud for an audience rather than read by an individual. The story is still popular today either in its original form, in modern translation or as a television series.

History

At the end of the ninth century, probably on the orders of King Alfred the Great of Wessex, monks wrote a history of Britain that started with the arrival of Julius Caesar. Copies were made and sent to monasteries around England. The monks then updated the history in their books independently until the twelfth century.

Historians call the full collection of these histories the '*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'. It can be very one-sided and has many gaps, but it is a really valuable source and it shows how the Anglo-Saxons had a growing sense of their identity as a nation.

Miscellany

Many surviving works of Anglo-Saxon literature mix sermons, poems, biographies of saints, medical treatments or advice on grammar. The largest known collection of Anglo-Saxon writings is the *Exeter Book*. This contains a mixture of works compiled in the late tenth century. It is owned by Exeter Cathedral but it contains far more than religious writings. Its most famous entries are Anglo-Saxon riddles, some of which are simply too filthy to include in a school text book today!

Reflect

What does the literature described on this page suggest about the interests of Anglo-Saxon people?

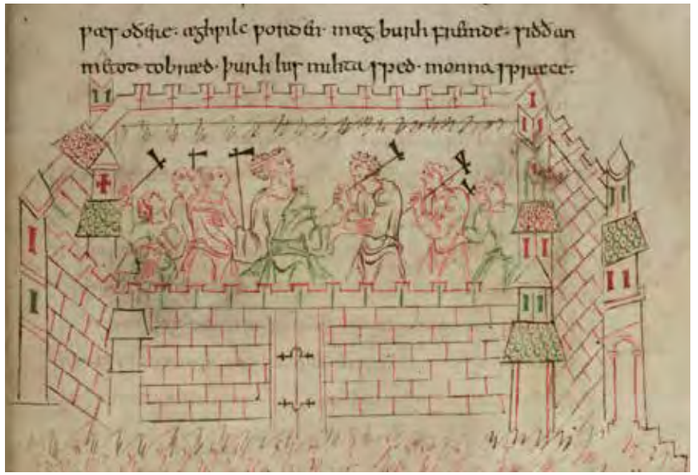
Buildings

There is a poem in the *Exeter Book* called 'The Ruin'. It describes a city that has fallen into decay, its walls and buildings more or less destroyed. The poem notes how these had all been made of stone and suggests that the city must have been made by giants.

Some historians believe the poem may be describing the city of Bath as it looked long after the Romans had left Britain. The Romans built in stone, but the Anglo-Saxons built almost entirely in wood, clay and straw. The Old English word for a builder was 'timbrend'.

As the buildings were made of wood, they have all rotted away. Archaeologists have investigated Anglo-Saxon sites and can work out the shape of the houses and other buildings from post-holes. These are where upright timbers once stood. As they rotted away, the soil that builds up inside is of a different colour from the surrounding area. This shows the shape and gives some idea of the size of the building by the thickness of the uprights. Most Anglo-Saxons lived in rectangular, single-storey houses with thatched roofs, but thanes lived in larger houses with two floors.

Even though they were often made of wood, some Anglo-Saxon buildings were remarkably fine. We know this from written descriptions, often recalling what a building looked like before it was burned down. With timber walls and thatched roofs, fire was a constant threat. One eleventh-century writer praised a nunnery at Wilton in Wiltshire that was notable for never having been burned down. Although it was fairly small, he compared it to the temple of Solomon that is described in the Bible. It had fine wooden carving, beautifully painted plasterwork, a winding staircase, polished precious stones and golden ornaments. He also delighted in the quality of the garments worn by the nuns, another reminder of the English skills of weaving and embroidery.



▲ An artist's reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon burh, c.2010

◀ Defending a burh. From an Anglo-Saxon manuscript, c.1000

Burhs

There were only three castles in England by 1065 and these had all been built very recently by the friends of King Edward who had brought the design from Normandy. Far more common were the royal burhs that were built all over England (see page X). These were surrounded by walls to keep the local community safe from attack. Even these were rarely made from stone. This illustration may look like a castle but in fact it shows a burh being defended. This one clearly has stone walls and it represents London or Londenburh, as it was called by Anglo-Saxons. Winchester was the capital of England in late Anglo-Saxon times but London was the largest burh and was growing in importance. This was one of the burhs where the Anglo-Saxons used the remains of the old Roman walls to create their own defences.

In most cases, however, the burh was defended by large earthworks of ditches and ramparts, with a strong wooden barrier. The artist's reconstruction of a burh shown here gives some idea of what they may have looked like in the eleventh century.

Reflect

What research would you expect the artist to have done before he or she produced this drawing of an Anglo-Saxon burh?

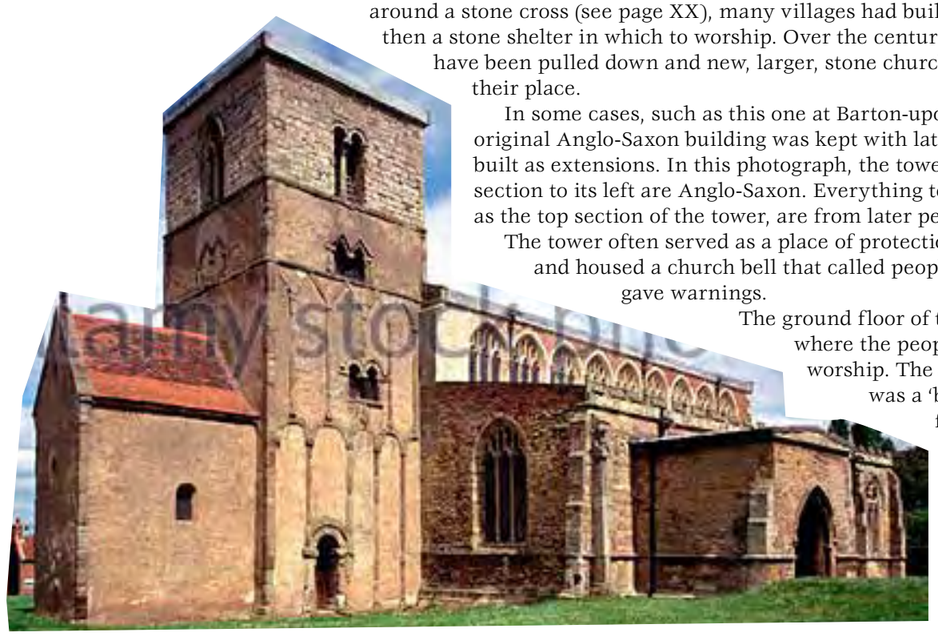
Churches

The only stone building that most Anglo-Saxons might ever have walked into would have been a church. Even though some still gathered for worship around a stone cross (see page XX), many villages had built first a timber and then a stone shelter in which to worship. Over the centuries most of these have been pulled down and new, larger, stone churches have taken their place.

In some cases, such as this one at Barton-upon-Humber, the original Anglo-Saxon building was kept with later additions being built as extensions. In this photograph, the tower and the small section to its left are Anglo-Saxon. Everything to the right, as well as the top section of the tower, are from later periods.

