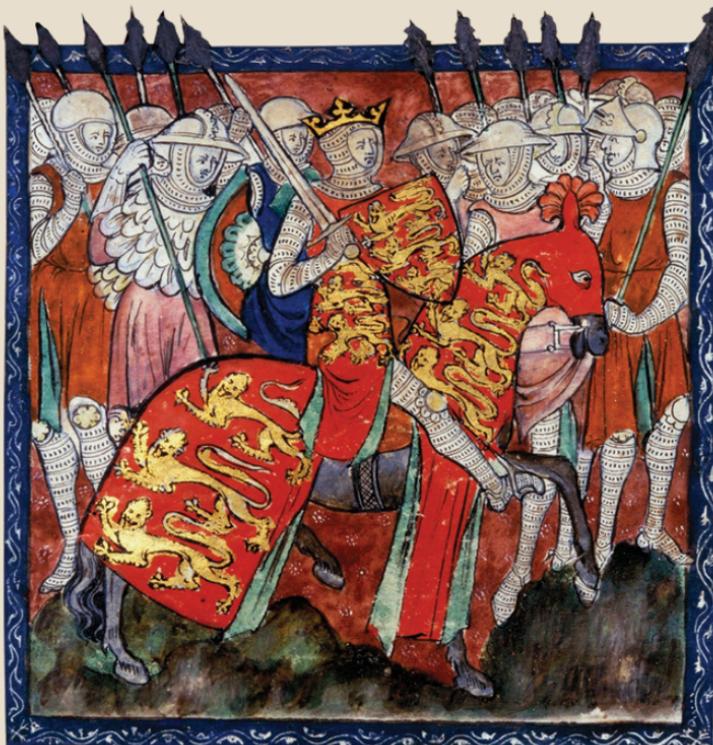


1066

The Year That Changed Everything

Course Guidebook

Professor Jennifer Paxton
The Catholic University of America



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Dr. Paxton's other Great Courses are *The Story of Medieval England: From King Arthur to the Tudor Conquest* and *The Celtic World*.

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1066: THE YEAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

On October 14, 1066, on a ridge 10 miles northwest of the village of Hastings, William of Normandy defeated Harold Godwinson in a contest for the English throne. In the centuries since, historians have debated the significance of this event, and current trends stress continuity between the periods before and after the battle. While it can be argued that, for many English people, life under King William went on much as it had before, it is also undoubtedly true that England as a nation had a different character and a different place in European affairs after the Norman Conquest.

The Norman Conquest changed England in two significant ways. By the mid-11th century, decades of Viking raids had drawn England further and further, politically and culturally, away from mainland Europe and into the Scandinavian world. Several Danish kings had held the English throne; mere days before Hastings, another Norseman with a stake in the succession had invaded the north of England. William's ties to France turned England toward the Continent—permanently.

By that same token, the contact between Norman French and Anglo-Saxon cultures rippled throughout the country, changing England in many ways, both obvious and subtle. Perhaps most relevant to the modern world was linguistic: The infusion of the Germanic Anglo-Saxon language with loan words from Norman French gave English a richness and complexity few languages can match. In many ways, the England that emerged from the conquest displayed the best characteristics of Anglo-Saxon and Norman society. William reformed the English church along Norman lines, yet he perpetuated the English legal tradition. Many English and Norman families intermarried, and the Norman elite made an effort to learn the history and traditions of their new home. In later generations, this led to a flowering of history writing and great literature.

The story of the conquest is also the story of fascinating personalities, from England's Queen Emma, whose two marriages and relentless ambition helped complicate the English succession, to William the Conqueror himself, who, despite (or perhaps because of) a harrowing childhood, became one of the most impressive military and political leaders in European history.

The Battle of Hastings was a triumph against the odds for William, and this course examines that conflict in detail, but England was not won in a single day. We will look at how events of many decades, not just in England and Normandy but in Scandinavia, France, Rome, and even Constantinople, affected the Norman Conquest. We will also examine the means William used to secure his new kingdom—sometimes violent, sometimes diplomatic—and how the English people saw these events, both at the time and in the centuries since.



LECTURE 1

THE NORMAN CONQUEST THROUGH HISTORY

The Norman Conquest has been regarded as a turning point in English history; however, its meaning has always been sharply debated. Two interpretations have dominated: either it imposed a repressive feudal regime or brought England a more advanced, Continental form of government. Today, historians typically downplay the importance of the conquest, stressing continuity. This course will argue that 1066 does matter because it reoriented England away from the Scandinavian world and toward the mainstream of European cultural development, making England an integral part of the European story and creating a hybrid culture that combined the strongest elements of Norman and Anglo-Saxon societies.

WHY DOES THE NORMAN CONQUEST MATTER?

