

The Norman Conquest Stage Two

On Christmas Day 1066 William was crowned King of England but that did not mean he controlled the country. There is a difference between winning a battle and conquering a country. There were two million English but only 10,000 Normans. So what happened next? How did the Normans conquer England?

'A fatal day!'

One English monk wrote that William's victory at the Battle of Hastings was 'a fatal day. Now we are ruled by foreigners and strangers'. Another monk said that the Normans had 'stolen England and robbed the people'. These two pages explain why.

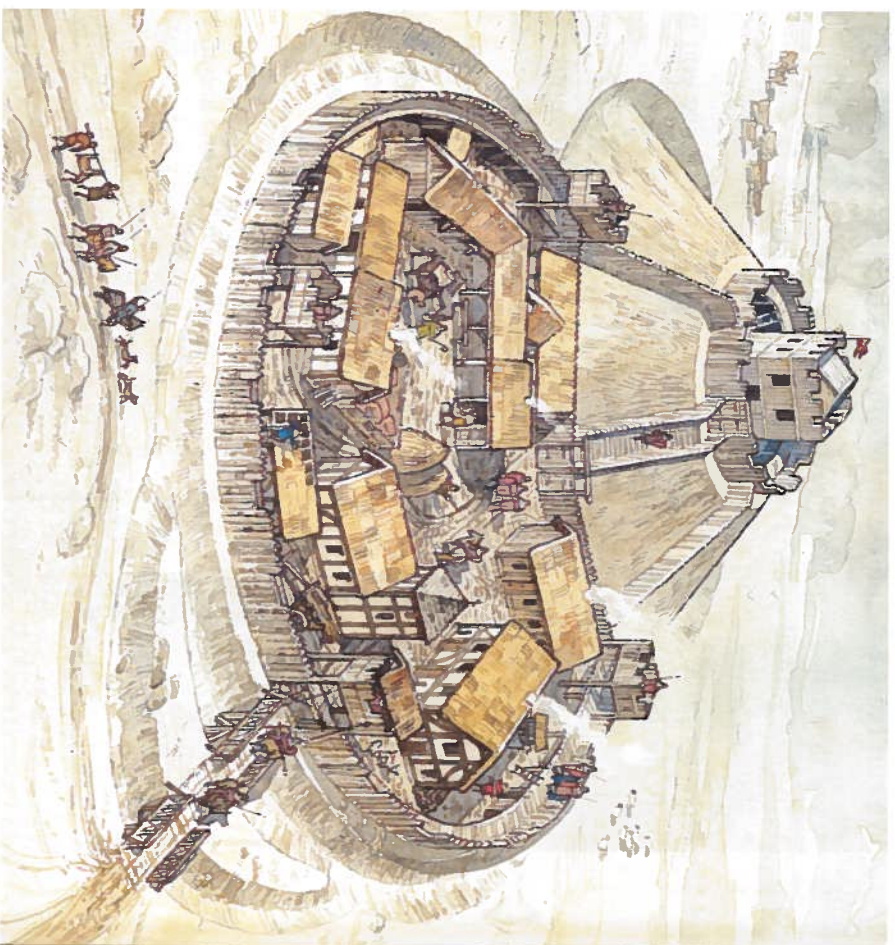
Land

William rewarded his supporters by giving them English land. In return for land they promised to provide soldiers whenever William needed them. For example, Robert de Montain, William's half-brother was given 793 manors (villages). This made him the second largest landowner in England (after William himself). Many English lords lost their land and now had to work for French lords.

Castles

The Normans built castles to protect their soldiers. The first castles were made of wood so they were quick to build and good for defence. Soon they were building stone castles that towered above the surrounding towns.

Between 1066 and 1087, the Normans built around 100 castles, mostly in towns. The Normans destroyed many houses to make way for their castles, and forced the English to build them.



▲ SOURCE 1

A drawing of a typical, wooden Norman castle.

Hunting laws

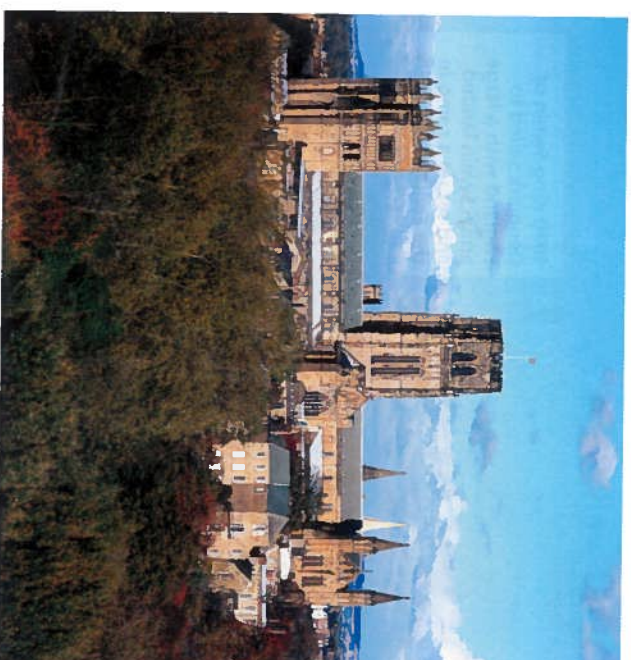
The Normans stopped the English hunting in their forests. Hunting was not just a sport in those days, it was an important way of getting food. The punishment for people caught hunting in the royal forests was to have two fingers cut off. The punishment for a second offence was to have your eyes gouged out.