The tower often served as a place of protection for the people and housed a church bell that called people to worship or gave warnings.

The ground floor of the tower was where the people stood for worship. The section on the left was a 'baptistry', set aside for baptisms. A similar-sized area on the right of the tower was once the chancel where the priest stood at the altar to lead worship. It was demolished long ago to make room for the later extensions on the eastern side of the church. To give some idea of how the church may have looked in the eleventh century, just before the Norman Conquest, an artist has made this drawing.



▲ St Peter's Church, Barton-upon-Humber

Historians think this church, like many at the time, was built by a thane as a private chapel. This was increasingly common by the eleventh century. The Anglo-Saxon preference for building in wood can still be seen in this stone building: the various arches and pillars that can be seen on the wall of the tower are made in stone but are purely decorative. They do nothing structural to support the building. They are like the shapes that would have been visible in a timber-framed tower.

▶ An artist's reconstruction of how the church may have looked c.1050. Drawn c.2000

On the continent of Europe it was far more common to build with stone. The great St Peter's church in Rome was the finest in western Europe. One architect has suggested that its floor-space may have been as much as 600 times bigger than the average Anglo-Saxon village church. Closer to Britain, the Normans in France had built many large and strong stone churches in their own distinctive style. Church-building clearly was not the Anglo-Saxons' greatest artistic achievement, although there was at least one notable exception, as you are about to learn.

Reflect

Are you surprised the church building at Barton-on-Humber was so small in the eleventh century?

▲ Westminster Abbey and Westminster Palace as they may have looked c1065. A reconstruction by artist Terry Ball, c.1990. The artist has shown a 'cut-away' view of parts of the abbey to show its interior.

Westminster Abbey

We end this enquiry where we began: with King Edward the Confessor and Westminster Abbey. Edward was fond of spending time in London and built a palace at Westminster, just a few miles down the River Thames from the main burh.

The palace stood where the present-day Houses of Parliament can be seen. An abbey already existed just a few hundred metres away. With the advice and help of his Norman friend, Robert of Jumièges, King Edward paid for a new abbey to be built in the style that was so popular in Normandy. It was longer and taller than any other Anglo-Saxon church. It was made from carefully cut stone and had rounded arches in the Norman style. Little remains of that abbey today as it was more or less completely rebuilt in the thirteenth century, but in the last years of his reign, after losing the power struggle of 1051–52 (see pages XX to XX), King Edward spent much of his time making it as splendid as he could. It was his own effort to show that Anglo-Saxon England was one of the great nations of Europe.

1066

The official opening of the great new abbey was held on 28 December 1065. Unfortunately King Edward was too sick to attend. The new year arrived with the English king on his death-bed. It was to be a year unlike any other in English history.

Review

In 2008 a book was published with the title *The Battle of Hastings: the fall of Anglo-Saxon England*. The book's author, Harriet Harvey-Wood, argues that the late Anglo-Saxon period in English history was 'wonderful and astonishing'. How far do you agree with her? Use the notes you have made in this enquiry to help you to explain your answer.

Record

Complete the entries in your table as described on page X.

Worth a thousand words

On the opposite page, you can see two artistic reconstructions of the past. You saw several of these in the last enquiry and you will find many more throughout this book. These reconstructions are not based purely on imagination. They are important interpretations of history and the artists who create them must work with the evidence available.

We find artistic reconstructions in museum displays, guidebooks, information boards at historic sites, history books and archaeological reports.

The artists who create these images have to keep four big questions in mind.

What is the point? (Purpose)

It could be one or more of these:

- to show the appearance of a particular site at a particular time
- to show an imaginary but typical site based on real ones
- to show how the site worked and what people did there
- to show how the site fitted into the landscape or the rest of society
- to give a quick, clear impression
- to draw the viewers into spending time taking in the details of the scene.

Who is it for? (Audience)

It could be one or more of these:

- family groups visiting a site together
- children learning about a site as part of a school project
- foreign tourists from many different countries
- academic experts needing very accurate detail with no distractions

How do you know? (Research)

It must never be based on guesswork, so artists should:

- do their own research
- meet the experts, that is archaeologists, historians, teachers
- visit the site (preferably with the experts)
- ask awkward questions of the experts, for example about lighting in rooms or colours of walls and clothing
- keep the notes from the research to help others later
- find ways to show which parts of the picture experts are not so sure about

How can you help the viewer? (Technique)

Use different methods to achieve different effects. For example:

- showing scenes at eye level makes the viewer feel more involved
- showing scenes from above in an aerial view helps to widen the range and show wider context, for example the landscape or variety of activity
- cut-away walls and roofs to show life inside buildings or architectural details
- fade-out in grey any parts of an image that we have less evidence for
- use colour to add warmth and to make the scene life-like
- create a mood or atmosphere by the time of day or the weather or keep it 'neutral' if that is more appropriate
- surprise the viewer with true details they would not expect, for example women doing work normally associated with men
- include people to give a sense of scale
- show people in detail to add life, show clothing or how work was done
- show people with little detail if you do not want them to distract the viewer
- add photographs of archaeologists at work or of artefacts found at the site to help the viewer understand the sources that the illustration has used.

Reflect

1. How many of these techniques can you see being used in the artists' reconstructions on pages XX to XX?
2. Which techniques do you find particularly helpful?

◀ An Anglo-Saxon home and everyday activities, Canterbury Archaeological Trust, c.2010

▼ Portchester Anglo-Saxon burh, c.1000. This burh was one that started as a Roman fort so it uses more stone than most.

2

‘Lucky Bastard’?

What made William a conqueror in 1066?

▶ Statue of William the Conqueror in Falaise, France. By Louis Rochet, 1851

This monument stands in Falaise in northern France. The main figure on horseback is William, Duke of Normandy who was born in the town in 1028. After his death in 1087, he became better known as ‘William the Conqueror’.

William’s statue was erected in 1851 and some years later smaller statues were made to stand beneath his feet. These show William’s six predecessors as dukes of Normandy. They are:

- Rollo the Walker (so-called because he was a giant of man and no horse could carry him)
- William Longsword
- Richard the Fearless
- Richard the Good
- Richard III (who only ruled for a few months and had no time to win a good name)
- William’s father, Robert the Magnificent.

The people of Normandy obviously liked a good nick-name!

Statues and names given to leaders after their death are two more examples of interpretations of history. They try to capture and share something about the person in question. In William's case it is just as well that the statue uses the name he was given after his death, rather than the one he was most commonly known by in his lifetime. He was born to a young woman called Herleva who was probably the daughter of a local undertaker, although no one is sure. Duke Robert, William’s father, never married Herleva and from an early age his only son was known as ‘William the Bastard’. Despite this unpromising beginning, William went on to overshadow all his ancestors. They were dukes but he became a king, the King of England

Reflect

The person who made this statue has tried hard to give the impression that William was a mighty and fearless leader. How does he do this?

The Enquiry

In this enquiry you will learn how William achieved his remarkable success and decide how he was able to become King of England. Maybe you will agree with the historian John Gillingham. In XXXX, after carefully studying William’s career and how he managed to defeat Harold at the battle of Hastings, Gillingham decided that William was, in fact, very fortunate to take the English throne. He recommended that William should really be remembered as ‘William the Lucky Bastard’.