- ✘ In September 1066, Duke William of Normandy set out on one of the most daring enterprises the world has ever known: the conquest of England. He would soon defeat the English king, Harold, and earn the name by which we know him: William the Conqueror.
- ✘ William accomplished one of the most impressive feats in history. After all, conquering England is something that both Napoleon and Hitler tried very hard to do but failed. Was it brilliant strategy? Was it luck? Or was it a combination of the two?
- ✘ We also must ask why it matters that William conquered England. Was it really a turning point in the history of England and perhaps Europe as well? Why should we care about it today?
- ✘ The first reason the conquest matters is that it truly made England a part of Europe. Before 1066, England was part of the Scandinavian world—conquered by the Danes in 1016 and ruled by a Danish dynasty.
- ✘ After 1066, England was oriented toward France and the rest of continental Europe. England would be a full participant in all the major cultural currents affecting Europe, including the great changes taking place in religious circles.
- ✘ However, English culture and English institutions proved strong enough to hold their own. They were not swept away; they survived and blended with the elements brought to England by the conquerors. The result was a very rich hybrid of English and Norman cultures.

- ✘ The crowning glory of this hybrid was the English language itself, a language with an enormous vocabulary because it contains both French and English versions of many words. This large vocabulary made English an extraordinarily effective tool for communication.

INTERPRETATION AND REINTERPRETATION

- ✘ In every subsequent generation, people reinterpreted what the conquest meant and why it mattered. Historical events look different to people at different times and places.
- ✘ Opinion on the conquest has at times been very sharply divided. But the impressive thing is how strong people's feelings could be about the conquest even many centuries later. Two examples in particular stand out.
- ✘ In the early 17th century, there was a fierce debate between the Stuart kings and certain elements in the Parliament: Did the king grant Parliament its authority, or did the king derive his authority from the people via Parliament?
- ✘ The Parliamentary side argued that before 1066, England had enjoyed a primitive democracy; the royalists argued that the Norman Conquest had brought enlightened royal rule to England for the first time.
- ✘ Neither version of the conquest is accurate, but the debate illustrates how important the conquest was to the English people.
- ✘ In early 19th century, the English had just fought a long and bitter war against Napoleon, and the young Queen Victoria had just married a German prince, Albert.

- ✘ Scholars and the public associated the Anglo-Saxons with the Germans and the Normans with the French. Thus, there was a wave of interest in everything Anglo-Saxon. Books about Anglo-Saxon heroes became hugely popular.
- ✘ Sir Walter Scott's best-selling *Ivanhoe*, to take one example, is set a century after the Norman Conquest. In the novel, there is an Anglo-Saxon old guard that wants to overthrow the Norman dynasty and put a genuine English claimant on the throne. The scenario is completely inaccurate.

ENGLAND VERSUS THE VIKINGS

- ✘ The story of the Norman Conquest begins not with a battle but with a wedding, and to understand the wedding, we need to go back the late 9th century.
- ✘ England was not England yet; it was divided into many small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. One by one, most were conquered by Viking armies.
- ✘ Then King Alfred, ruler of the kingdom of Wessex in the south, stemmed the tide, and his descendants reconquered the territory lost to the Vikings.
- ✘ Wessex expanded and took over all of what we now know as England until the 990s, during the reign of King Æthelred II, when the Vikings came back.
- ✘ The Vikings sometimes received safe harbor in Normandy, just across the English Channel. The Normans were basically Vikings who had settled down in France earlier in the 10th century.

- ✘ After a very tense period, England and Normandy made peace by means of the diplomatic marriage in 1002 between Æthelred and the sister of the Duke Richard of Normandy, Emma.
- ✘ Æthelred already had six grown sons, but Emma and Æthelred had two more, Edward and Alfred.
- ✘ The marriage did not fix the England's basic problems: It was still under Viking attack, and Æthelred's reign was marked by faction fighting and betrayal.
- ✘ In 1013, Sweyn Forkbeard invaded, and the king sent Emma and their children to refuge in Normandy. Æthelred tried to hold out on the Isle of Wight but eventually fled to Normandy as well.
- ✘ Sweyn died suddenly in 1014, but then his son, Cnut, came from Denmark to claim England. Æthelred died in 1016, leaving his oldest son by his first marriage, Edmund Ironside, to fight Cnut.
- ✘ In the fall of 1016, Edmund was defeated by Cnut at the Battle of Ashingdon, and Edmund Ironside died shortly thereafter. Cnut became king of England, Denmark, and Norway—a Scandinavian empire.
- ✘ Edmund Ironside had two sons, and they were spirited out of England by Cnut. But somehow, Cnut lost track of them. One, known as Edward the Exile, would reappear later.



- ✘ Æthelred's sons by his marriage to Emma, Edward and Alfred, were known as the Æthelings, meaning “throne-worthy.” They remained in Normandy for the next 20 years and possibly never expected to set foot in England again.

ONE QUEEN, TWO KINGS

- ✘ Cnut had conquered England, but he realized it would be difficult to hold onto it. So in 1017, he sent for Emma to make her his queen.
- ✘ Some historians think this was a diplomatic marriage arranged by Duke Richard like Emma's first one; others have suggested that Emma made the agreement with Cnut herself, happy to get her old job as queen of England back.
- ✘ Emma left her two sons and her daughter by Æthelred to fend for themselves in Normandy, and this is something that commentators at the time attacked her for.
- ✘ Rather than judge Emma, however, we should simply be fascinated by the remarkable story of a woman who became queen of the same country twice—the living, essential link between England and Normandy.