Language

The King and his men spoke Norman French. The ordinary people carried on speaking English. The difference in language made them afraid as they did not know what their lords were saying.

Churches

Saxon churches and cathedrals were knocked down to make way for bigger, grander Norman ones. These showed off the Normans' wealth and power as well as being places of worship.



▲ SOURCE 2

Durham cathedral, built by the Normans.



▲ SOURCE 3

Norman soldiers gathering food from the English countryside.

ACTIVITY

Tabloid newspapers are a modern invention but if one had existed in the eleventh century, how would they have covered these events? Use the stories and evidence on these two pages to create your own tabloid newspaper.

THE ENGLISH NEWS FATAL DAY!



William the ... what?

After William died the Normans called him William the Conqueror and the name has stuck. What do you think the English would have called him? Your task is to choose a name and then write an obituary (a description of his life) to go with it.

William dies

In 1087 King William died fighting. He had just captured a French town but, as he rode in triumph through the streets, a spark of burning wood fell beneath his horse's hooves. The frightened horse reared up, throwing William back and then violently forward. The iron pommel on his saddle drove into his stomach, injuring him so badly that he died a few days later. As soon as William died, servants stole his jewels and clothes, leaving his body naked. Worse was to come. At his funeral, the coffin was too small for his swollen body. As men tried to force his body into the coffin, it burst, causing a terrible stink. The nobles and bishops ran out of the cathedral, leaving a handful of monks to bury the King.

After William died many English people wrote about his life. Here are a few of them.

SOURCE 1 *A monk wrote this in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

King William was greater and stronger than all the kings before him. He was kind to the good monks who served God. During his reign, the great cathedral at Canterbury was built and so were many others. He was cruel to anyone who disobeyed him, putting lords and even his own brother in prison. He kept good order in the country. A man with a bag of gold could travel unharmed right through the country. No man dared to kill another.



▲ **SOURCE 2**

William as shown in the Bayeux Tapestry.

SOURCE 3 *A description of the Domesday survey by a monk*

The King sent his men all over England, into every shire and had them find out how much land the king, the bishops and the lords had in each county and how much that land was worth. So very detailed was this investigation that there was no land, no ox, no cow, no sheep nor one pig left out (I am ashamed to write this but he was not ashamed to do it), and all these records were brought to him.

What was the Domesday Book?

The information in Domesday Book was collected in 1086. William wanted to know exactly who owned each village and what each village was worth. He wanted this information to help him collect more taxes and to feed his soldiers if the Danes threatened to invade England again. He sent officials round the country to ask very detailed questions. Then he sent another group of officials to check the answers were correct. The Domesday Survey covered all of England except Cumbria, Durham and Northumberland. Source 4 is an example of what they found.

SOURCE 4 *From Exon Domesday book*

Lands of the abbot of Tavistock in Devon
On the lands of the manor of Tavistock are 37 villeins and other householders, 12 slaves, 1 horse, 26 cattle, 12 pigs, 200 sheep, 30 goats. The manor is worth 12 pounds a year to the abbot.
Six knights hold land from the abbot. On Hugh's land are 1 villein and 6 other villagers, 2 slaves, 7 ploughing oxen, 10 cattle, 12 pigs and 60 sheep.

SOURCE 5 *An English poem about William*

The king was a tough and greedy man.
He forced the poor to build castles.
He took many gold coins from his people
And many more hundreds of pounds in silver.
He marked out huge forests for deer and made laws about hunting.
Anyone who killed a deer was to be blinded.
He loved the stags as dearly
As if he was their father.
The rich complained and the poor wept
But he was too merciless to care if everyone hated him.
They had to obey him.
Or they lost their lives and their lands.
Their goods and the king's friendship.

ACTIVITY

Details that praise William

Details that criticise William

- 1 Use Sources 2–5 and anything else you have studied in this section to fill out the chart above. Use one colour for details recorded by English writers and another for details recorded by Normans.
- 2 Now choose a nickname for William instead of '...the Conqueror'. For example, you might want to call him 'William the Ruthless' or 'William the Strong'.
- 3 Why might the English and the Normans disagree about a nickname for William?
- 4 After someone famous dies the newspapers often print an obituary, which summarises important things about the person's life and gives a judgement on their successes and failures. Write a paragraph to sum up William. Before you start, decide whether you are writing from the English or the Norman point of view.