This enquiry will take you through William’s career up to the end of 1066. You will see that there is plenty of room for disagreement between historians over several points in the story and you will need to make your own mind up about each of these. The story will unfold in three sections:

1. Norman society, culture and warfare by 1066
2. The succession crisis of 1066
3. The battles of 1066 at Fulford, Stamford Bridge, and Hastings.

In each section you must make a list of key points that helped William gain victory over Harold. These points should be gathered under the following headings:

- William’s Norman background
- William’s personal qualities
- William’ opponents’ weaknesses or errors
- William’s good luck.

At the end of each section, pick out the three (??) most influential events or factors from that section that did most to help William win the English crown. These will help you to tackle the final Review task at the end of this enquiry.

Normandy in 1065

The society in which we grow up often shapes the way we live and the values we hold. That is why we begin this study by investigating what life was like in Normandy and in the rest of France between William's birth in 1028 and 1066 when he launched his invasion of England.

France – a different sort of kingdom

Strictly speaking, there was no such country as France in the eleventh century. A 'King of the Franks' ruled over the lands shown on this map, but these were not called France until the thirteenth century. In England, the struggle to drive out the Vikings had led to the development of a single kingdom where the King had strong central power over all his lands. The King of the Franks had far less central control. The only lands that he could claim to rule directly were those shown in pink on the map.

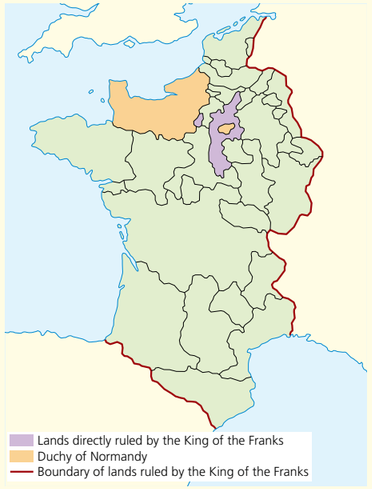
The feudal system

The other areas outlined within the red borders on the map were ruled by dukes or counts on behalf of the King. These duchies or counties were known as 'fiefs'. The duke or count who ruled these were 'vassals', men who had sworn loyalty to the King of the Franks. The King then granted the fief (lands) to them and they, in return, promised amongst other things to use their own armies to fight on behalf of the King.

Historians call this arrangement of land-holding in return for service the feudal system. It sounds similar to what happened in England but the important difference is that although English armies were gathered by the earls and thanes they were the King's armies. In France, dukes or counts had their own armies that they promised to use for the King when necessary. This gave French dukes and counts considerable independence. They ruled their lands rather like private kingdoms.

Record

Start making your notes under the three headings given on page 27.



▲ France in 1035

▲ Viking boats attacking northern France. A nineteenth-century painting.

The strength of Normandy

Normandy was one of the strongest fiefs in France. It had started as a Viking colony and its name means 'Land of the Northmen'. In the early tenth century, Viking raiders sailed down rivers and struck deep into northern France. Unlike the English, the French armies could not drive them out.

The Vikings' first leader in this new French settlement was Rollo the Walker, whose statue stands below William's in the photograph on page 26. In 911, having taken the land, Rollo became a vassal of the King of the Franks. Over the next century he and his descendants doubled their territory by conquest and by marriage alliances. They used brutal force to crush any rebellions, but they also adopted the language, laws and forms of government of the French people they now ruled. They chose trusted men as local lords who governed each part of the duchy. By the time William the Bastard was born in 1028, Normandy was, in many ways, more stable than many other areas of France.

Reflect

In this painting, the artist has tried to show the speed and power of a Viking raid. How has he done this?

▲ Knights fighting. A stone carving made c.1120

Knights

Viking raids were based on the speed of their ships and the fierce use of battle-axes and swords. In France a different but even more effective form of warfare was developing.

As dukes and counts across France tried to build up the strength of their private armies, they started to provide loyal supporters with armour and weapons and to keep them as full-time soldiers. With their chain-mail, swords and shields these professional soldiers would have been a frightening force, but their greatest strength was that they had mastered the art of fighting on horseback. They became known, in French as 'chevaliers' or horsemen. We know them as knights.

New forms of fighting

The invention and spread of the stirrup helped this form of warfare to develop. It allowed knights not only to charge their enemies on horseback, but to remain on the horse leaning out and swinging their swords while still fixed firmly in the saddle. The Anglo-Saxons never took to this way of fighting. In the 1050s, one of Edward the Confessor's Norman friends who had granted some land in the west of England, tried to get the English to fight on horseback against the Welsh. It was a hopeless failure. To fight this way needed years of training. William did not invent it, he just grew up among men who had mastered the technique and who could put it to good use when he later led the invasion of England in 1066.

This image shows two knights fighting each other with lances. Historians argue about whether Norman knights at Hastings used these weapons in this way or whether this approach developed later. In the Bayeux Tapestry, most knights seem to be throwing spears but one document says that William ended the battle with his own shattered spear in his hand. This suggests he had used it as a lance like the knights in the stone carving.

'Thugs'

Whatever their methods, the eleventh-century knights of France were a long way from being the 'knights in shining armour' of fairy tales. One historian has said that 'some of them were little better than brutal thugs'. This does not simply describe their approach to fighting, it covers their general way of life. They too were part of the feudal system. Just as dukes and counts received fiefs as vassals of the King, so these knights swore to serve their lord (the duke or count) and received land in return. They then used their own military power to take as much tax and rent as they could from the people who lived on their land under their control.

Reflect

Why do you think the historian mentioned above said some knights were 'little better than brutal thugs'?

Castles

Knights had to defend the precious land that gave them their wealth. They did this through the use of castles. Some were made from stone but most were made of earthworks and timber like so many royal burhs in Anglo-Saxon England. But the similarity ends there. The castles of French knights were not made for the defence of the wider community. They were the knights' homes and fortresses in one. They were made to keep themselves and their fellow warriors safe and to provide a safe 'hub' from which they could ride out and dominate the area.

▲ A model reconstruction of an eleventh-century French knight's castle at Le Plessis-Grimoult

There were two main types of castle.

1. The older and simpler form was a 'ringwork' castle. It consisted of an enclosure called a 'bailey' surrounded by a ditch and an earthwork bank topped by a strong wooden fence. The entrance, which would always be the weakest point, was fortified by a solid gatehouse.
2. The new and particularly effective form was a 'motte and bailey' castle. This was similar to a ringwork, but within the bailey there was a man-made mound known as the motte. On top of this motte a wooden structure called a 'keep' served rather like a castle within the castle.

Both types of castle could be built with great speed. Knights who took new land or who dared to rebel against the authority of their lord, could set the local people to work to construct a basic fortress in a matter of days, although larger ones might take a few months to complete. Over time, the wooden defences would be replaced by stone walls and keeps, but only if the knight had succeeded in establishing his rule in the area.