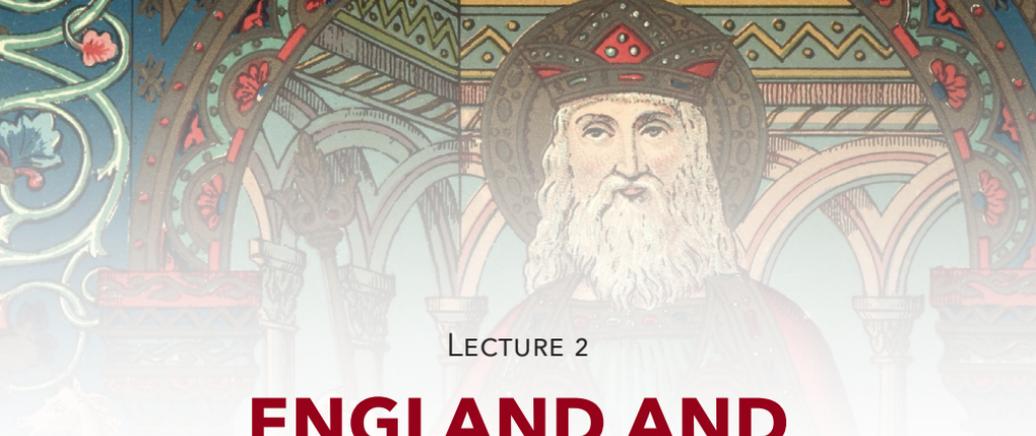


SUGGESTED READINGS

Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*.
Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 The Norman Conquest is one example of a historical event whose meaning has seemed different at different times. Can you think of other events whose interpretation has been controversial or even polarizing?
- 2 Should we judge Queen Emma harshly for marrying the son of her first husband's conqueror and leaving the children from her first marriage in Normandy? What might be said in her defense?



LECTURE 2

ENGLAND AND NORMANDY BEFORE THE CONQUEST

England and Normandy in the late 10th and early 11th centuries were turbulent societies in which power was very much up for grabs. Although Cnut married Queen Emma in a move to stabilize his power, the Danish dynasty was short-lived, and a son of Emma and Æthelred—Edward the Confessor—succeeded to the throne in 1042. Edward was dominated by a powerful noble family, the Godwinsons. Meanwhile in Normandy, Emma’s great-nephew William had brought the Norman nobility under his control. His successes in Normandy equipped him to undertake the challenge of conquering England.

✦ Cnut's Two Queens ✦

- ✦ Cnut helped ease the transition from English rule to Danish rule by marrying Emma, but the next half-century proved anything but stable. At no time between 1016 and 1066 was it clear who the next king of England would be.
- ✦ Emma had a lot of influence in Cnut's court. On many period documents, her signature appears right after the king's, even before the archbishop of Canterbury's—an unusual mark of her precedence.
- ✦ But Cnut had another queen—not crowned, and perhaps never officially married to Cnut—Ælfgifu of Northampton. She became his consort around the time he conquered England.
- ✦ Cnut had sons by both women: Harthacnut with Emma and Sweyn and Harold Harefoot with Ælfgifu.
- ✦ Much later, Emma commissioned a biography: *Encomium Emmae*—"In praise of Emma." It claims her marriage agreement with Cnut said their sons would take precedence over any sons Cnut had with other women. There is no other record of this agreement.
- ✦ Cnut needed help ruling his empire, so he sent Sweyn to Norway and Harthacnut to Denmark. Sweyn was shortly driven out by rebels and joined Harthacnut in Denmark. Neither was in England when Cnut died in 1035.
- ✦ Ælfgifu, Harold Harefoot, and Emma were in England and began to battle for the throne. When Sweyn died shortly after his father, Ælfgifu threw her full support behind Harold Harefoot.

- ✘ Emma supported the absent Harthacnut, but he was busy putting down a rebellion in Denmark, so the English nobility rallied around Harold Harefoot.
- ✘ Emma did not give up; she summoned her sons from her first marriage, Edward and Alfred, from Normandy to make their claim to the throne—although Emma’s biography claims Harold Harefoot forged a letter from Emma to lead them into a trap.
- ✘ Edward and Alfred came separately to England. Alfred was intercepted by the men of Earl Godwine, a powerful supporter of Harold Harefoot.
- ✘ They took Alfred to the monastic church at Ely and attempted to blind him. He died early in 1037 of his wounds. Edward returned to Normandy, and Emma was forced into exile in Flanders.
- ✘ Harold Harefoot took the throne, but he died suddenly in 1040. Ælfifu then vanished from history.



King Edward the Confessor is revered for his great piety, not for his leadership.