Normandy – stability and strength

Although the power of knights was growing in Normandy, they were carefully controlled by the different dukes who followed Rollo. This made Normandy much more stable than other parts of France at the time when William was growing up there. But knights were always hungry for land and power and would soon challenge any weakness shown by their lords.

▲ A model reconstruction of an eleventh-century French knight's castle at Grimbosq

▲ A photograph of the site of a French knight's castle at Grimbosq, taken c.2015

Christianity and the Church

The first Vikings in Normandy were pagans who believed in many different gods. When he became a vassal of the King of the Franks, Rollo converted to Christianity. This was a political move but in the years that followed, the dukes of Normandy put pagan ideas behind them and, with characteristic energy, they built up the strength and quality of the Roman Catholic Church in their lands. While England was drifting from high standards it had set around 1000, Normandy was moving to the forefront of Roman Catholic reforms, building many fine new monasteries. Popes praised Norman monks and nuns for their devotion, their teaching and their art and music. Above all, Normandy became famous for the beauty of its churches.

This photograph shows the interior of an abbey in Caen, the Normans' capital city. Its height and the elegance of its fine rounded arches are typical of the Norman style of architecture that was being copied across much of continental Europe at that time. It was called 'Romanesque' as the rounded arches were similar to those used in the Roman Empire many centuries before. Even fairly humble town churches in Normandy were made from stone and featured this same style, while many English churches were still made from wood.

The Norman style of church building spread so quickly because it was praised by popes and also because the duchy had strong trading links around northern Europe. Normandy was becoming both settled and wealthy, with firm government and efficient taxation. And yet, soon after William was born in 1028 it faced a crisis.

▲ The Abbe aux Dames in Caen, Normandy

William's early experiences

In 1035, when William was just eight years old, his father died. William became the new Duke of Normandy but he was far too young to rule. Almost immediately Norman knights turned against each and started more than a decade of violence as they grabbed land and power for themselves. They built castles and challenged authority, making the duchy like other regions of France. Senior lords ruling Normandy on behalf of William were killed in battle or simply murdered. The new guardians who took their places may well have been the murderers. William learned to be careful who he trusted.

As he grew older, William took a more active part in trying to restore order. By 1047, when another large-scale revolt was taking place, he took command. He skilfully negotiated with the King of The Franks who joined forces with William against the rebels who were crushed. William proved to be a good tactician and a fearless soldier. In the style of the first Viking dukes of Normandy, he could be merciless to his defeated enemies in the aftermath.

From that point on, William grew in experience as he increased his control and his territory. He defeated enemies in battle and, like Rollo years before, he made an ambitious but effective marriage alliance. He took Mathilde of Flanders as his wife in 1050. Flanders was a powerful county that bordered Normandy.

William and Mathilde knew that their marriage was against church rules as they were distant cousins. They were both deeply religious and, as a way of thanking the Pope for giving them special permission to marry, they each built an abbey in Caen. You can see the interior of Mathilde's abbey above. Building started there just as work on Westminster Abbey in England was coming to an end. It is at Westminster Abbey that we continue the story in the next section.

Reflect

What links can you find between the story of William's early experiences below and the information about Norman society on pages 10 to 13?

Record

Complete the notes you have been making on this section (pages 28 to 31).

Remember to use the headings given on page 27.

Record

Continue making notes under the headings given on page 27.

▶ Edward the Confessor dies. From the Bayeux tapestry, c.1075

The succession crisis

In January 1066, Edward the Confessor lay on his deathbed. The upper part of this scene from the Bayeux Tapestry shows him with his closest friends. At the foot of the bed his wife Edith wipes away a tear. Immediately below that scene, the tapestry shows him again. The Latin says he is 'defunctus': he is dead.

As Edward had no children, it was uncertain who would rule England after him. The events of 1066 were shaped by what the King may have said in his last moments.

Dying words

We simply cannot be sure what Edward actually said as he lay dying. The sources from the time are unclear. A biography of Edward was written for Queen Edith soon afterwards. It names the four people who were by his bed as his servant, Robert, his wife, Queen Edith, Archbishop Stigand and Earl Harold. It describes how he praised Edith, then reached out to Harold and said 'I commend this woman and all the kingdom to your protection'.

It is not clear from this whether Edward meant Harold to rule England as King or just guard the country and Edith until a new King was crowned. Historians are not even sure whether Edward ever spoke these words at all. The biography was written for Edith who was the sister of Harold Godwinson. Harold's claim to the English throne depended entirely on these deathbed words from Edward.

With so little clear and trustworthy evidence, and with this being such a dramatic and significant moment, different writers have summarised Edward's dying words in different ways:

Reflect

1. How do these three interpretations differ?
2. Why do you think they summarise the King's death so differently?

From 'Historyinanhour.com – History for busy people', 2016

Edward offered his hand to his brother-in-law Harold, and placed the kingdom of England into his protection. After these important announcements, Edward fell back into a coma and died during the night of 5 January 1066.

From *Edward the Confessor* by professional historian Frank Barlow, 1984

Even if Edward did recover consciousness just before the end, speak with a loud voice and make some sensible remarks, it is extremely doubtful that his mind was in a fit state to make a bequest. Moreover, we must admit that pressure could have been put on the dying man to say what was required, or words uttered indistinctly could have been interpreted by the archbishop in the sense he wanted.

From a novel, *The Last English King* by fiction writer, Julian Rathbone, 1997

Queen Edith knelt and put her ear close to the lips of the King. His throat rumbled like dry wattle in the wind, a bubble of spittle formed between his lips and burst. The King farted. The king died.

Queen Edith stood up tall, looked down into the hall, spoke clear and loud like a trumpet, her voice filling all the spaces.

'My lord the King is dead'. She took a breath. 'These were his last words. "I do prophesy the Witan will choose Harold Godwinson to rule England in my place. He has my dying voice."'

The claimants

Harold Godwinson was not the only person with a claim to be Edward's successor. He had three potential rivals. This chart shows where they all came from and why each one might have been crowned King of England. The crowns show the kings of England and the order in which they came.

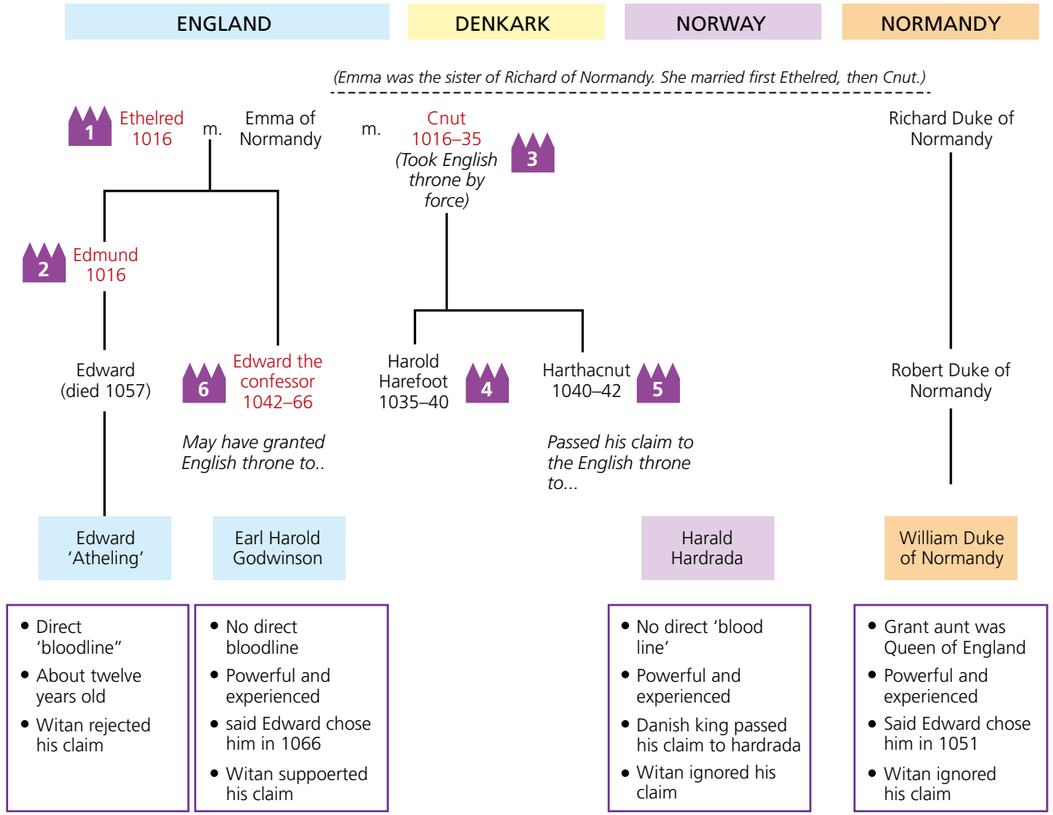
It may seem strange to us now, but in eleventh-century England, the throne did not automatically go to the nearest living relative of the King. The person who would take over needed to have a strong case based on the following criteria:

- Being in the 'blood line' of the previous King (that is being directly related)
- Being chosen by the previous King
- Being chosen by the Witan (leading nobles)

The new king – Harold II

Earl Harold Godwinson wasted no time. He persuaded the Witan that Edward had granted him the throne and the nobles then agreed that he should be King. This is probably what is happening on the far right of the picture on page 32. Two nobles meet Harold and hold out a crown and a battle-axe. The two men may well be Edwin and Morcar, the brothers who were earls of Mercia and Northumbria. Harold won their support by agreeing to marry their sister, a deal which would strengthen their family's power. Without their support, it is unlikely that Harold could have become King.

On 6 January 1066, just hours after King Edward was buried in Westminster Abbey, Harold was formally crowned as the new King of England. He had his crown. He would soon need his battle-axe.



Reflect

Based on the criteria listed at the top of the page, how strong were the claims of each of the four claimants shown on the diagram?

▲ Harold swears an oath in front of William. To add to the power of the oath he touches boxes of relics, probably the bones of saints. From the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1075

Responses to Harold's coronation

On learning that Harold had been crowned King of England, each of the three other claimants reacted differently:

Edgar accepted the situation. He knew he was too young to rule and that he had no power base in England, having been born in Hungary where his father went when the Danes took the English throne. If he had pushed his claim by his royal blood, maybe the story of 1066 would have been very different.

Harald Hardrada, King of Norway, had his hands full at the start of 1066 as he had been fighting a war against the Danes. He took no immediate action to follow up his claim to the English throne, but he became involved later in the year.

William, Duke of Normandy, responded with silent fury and immediate action: he began planning an invasion of England. He was certain that the crown should have passed to him. To understand his reaction, we need to look back to the events that you read about on pages XX to XX. They happened in either 1064 or 1065. The date, like so much else in this critical episode, is uncertain.

Reflect

1. Which of these accounts do you think is most likely to be true and why?
2. If Harold did swear an oath, was that a sign of weakness?

The reason for William's anger

The Norman version of events

As you know, the Bayeux Tapestry shows King Edward sending Earl Harold of Wessex to Normandy. Norman chroniclers writing in the 1070s insist that:

- King Edward, whose Norman mother was William's great aunt, originally promised the throne to William in 1051.
- In 1064, Edward sent Harold to Normandy to confirm the promise.
- Edward ordered Harold to take an oath while he was in Normandy. He had to swear that he would fully support William's right to take the English throne.
- Harold spent some weeks hunting and fighting alongside William in battle against his enemies.
- Harold willingly swore to support William's claim to the crown.

The English version of events

Not a single English source mentions any visit by Harold to Normandy until these written in 1120s. At that point, over fifty years later, two writers gave slightly different accounts:

- A historian wrote that Harold did go to Normandy, but he was not sent by Edward. He was there because he went out fishing on a boat that was blown across the English Channel. He was forced to swear his oath before William would allow him to leave.
- A monk agreed that Harold had been forced to swear his oath but he gave a different reason for him being in Normandy. The monk said that Harold went there by his own free will because he wanted William to release two of Harold's relatives who were being held hostage there.

Any of these accounts could be true. It is quite possible that King Edward sensed that Harold wanted the throne for himself. By sending him in person to confirm that William should be the next King of England, Edward could also insist the Harold should swear the oath of loyalty while he was in Normandy. If this really is what happened, then William could thank Edward for his foresight. The Duke won lots of support for his invasion of England by claiming that Harold had broken a promise made before God. If, on the other hand, Harold came to Normandy purely by accident or for some personal reason, he played right into William's hands.

When historians are faced with contradictory sources like this, they have to use their wider knowledge of the situation to decide which ones 'ring true'. They may reach very different interpretations though, as in these two examples:

Reflect

How and why do these two interpretations differ?

From *The Normans and the Norman Conquest* by R Allen Brown, 1985

That King Edward … sent Harold to confirm the earlier promise of the succession to duke William is entirely consistent with what is known of his Norman sympathies and wishes … As for Harold, if the mission was unwelcome to him it would have been nonetheless difficult to refuse, and he may have been motivated also by the thought that if he did not undertake it his brother would.

From *The Norman Conquest* by Marc Morris, 2016

By 1064, Harold and his brothers reigned supreme, whereas the authority of Edward the Confessor had been eroded to virtually nothing. It stretches credibility … to believe that the king, aged and powerless as he was, could have commanded the earl to do anything that would damage his own interests, let alone to help revive a scheme for the succession to which he had always been opposed.

William's preparations for invasion

Whatever had happened when Harold was in Normandy, William was determined to take the English crown. With characteristic energy and an eye for detail, he set about planning an invasion of England.

He quickly sent men to Rome to win the support of the Pope. They described Edward's promise to William, Harold's oath and how he had broken his word. They told the Pope how Archbishop Stigand crowned Harold, knowing that he saw Stigand as the sign of all that was bad about the English Church.

The Pope gave his full and open support. He sent them back to Normandy with a papal banner to carry into battle as a sign that God was on their side. William used the Pope's support to win over the many who, very reasonably, doubted whether the invasion could succeed. He also offered great rewards to those who backed him. His Norman vassals were obliged to fight for him but he gained extra support from other powerful men across northern France in this way.