THE LAST OF THE ANGLO-SAXON KINGS

- ✘ Harthacnut finally arrived to rule England, but he was neither married nor in good health. He made a pact with King Magnus of Norway that if one died without an heir, the other would inherit his kingdoms.
- ✘ Instead, in 1041, Harthacnut sent for his remaining half-brother, Edward, to help him rule. Harthacnut died in 1042, and Edward, son of Æthelred and Emma, became king.
- ✘ This should have been Emma's moment to shine, but Edward had her banished.
- ✘ Edward ruled for 24 years, but his reign was far from stable. Known as Edward the Confessor, he was a holy man perhaps best known for building Westminster Abbey.
- ✘ Edward was not a particularly strong leader and was under the thumb of the aristocratic Godwinsons, led by Earl Godwine, who was blamed for the murder of Alfred.
- ✘ Edward was even compelled to marry Earl Godwine's daughter, Edith. The marriage remained childless, making Edward the third English king in a row with no descendants.
- ✘ In 1053, when Earl Godwine died, family leadership went to his son, Harold Godwinson. In 1055, Harold's brother Tostig was installed as earl of Northumbria, but the Northumbrians never accepted him.
- ✘ In 1065, the Northumbrians drove Tostig out. For some reason, Harold did not help his brother. Tostig went into exile with his wife's family in Flanders.

WILLIAM OF NORMANDY BEFORE THE CONQUEST

- ✘ Normandy is a coastal region of northern France that suffered from Viking attacks in the 9th century. In the early 10th century, the French king Charles the Simple gave territory to a Viking named Rolf, or Rollo.
- ✘ In exchange for French land, the Vikings had to become Christians and act as a bulwark against other Viking attacks. The name “Normandy” means “land of the Northmen.”
- ✘ In the late 10th and early 11th centuries, Norman dukes invited foreign clergy to found monasteries in Normandy. They also gave their relatives important jobs in the church or made them counts in charge of regions of Normandy.
- ✘ Medieval relatives were notorious for rebelling against the head of the family, and Normandy was no exception. This was a particular problem if the duke was not in a position to assert his authority—for example, if he was a child.
- ✘ When Emma’s brother Richard died, his son Robert inherited the dukedom. Robert never got married but had a son, William, with the daughter of one of his officials.
- ✘ Robert publicly acknowledged this son, and in 1034, when he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he made his nobles swear to accept William as his heir. William’s illegitimacy was not an insuperable obstacle in the 1030s.

- ✘ Robert named several guardians for his son, mostly noble or clerical relatives. Robert died on the pilgrimage, which made seven-year-old William the duke of Normandy.
- ✘ Right away, there was trouble. One by one, his guardians died—some by murder. But this only seems to have made William stronger.
- ✘ By the mid-1040s, he was a mature, skillful leader. He had learned how to read men and whom to trust. He recruited a new group of advisers to replace his guardians and rewarded them well for their loyalty.
- ✘ His most important ally was King Henry I of France. The dukes of Normandy were technically the king's vassals, and Henry was initially father figure to William.
- ✘ William relied on Henry to help keep his rebellious nobles in check, particularly at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047.
- ✘ William's martial prowess reportedly turned his strongest ally into his enemy. Henry is said to have become jealous, and the men grew apart.
- ✘ In 1054, another rebellion broke out in Normandy, but instead of coming to William's aid, the king backed the rebels for fear of William's growing power.
- ✘ The king sent his brother, Count Odo, to lead a force into Normandy. William defeated Odo at the Battle of Mortemer. The vassal was now strong enough to defy his king.
- ✘ One of the Norman rebels in this conflict, Count Guy of Ponthieu, was captured at Mortemer and spent two years in prison, then on his release did homage to William. He later played a role in the struggle over the English throne.

- ✦ William had consolidated his hold on Normandy and sharpened his skills as a warrior and a politician. Meanwhile, in England, there was a king who had faced serious challenges and neither risen to the occasion nor produced an heir.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Crouch, *The Normans*.

Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 How were England and Normandy in the half-century before the Norman Conquest alike? How were they different?
- 2 What skills did William the Conqueror need to cultivate to impose order on the rebellious nobles of Normandy?



LECTURE 3

THE SUCCESSION CRISIS IN ENGLAND

King Edward the Confessor's reign was overshadowed by his childlessness and the question of the succession. His death early in 1066 set off a turbulent year in which England was twice invaded. Harold Godwinson was the man on the spot who managed to command the support of the great nobles of England. Harold knew that William of Normandy was preparing to invade, but the first move came from Norway, when Harold Hardrada and Harold Godwinson's brother Tostig invaded the north and defeated the local English forces. Harold rushed north and beat the invaders just as William was setting sail.

EDWARD'S INDECISION

- ✘ Edward the Confessor and William of Normandy belonged to different generations. Edward was the son of Emma of Normandy; William was her great-nephew. There was a gap of almost 30 years between them.
- ✘ Edward lived in Normandy until 1041, by which point William had been duke for six years, though he was still a child. It is possible Edward understood William's potential.
- ✘ There are signs that in the early 1050s, Edward thought seriously about making William his heir. We have several Norman reports of Edward making overtures to William, although there is no English source that reports this.
- ✘ If these reports are true, it was not Edward's last word on the subject. In the late 1050s, he sought out the heirs of his half-brother, Edmund Ironside, who had briefly been king in 1016.
- ✘ The older son had died, but the younger son, Edward the Exile, had ended up at the Hungarian court, where he married and had three children.
- ✘ In 1057, he and his family were persuaded to come to England, but when they arrived, King Edward was occupied with other matters, and within a very short time, Edward the Exile was dead.
- ✘ King Edward took care of the surviving children of Edward the Exile and seems to have intended the son, Edgar, to be his heir because he was referred to as Edgar Ætheling.