Spring was spent in building extra ships and moving armour, weapons, food and wine to the coast. In the summer, foot-soldiers, archers, knights and horses made their way to a great camp at Dives-sur-Mer. By early August, William's invasion force was ready.

◀ William's army prepares to invade England. From the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1075

Reflect

What supplies are being transported in this picture?

Record

Complete the notes you have been making on this section (pages 32 to 35).

Remember to use the headings given on page 27.

The three battles

In England, King Harold's spies told him about William's invasion fleet. Just as he was starting to organise his defence of England, there came a worrying sign. In April 1066, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded the appearance in the night skies of a 'long-haired star' that stayed for over a week. We now know that this was a comet that reappears every 76 years, but at the time the English took it as terrible omen of a disaster that was soon to come. In Normandy, according to chronicles written later, the comet was seen as a sure sign of England's downfall.

Just as the comet was disappearing, news of violent raids along the south coast of England reached Harold. These attacks did not come from Normandy. They were led by one of Harold's own brothers, Tostig. He had lost his place as Earl of Northumbria in 1065 and was probably trying to force Harold to reinstate him. His attacks moved up the east coast but were never a serious threat. Sometime in May 1066, Morcar, the new Earl of Northumbria and his brother Edwin, Earl of Mercia, drove Tostig out of the north east and he sailed away from England once more. Despite the comet, the country seemed safe once again.

▲ From the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1075

▲The battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge

Reflect

By 20 September 1066, do you think most English people would still have thought the comet was a sign that England was doomed?

The Battle of Fulford

Harold pressed on with his plans to defend the country. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that he raised more in taxes than any other king. He used the money to pay for the fyrd (army) and a fleet to defend the south coast of England. By June 1066, thousands of Englishmen were based along the south coast, watching and waiting for an attack from Normandy.

They were still watching and waiting in early September. Nothing had happened. Provisions were running out and the men were desperately needed back in their shires to bring in the harvest. On 8 September, believing that William would not launch an attack when his own men would have to bring in the crops in France, Harold disbanded the fyrd. At almost exactly that same time, another army landed far away in the north east of England. Harold's brother Tostig had returned, this time with the support of Harald Hardrada, King of Norway. After fleeing the country in May, Tostig had travelled to Norway and had persuaded Hardrada to invade England and to take the throne. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says no one had expected this attack.

When Harold heard the news he hastily gathered an army in the south and marched north. Meanwhile, on 20 September, the northern earls, Edwin and Morcar, led a force into battle against the invaders at Fulford, just south of York. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the outcome:

> They fought army against army and made great slaughter. A great number of the English were slain or drowned or driven in flight and the Norwegians had possession of the place of carnage.

Edwin and Morcar escaped but nothing could stop Tostig and Hardrada taking the city of York. They rested there with the clear intention of moving south to claim the rest of the kingdom.

The Battle of Stamford Bridge

On 25 September 1066, Harald Hardrada and Tostig moved their army out of York to a nearby river-crossing called Stamford Bridge. They were probably waiting there to receive the surrender of other Anglo-Saxons from the area before heading south. They had no idea that King Harold had managed to gather his army again and had marched the two hundred miles from London to York in barely a week. He had increased the size of his force as he went along and the fleet had also carried more men up the east coast.

Harold had expected to have to attack Hardrada and his brother Tostig in York. On finding that they had left the town, he marched his combined force straight through from one side to the other and launched a surprise attack on his unsuspecting enemies at Stamford Bridge. The Norwegians were not even wearing their chain-mail as it was a warm day.

Despite King Harold's advantages, the two armies fought for many hours before the Norwegians surrendered. It was the last ever hand-to-hand battle on British soil. Thousands died on each side. Hardrada and Tostig were among them. After the battle, Hardrada's son, Olaf, was allowed to sail back to Norway having promised never to return. His father had brought three hundred ships but no more than twenty four made the voyage home.

Painting the past

In 1870, a Norwegian artist painted this interpretation of the Battle of Stamford Bridge. His name was Peter Nicolai Arbo and he specialised in military paintings and in scenes from Norse mythology. This combined both.

He based the image on the 'Saga of Harald Hardrada' a tale written c.1230 by a Norwegian poet called Snorri. Nineteenth-century historians used to think that Snorri was a reliable source about historical events but he is no longer trusted as his sagas rarely match other sources or the findings of archaeology. Snorri tells us, for example, that the English fought on horseback at Stamford Bridge but they only did this after the Norman Conquest. The artist has followed Snorri's account here, though, and King Harold is shown in white swinging his sword as Hardrada, in the centre, dies a hero's death when an arrow pierces his windpipe.

Reflect

1. Was King Harold lucky to defeat Hardrada and Tostig?
2. Why has the artist placed Hardrada not King Harold at the centre of this painting?

▼ The Battle of Stamford Bridge, painted by Peter Nicolai Arbo,1870

The Battle of Hastings

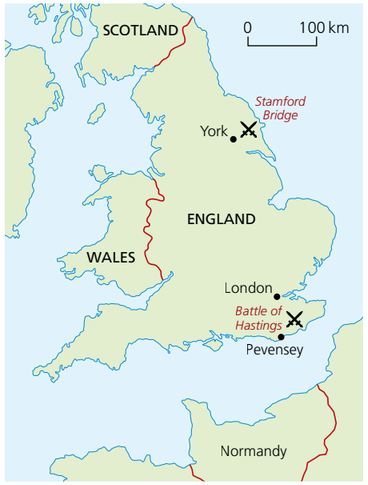
King Harold must have believed that he had saved his crown after his victory at Stamford Bridge. He was still at York just days later, probably on 1 October, when news reached him that William's army had landed on the south coast, not far from Hastings. Clearly the Normans had not disbanded their army to bring in the harvest after all.

William's wait in France

William's army had been on the French coast for about six weeks before finally sailing to England. The long delay had been difficult to handle. The force of about 7,000 thousand men included between 2,000 and 3,000 knights with their horses. They came from many different regions in northern France so there might have been disagreements. They all needed food and water and William gave strict orders that they were not to raid nearby villages or farms. Instead he ensured they had all they needed. One of the French chroniclers, William of Poitiers, praised the discipline of William's army:

> Weak or unarmed, any man could move about the district at his will, singing on his horse, without trembling at the sight of soldiers.

Poitiers explained that the reason for the long delay was bad weather and the wind that blew constantly from the north. There was no chance of sailing across the English Channel until it changed direction. He describes how William did once attempt to set off in bad weather on 12 September. This resulted in the ships being blown a hundred miles east along the coast. Many were wrecked at sea. William set up a new camp where the wind had taken them. The army spent two weeks there. William arranged an open-air service where the whole army prayed around the bones of a saint that had been brought out of a tomb. The army finally crossed to England, probably on 27 September.



▲ The Normans set sail for England. The carved figure of a boy blowing a horn at the rear of this ship shows that it is the one that was specially made for William by his wife Mathilde. The person at the front may be William. In the ship behind his back, you can see some of the knights' horses. From the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1075

◀ Pevensey and Hastings

William's strategy in England

On 28 September, William landed at Pevensey. He learned that King Harold had gone north to fight Hardrada. He chose not to move inland, but quickly built motte and bailey castles at Pevensey and Hastings. He now encouraged his men to raid the surrounding area. This helped provide for their needs but William was also probably deliberately trying to provoke King Harold's anger by pillaging the King's own lands. It may have worked: on 13 October, William's spies informed him that Harold's army was hurrying towards Hastings.