HAROLD GODWINSON IN NORMANDY

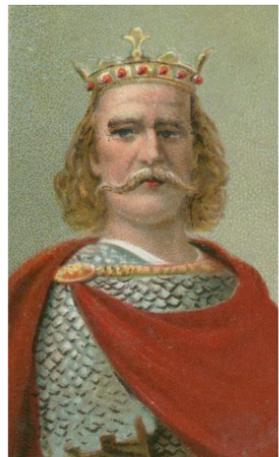
- ✘ One of the most puzzling episodes in English history is an oath that Harold Godwinson supposedly swore in 1064 to support the claim of William of Normandy to the English throne.
- ✘ The sources for this are clearly divided into English and Norman ones. The English sources come in two varieties: contemporary or early 12th century.
- ✘ The main contemporary English source is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a set of yearly records kept by English churchmen. The Norman sources date from just after the Battle of Hastings.
- ✘ What is certain is that in 1064, Harold Godwinson ended up in Normandy and there swore one or more oaths to support William's claim to the English throne. But the English and Norman sources disagree on every other point.
- ✘ The Normans say Harold was in Normandy on an official mission to reaffirm William's claim to the throne; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has no entry for the year 1064. The early 12th-century sources have various explanations for Harold's journey.
- ✘ Harold wound up in Ponthieu and fell into the hands of Count Guy, who fought at Mortemer on the losing side. William had hold on Guy; thus, Guy turned Harold over to William.
- ✘ Rather than ransom Harold—which would have been the norm—William took Harold's oath (or more than one) to support William's claim to the throne.
- ✘ The Bayeux Tapestry, another Norman source, is one of our best sources for the period. The tapestry's text just says that Harold swore

an oath. The official Norman story agrees; Harold was reaffirming his own king's views.

- ✘ It is possible that Harold voluntarily swore such an oath to keep the Godwinson family in their high position under a future King William, but the later English sources contend that the oath was coerced and thus invalid.
- ✘ If Harold did swear voluntarily, then in January of 1066, when Edward the Confessor died, Harold broke that oath. He did not back William. Instead, he seized the crown for himself.

HAROLD TAKES THE CROWN

- ✘ Edward the Confessor died on January 4 or 5, 1066, but before he died, he designated Harold Godwinson as his successor. Harold had the support of the king's close advisers, the witan; he was the most powerful man in England; and he could step in immediately.
- ✘ Perhaps Edward chose Harold freely; perhaps Harold pressured him. We will never know. Notably, nobody seems to have thought of making Edgar Ætheling king.
- ✘ As soon as Harold took the throne, William began planning his countermove. He had to fight on two fronts: The military front and the public relations front.



- ✘ William needed the support of the major nobles in Europe, like the king of France or the count of Flanders, but he especially needed the pope's approval.
- ✘ He sent a delegation to Rome and he supplied them with talking points: (1) that Harold had broken his oath and (2) that, as king, William would reform the English church as he had the Norman one.
- ✘ The pope approved of William's effort to conquer England. We are told that he gave William a papal banner to fight under, a powerful symbol at that time.

ANOTHER CONTENDER EMERGES

- ✘ As William was preparing to invade England, another man came forward to stake his claim to England's throne, spurred forward by Harold Godwinson's estranged brother, Tostig.
- ✘ Tostig, seemingly infuriated that his brother had taken the throne, made plans to invade England. In May 1066, Tostig raided the southern coast of England, but Harold drove him away.
- ✘ Undaunted, Tostig called on King Harald Hardrada of Norway, an amazing figure. Driven out of Norway in 1030 in a power struggle, he led a band of warriors in Eastern Europe, then took them to Constantinople to become the Varangian Guard of the Byzantine emperors.
- ✘ He eventually married the daughter of the Russian prince Yaroslav and returned to Norway, where he succeeded to the throne of King Magnus—the same Magnus who had a succession agreement

with Harthacnut. This gave Harald Hardrada a slim claim to the English throne.

- ✘ From late summer 1066 until September 8, Harold Godwinson waited in the south of England for William to attack. Just as he disbanded his army, he heard that Tostig and Harald Hardrada had landed in Northumbria and were marching toward York.
- ✘ On September 20, Harald Hardrada and Tostig defeated the English under earls Edwin and Morcar at Fulford. Harold Godwinson reassembled the core of his army and raced north, catching the invaders by surprise at Stamford Bridge on September 25.
- ✘ The Battle of Stamford Bridge was a total victory for the English. Harald Hardrada and Tostig were killed, and the Scandinavian invasion was at an end.
- ✘ It was a huge achievement for Harold Godwinson. But he was now at the wrong end of England to meet the Norman invasion.