King Harold's haste

Harold and those of his men who had horses had ridden south from York to London in just four or five days. His foot-soldiers could not match at this pace so he sent out orders for new troops to gather in London and in Sussex, near Hastings. He had to decide which mattered more: speed or numbers? His brother, Gyrth, and his mother both urged him to stay in London until he had a full army. He angrily rejected their advice and headed for Hastings, probably on 11 October.

Some historians say that Harold was in a hurry because he had been provoked by William's plundering of Sussex. The devastation must have been great. Even the Bayeux Tapestry, which always favours the Norman point of view, shows a blazing English house and a mother and child fleeing for safety. Maybe Harold was acting out of anger. Other historians say that he was simply trying to repeat his tactics that had succeeded against Hardrada at Stamford Bridge: move quickly and surprise the enemy.

Moving into position

For whatever reason, Harold did move quickly, but he failed to surprise William. He did not catch him in his camp at Hastings. William's look-outs warned him that Harold was coming and at dawn on 14 October, the Duke marched out towards Harold's army. The King was leading a much smaller force than he might have had. Many experienced soldiers had died at Stamford Bridge; some were alive but still in the north; others from the south were trying to join him but were still many miles away. Even those who had ridden south with him must have been weakened by tiredness or injury.

Harold had to find a battleground that might give him an advantage. He chose to take his stand on a short ridge with a forest behind it. This would make any orderly retreat impossible but it favoured a strong defensive line. When they saw the site, many of the English deserted. It was known at the time simply as the place of 'the grey apple tree'. It was about seven miles from Hastings.

The battle begins

Early in the morning on 14 October 1066, the armies prepared to do battle. William had prayed and, according to one chronicle, he wore around his neck some of the holy relics on which Harold had sworn to help him become king. His army was arranged at the foot of the hill. There were archers, infantry and heavy cavalry, the knights.

At the top of the hill, King Harold had a force of about the same size, 7,000 men. If he had waited longer, he might have had twice as many. None was on horseback. Some were 'housecarls', more less professional warriors who served the King, but most were thegns and freemen from the shires. They stood in a line about 400 to 600 yards long and twelve men deep, with their shields forming a wall in front of them.

At nine o'clock, trumpets sounded and war-cries filled the air. The battle was under way. The Norman archers fired their arrows 'like a storm of hail' in the words of an English chronicler. Behind this cover, the Norman infantry made their way up the rough slope as English javelins, axes and stones rained down on them. At the top they pressed hard against the English shields with their own and the battle fell into a test of physical strength and endurance as they swung swords and axes to try to break the English line. It held firm. The Norman cavalry then got involved. The uphill slope stopped this from being a full charge so they simply sat on their horses high above the English and battered them with swords and clubs. Even after hours of this, the English line still refused to break.

Reflect

1. Why was Harold's army smaller than it might have been?
2. Who do you think had the advantage just before the battle began, William or Harold?

Why can't there be a single story accepted by all?

1. We have only a few sources.
2. These sources sometimes say very different things, due to when they were written, who wrote them and why. Historians have to decide how the accounts fit together.
3. Some historians reject sources that others accept.
4. New sources or new findings from archaeology or science sometimes turn up. Earlier historians never had the chance to see these.
5. Historians may simply and honestly disagree about who did what and why, just as people disagree about similar events in the present.

Reflect

Which of the five reasons above may explain some of the different interpretations of the critical moments in the battle that appear on this page?

Critical moments

We know that the battle lasted all day so it is likely that the two armies simply battered each other for several hours at the top of the hill. The outcome depended on a few critical moments.

William's 'retreats'

After hours of stalemate, a group of Norman knights turned away from the battle line and rode back down the hill. Some English soldiers chased after them, sensing that they had the enemy in retreat. At the same time, a rumour went around that William had been killed and the Normans too began to drop back.

This was a crisis for William, but he acted quickly, pulled back his helmet and rode along the Norman lines. He showed his face, called out that he was still alive and reminded his men that there was no way back to France: they had to win or die. He led a counter-attack against the English who had charged down the hill, killing them all. One French chronicle says this 'retreat' was a trick by some knights that nearly backfired, but others say they really were on the run.

As the battle once again settled into stalemate, several Norman chroniclers say that William ordered his knights to fake a retreat so that the English would once again break their lines and follow. They did and were cut down like the first group. William even managed to repeat this tactic again with the same effect.

For years many historians insisted that no army of that time feigned retreats. They said the French chronicles were just trying to cover up panic in William's army. Then other historians found examples of Norman knights feigning retreat in battles in the 1050s and early 1060s. It seems that William – or maybe some of his knights acting on their own – knew exactly what they were doing.

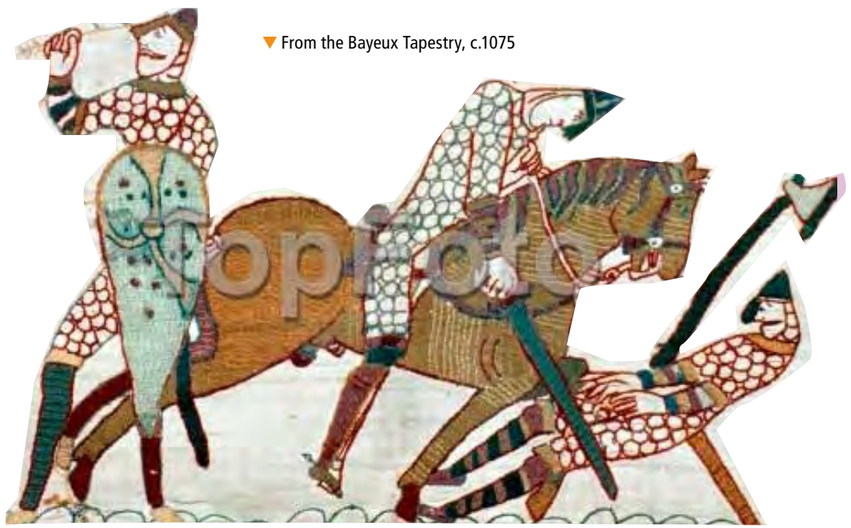
Harold's death

This was the real turning point. Late in the day, the English army was still holding out against the French attacks. It was the death of King Harold that gave William his victory. The well-known story is that an arrow struck Harold in the eye. Only one source produced within a few years of the battle seems to support this: the Bayeux Tapestry. In the scene below the writing tells us that Harold is killed and shows an Englishman with an arrow in or very near his eye. Surely it is the King? The problem is that sketches of the tapestry made in the early eighteenth century show the same figure holding a spear that is far longer than this arrow. A nineteenth-century restorer may have turned the spear into an arrow.

The earliest mention of Harold being struck in the eye is in a chronicle from about 1120. Most of the Norman chronicles of the 1070s say nothing about Harold's death. The only one that describes it says that William and a group of knights gathered around the English King and cut him to pieces. Some say the story of the arrow in Harold's eye was invented to hide this more brutal truth.