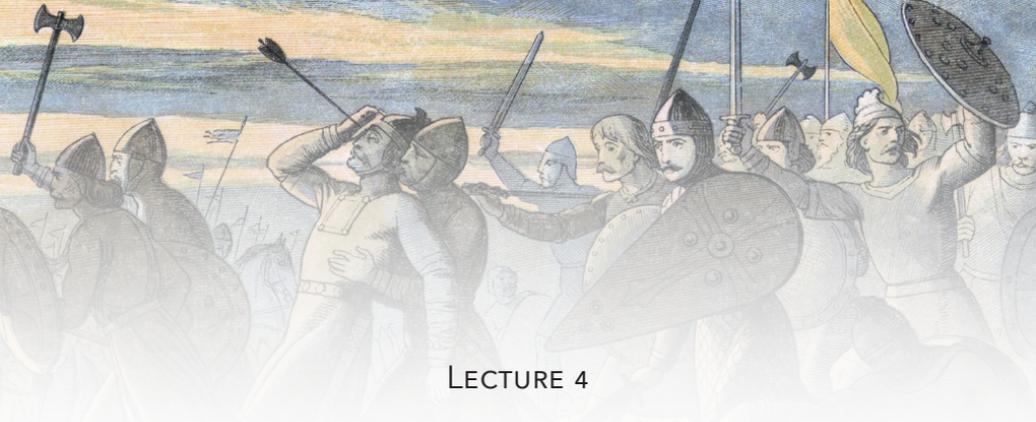
SUGGESTED READINGS

Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*.

———, *The Godwins*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 What were the various ways in which Harold's oath could be interpreted? What, in other words, were the possibilities for propaganda on each side?
- 2 What do all the twists and turns in the story of the English succession tell us about the stability of dynastic rule in this period?



LECTURE 4

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

Battles in the Middle Ages were rare, and decisive battles even rarer, but the Battle of Hastings qualifies, because if William had lost, his invasion would have been over. William prepared carefully, gathering men, ships, and supplies not just from Normandy but the surrounding territories in France and the Low Countries and securing papal backing. He landed on the Sussex coast and immediately began fortifying his position. Harold Godwinson rushed south to meet him in battle, probably without adequate troops. The resulting battle had many twists and turns, but it ended with Harold dead and William master of the field.

WILLIAM'S MILITARY PREPARATIONS

- ✘ William needed two things for his invasion: men and ships. First, he had to persuade the Norman nobles to go with him to England; it was not part of their feudal obligation to help him try to conquer England.
- ✘ One Norman narrative source says that some of William's men raised serious objections to the invasion, including the danger of the crossing and concern at being outnumbered on English soil.
- ✘ It is a sign of the strength of William's leadership that he persuaded so many people to join him. There were perhaps 7,000 or 8,000 in the army, which for that time was a very large force.
- ✘ These men came from all over northern France. The largest non-Norman contingent came from Brittany, just to the south and west of Normandy.
- ✘ There were also quite a few soldiers from Flanders thanks to William's wife, Matilda of Flanders, and her father, a Flemish count.
- ✘ What mattered more to the conquest than Matilda's connections was her wealth, which paid for the most expensive items William needed: ships.
- ✘ Rulers in Western Europe in the 11th century did not keep a standing fleet but assembled ships as they needed them. William's ship list has survived, so we know his major vassals contributed ships and that other ships were constructed.
- ✘ The Bayeux Tapestry shows the construction of ships for the invasion. There is a later tradition that Matilda contributed the flagship, *Mora*.

- ✘ The ships not only had to carry men; they had to transport horses, too. About 1,000–2,000 of the soldiers were cavalry.

CROSSING THE CHANNEL

- ✘ By late July or early August, 1066, William's invasion force was gathered in the mouth of the Dives River, waiting to cross the English Channel, but the wind would not cooperate.
- ✘ It was common for ships in the Middle Ages to be bottled up in port for long periods, but this was an exceptionally long delay; the fleet didn't set sail for nearly two months.



- ✘ Some historians have speculated that the delay was deliberate. Perhaps William had spies in England, briefing him about the state of Harold's military forces, and was waiting for the opportune moment.
- ✘ If so, we should be even more impressed by William's ability to keep 7,000 or 8,000 soldiers waiting—fed and occupied—for so long without incident.
- ✘ In mid-September, the fleet moved to the Picardy coast—possibly for a shorter crossing, or possibly pushed there by storms. Finally, on about September 27, the fleet set sail.
- ✘ The story of the crossing is very dramatic, though it may have been embellished after the fact. They sailed under cover of darkness and were separated in a fog. William's shipmates panicked, but the duke kept his men calm by example, and the ships reassembled at dawn.

THE HARRYING OF HASTINGS

- ✘ The fleet landed at Pevensey, Sussex, and met with no resistance. William's men took possession of the old Roman fort on the site and strengthened the fortifications.
- ✘ William marched inland a few miles to Hastings, where he and his men built a castle on a cliff, then dug in and waited for reinforcements to arrive from Normandy.
- ✘ Meanwhile, his men went out searching for supplies—in other words, they pillaged the countryside. This was a standard tactic in medieval warfare.



Pevensey Castle as it appears today. William's forces built a wooden castle here when they landed; the stone structure was added during the following century.

- ✘ Here we come to one of the main puzzles of the Norman invasion: Harold, having just won at Stamford Bridge, now raced south to meet William, and military strategists have been second-guessing that decision ever since.
- ✘ Medieval warfare was not about battles; most warfare consisted of sieges and harrying. Harrying could be a very destructive affair, designed both to provide food for your own army and deny it to your enemy.
- ✘ Taken to extremes, harrying also destroyed your enemy's productive capacity into the future. Pillagers not only stole crops; they burned what they could not carry; they killed livestock; they set fire to buildings; they destroyed equipment—literal scorched-earth warfare.
- ✘ Apparently this is what William's troops were doing in the area around Hastings—lands that were Harold's personal holdings as earl

of Wessex. Thus, William was making a public demonstration of Harold's shortcomings.

- ✘ That may be why Harold hurried south when it was smarter, in a strict strategic sense, not to do so. Harold could have waited for William to exhaust his supplies or for William's men to become disenchanted and go home.
- ✘ Harold's pride might have been pricked, or he might simply have been overconfident. He had, after all, just beaten the greatest living Viking at Stamford Bridge.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

- ✘ Another controversial aspect of Harold's decision is that his force was not at full strength. They were undoubtedly tired and may have been seriously reduced in number.
- ✘ Harold gathered his forces at London, then marched south to a meeting point about eight miles north of Hastings. He did not have any archers or cavalry yet and perhaps wanted to wait for them, but William moved first.
- ✘ On Saturday morning, October 14, William moved his men north to Harold's position. Harold was on top of a ridge, protected by woods on his flanks. In front of him was a stream and marsh. It was a good defensive position.
- ✘ The duke deployed his soldiers in a traditional manner: three contingents, himself commanding the center. Each contingent was organized with archers in front, foot soldiers next, and cavalry in the rear.

- ✘ The attack did not go according to plan. The archers were ineffective; it is hard to shoot uphill, and the English shield wall held firm. The foot soldiers were beaten back by a hail of spears, axes, and stones.
- ✘ The Norman horses were spooked by the huge English battle axes, and the cavalry began a retreat that threatened to turn into a rout.
- ✘ Then a rumor went out that William had been killed, but William's brilliance turned the tide: He risked removing his helmet and rode back and forth along the lines, showing his face and shouting that he was not going to be defeated. This helped to stem the rout.
- ✘ The English should have stayed put within their shield wall, but some pursued the retreating Norman soldiers. Off the high ground, their tactical advantage was lost, and the Norman cavalry could pick them off.
- ✘ William may have seen this and decided to execute a feigned retreat. Each time the Normans retreated, a few more English soldiers were tempted to follow and were cut down in their turn.

▶ THE DEATH OF HAROLD ◀

- ✘ We know Harold Godwinson was killed in the battle, but we do not know exactly how or when. This makes a difference in evaluating his leadership in the battle.
- ✘ If he was killed early on, then the loss cannot be blamed on him. If he survived until late in the proceedings, then we have to say that William outgeneraled him. Most sources suggest the latter.

- ✘ The sources also disagree on the manner of his death. The Bayeux Tapestry seems to show Harold being pierced in the eye with an arrow. By the early 12th century, this was the common narrative.
- ✘ Experts now are not sure that the figure traditionally identified as Harold really is him and if the arrow is an arrow; it may have been a spear, but the threads are now damaged.
- ✘ The fact that the details are so unclear probably means that Harold was killed in a random accident of battle; no one in particular was able to claim credit for it.
- ✘ There are several stories regarding the identification and burial of Harold's body, many of them from long after the battle. We cannot know for sure where King Harold found his last resting place.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Bennett, *Campaigns of the Norman Conquest*.
Morillo, ed., *The Battle of Hastings*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 In what ways does the campaign leading to the Battle of Hastings demonstrate William's good leadership? On the other hand, what role did luck play in his success?
- 2 What could Harold have done differently in the period leading up to the Battle of Hastings? Should he have risked further damage to his own estates so as to avoid an early battle with William?



LECTURE 5

COMPLETING THE CONQUEST

The conquest did not end in 1066; it took William several years to consolidate the gains made at Hastings. He first had to get himself crowned, a tense occasion at which linguistic confusion led to a riot. He then faced serious uprisings, especially in the north, where his infamous harrying made a lasting mark on the landscape. A revolt in the east in 1070 involving a shadowy figure called Hereward “the Wake” quickly became the stuff of legend but marked the effective end of Anglo-Saxon resistance to Norman rule.

SEIZING THE CROWN

- ✘ Not until the 1070s was William's hold on England secure. But William demonstrated the same kind of patient resolve in England that he demonstrated while taking control of Normandy.
- ✘ William met each threat to his rule as it arose, and he was ruthless if he had to be. He earned the nickname William the Conqueror as much by what he accomplished after the Battle of Hastings as he did on that one fateful day.
- ✘ After the battle, William's first priority was to get himself crowned. To be crowned, he needed to get to London (where Edward the Confessor, from whom William claimed succession, was crowned), and he needed the approval of the English church.
- ✘ First, William went to Canterbury, the religious center of England. The archbishop, Stigand, was a supporter of the Godwinsons, but he was holding office under questionable circumstances.
- ✘ Stigand was not in Canterbury at the time, so William secured Canterbury, cutting Stigand off from his own resources.
- ✘ William then marched on London but met resistance in the southern suburbs. Edwin, earl of Mercia, and Morcar, earl of Northumbria, were in London, rallying English resistance and supporting the claim of Edgar Ætheling.
- ✘ William burned the southern suburbs and marched west. He seized Winchester, the site of the treasury, which was also ideally placed for receiving reinforcements from Normandy.