Whatever the truth, with their king dead, the English finally gave in and tried to flee.

▼ From the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1075



The end

The final scenes of the Bayeux Tapestry show the Norman cavalry chasing the English off the worn and torn edges of the fabric. It seems appropriate. The English were in disarray. King Harold and his two brothers, the earls Gyrth and Leofwine, as well as thousands of thegns and freemen had died. Thousands more had been killed at Stamford Bridge and Fulford.

The next morning, the Normans buried their dead but they left the English bodies lying above ground. No one is sure what happened to Harold's remains but, years later, William built an abbey whose main altar is said to stand exactly where Harold died. This was done on the orders of the Pope as a way of asking God's forgiveness for all the bloodshed in that place. Over the years a village grew up around the abbey. Its name is quite simply, Battle.

020-020 missing

Record

Complete the notes you have been making on this section (pages 36 to 41).

Remember to use the headings given on page XX.

Review

It is time to decide whether William was, in the words of the historian John Gillingham, 'William the Lucky Bastard'. You should have gathered plenty of evidence to help you make up your mind.

1. Look back through all your notes and consider whether you want to change anything or make any additions now that you know the full story.
2. Then, create your own visual interpretation of what made William a conqueror in 1066. You do not have to make a statue like the one at the start of this enquiry. You can simply draw four circles like these. The only difference is that you must change the size of the circles so that the one that you think is most in helping William win is the largest. The one that did least is the smallest. Underneath each one, write a brief explanation of why you made it that size.
3. Next, compare your diagram with others in your class. Have they reached the same interpretation as you? Discuss and debate the reasons for any differences.
4. Finally, go back to your diagram and change it if you have been persuaded that there is a better interpretation that fits the evidence. After all, that is one very important way in which interpretations of history develop!

William's Norman background

William's personal qualities

William's opponents' weaknesses and errors

William's good luck

Who says so?

There are relatively few sources from the time of the Norman Conquest and those that we have often disagree with each other. This helps to explain why we get different interpretations when, much later on, historians, artists, film-makers and others try to come up with their own versions of events.

Here is some background information about several of the sources that you will come across throughout this book.

William of Jumièges

In 1070, this Norman monk wrote about William's conquest of England up to 1067. He added his account to an earlier book called Gesta Normannorum Ducum (The Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans). He spoke to eye-witnesses of the events.

William of Poitiers

In the early 1070s, this Norman monk wrote a book called Gesta Guillemi (The Deeds of William). As he was William's personal chaplain and so he usually praises William's actions, but he does give detailed accounts of events. The start and end of the book are missing.

Guy of Amiens

This French bishop wrote a poem called 'Carmen' that was performed in front of William c.1068. We have a document that some historians say must be that poem. Others say that its details differ so much from other sources that they think it is something made up at a much later date.

▲ A monk believed to be the chronicler Eadmer, c.1140

Orderic Vitalis

This monk was the son of a Norman priest and an English woman. He wrote his Historia Ecclesiastica (History of the Church) c.1124. He usually based his account on French chronicles but sometimes changed them where he thought they were being too kind to William.

William of Malmesbury

An English historian. He used many sources to write his Gesta Regum Anglorum (History of the Kings of the English) in 1125. Where he was unsure of what happened he said so. He did tend to favour the English.

Florence of Worcester

Florence was an English monk (not a woman). He wrote the start of Chronicon ex chronicis, a history of the world. Another monk, called John, finished the book c.1120. It is strongly pro-English but uses a wide range of sources.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

This is not one book but several parallel accounts recorded by English monks. These accounts sometimes give very different versions from each other.

Eadmer of Canterbury

This English monk whose image appears on the left wrote a brief but quite detailed account of how William took the English throne. He is the one who tells us that Harold Godwinson went to Normandy to try to release two hostages in 1064. (See page XX.)

The Bayeux Tapestry

Made c.1075 probably for William's brother, Bishop Odo, who fought at Hastings. The images are remarkable but the text is very brief so it can be a difficult source to use.

Charters

These are legal documents drawn up to record important agreements made by kings, dukes or lords.

Archaeology and history

As well as the sources listed on page 42, historians can use the findings of archaeologists. The remains of buildings, roads or objects often confirm what documents say, but they may also force historians to think again.

The battle over the battle site

In 2012, this book was published. It is by two historians who are convinced that the Battle of Hastings was fought at Caldbec hill, about one mile away from the traditionally accepted site at the place now known as Battle. They argued that Caldbec fits perfectly the descriptions given in several of the chronicles and that it is strange that no bones of soldiers or remains of weapons have ever been discovered at Battle. They called for archaeologists to work on Caldbec hill, confident that this would reveal the mass burials that took place after the battle had ended in 1066.

Digging deeper

In 2013, Channel 4's television archaeologists from *Time Team* were given permission to work at both sites. They soon came across a problem at Battle. Since 1966, there has been a re-enactment of the battle each year. The enthusiasts who take part make every effort to wear the right clothing and use the right weapons. They say that this can help historians by revealing practical issues that are not obvious from documents. Unfortunately, the re-enactments have scattered modern arrowheads and fragments of swords and chain-mail around the site, while tourists leave objects such as ring pulls. These were confusing metal detectorists until the team used diggers to remove the top few centimetres of soil that was most likely to hold material dropped in recent years.

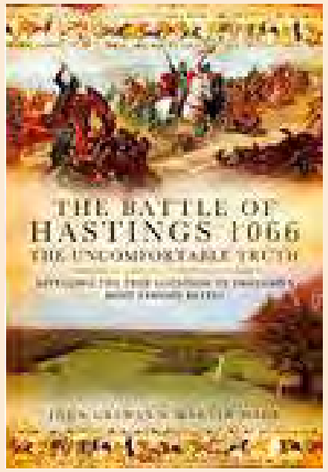
Surprising conclusions

Time Team archaeologists dug three strips totalling about 180 metres across the traditional battlefield and covered a wide area of Caldbec hill with metal detectors. Neither site produced any finds associated with 1066. They also flew over the whole area with modern equipment that allowed them to work out how different the landscape would have been in the eleventh century. This suggested that William could not have gathered his forces at the bottom of the traditional battle site as the ground was too marshy at that time. Instead, *Time Team* decided, the fighting took place a few hundred yards away – where a small roundabout now stands.

Unconvinced

In May 2013 historian Marc Morris commented:

> There is sometimes enough evidence to counter the 'make-it-up brigade'. Despite the noisy newspaper headlines in recent months, we can still reasonably suppose that the Battle of Hastings was fought on the site where Battle Abbey now stands because the contemporary sources are so compelling. 'On the very spot where God granted him the conquest of England, William caused a great abbey to be built'. So says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in a passage clearly composed before 1100 by an Englishman who describes himself as having lived at the king's own court. Unsurprisingly, it is a source that goes unmentioned by those who contend that the battle was fought elsewhere.



▲ The 2012 book that claimed that the Battle of Hastings was fought at Caldbec hill

02-23 missing