- ✘ William turned north, circling London, and stopped at Wallingford where Stigand had taken refuge. Stigand surrendered, which delivered most of the English church to William.
- ✘ Marching northeast, William harried the lands around Bedford and Hertford to make the English think twice about continuing resistance and to cut off the northern supply routes to London.
- ✘ One by one, the English leaders in London submitted to William's authority—even Edwin, Morcar, and Edgar Ætheling.
- ✘ Next, Archbishop Ealdred of York submitted. William did not want to be crowned by Stigand because of his questionable status. Ealdred was William's solution to that problem.
- ✘ Thus, on Christmas Day, 1066, William was crowned king of England in Westminster Abbey by Archbishop Ealdred of York.
- ✘ The coronation did not go smoothly. There was a moment in the coronation service—spoken in English—when the congregation was supposed to loudly acclaim the new king. The Norman guards stationed outside the Westminster Abbey heard the shouts and, not understanding the language, thought rebellion had broken out.
- ✘ The guards set fire to some of the wooden houses surrounding the abbey, perhaps to create a firewall of protection around the abbey. It took some time to restore order. This episode is symbolic of some of the misunderstandings that were going to make the early years of William's rule in England turbulent.

SOUTHERN REBELLIONS

- ✘ William felt secure in England, so in March 1067, he returned to Normandy to check on his holdings and allow his men to do the same.
- ✘ William left his most trusted lieutenants in England, and he took the some English leaders to Normandy with him. They were not kept as formal prisoners but were displayed as curiosities to the Normans.
- ✘ The peace in England did not last long. By late 1067, a serious revolt against the Williams new taxes had broken out in Exeter, where Harold Godwinson's mother, Gytha, was living and rallying remaining supporters of the Godwinson cause.
- ✘ William returned to England and laid siege to Exeter. After 18 days, the town negotiated a surrender, and William built a castle to secure the town. Castle building would become the mark of his control.
- ✘ William then brought Matilda to England to be crowned queen. Matilda acted as William's regent at various points, both in England when he was in Normandy and in Normandy when he was in England.
- ✘ Matilda's coronation took place in May 1068, and William brought over Edwin and Morcar to give a little official English gloss to the occasion.



NORTHERN REBELLIONS

- ✘ Two years into William's reign, his authority was fairly secure in the south of England. It was time for him to extend his reach into the north, where even the Anglo-Saxon kings had had difficulty ruling.
- ✘ In the summer of 1068, the English lords in Northumbria rebelled. William marched north and built a castle at Warwick, then at Nottingham.
- ✘ When the resistance leaders at York saw this, they decided to negotiate. William marched into York, built the inevitable castle, and turned south, building castles at Lincoln, at Huntingdon, at Cambridge.
- ✘ In late 1068, William returned to Normandy. But the king's newly appointed Norman earl of Bamburgh, Robert de Commines, apparently allowed his followers to ravage the lands of his earldom unchecked.
- ✘ In response, a group of rebels forced their way into Durham, where Robert was staying with the bishop, and began killing all the Normans they could find, then burned the bishop's house down with Robert inside.
- ✘ People began to flock to the rebels. They gathered at York and chose Edgar Ætheling as king. William hurried back to England and appeared at York with a huge force, routed the rebels, and built a second castle in the city, but the leaders of the revolt had escaped, and Edgar Ætheling returned to Scotland.
- ✘ At this point, the king of Scotland, Malcolm Canmore, married Edgar's sister, Margaret. This gave Malcolm a stake in seeing Edgar Ætheling become king of England.

- ✘ New rebels joined the cause, and then the Danes arrived. King Sweyn Estrithson of Denmark was the cousin of King Harthacnut and claimed a right to the English throne. He sent a fleet led by his brother and his son.
- ✘ The Danes and the English rebels stormed York, captured both castles, and massacred the garrisons, but as soon as William reappeared, resistance collapsed.
- ✘ Edgar Ætheling fled back to Scotland. The Danes withdrew into the estuary of the Humber River, and William simply paid them to go away.
- ✘ William scorched the counties of Yorkshire and Durham in an episode known as the harrying of the north. Almost two decades later, the Domesday Book recorded that the value of northern estates had dropped dramatically between 1066 and 1086.

THE LAST PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

- ✘ By January 1070, William has restored order in York, but there were rebels in Cheshire, near the Welsh border. He undertook an impossible wintertime march across the Pennine Mountains and arrived in rebel territory completely unexpectedly—winning the campaign without needing to fight at all.
- ✘ William harried Cheshire and had himself recrowned by a papal legate at Easter. He also finally deposed Stigand, making good on his promise to clean house in the English church.

- ✘ There was one more big push by the rebels in the summer of 1070 in the fenlands of eastern England, led by a shadowy figure known as Hereward the Wake.
- ✘ Hereward seems to have been a minor English nobleman from Lincolnshire who lost his lands after the conquest. His story is full of legendary elements, but we do know he took refuge in the monastery of Ely and William besieged him.
- ✘ Ultimately, Hereward surrendered, and some evidence suggests that he got a royal pardon and lived the rest of his days in quiet obscurity.
- ✘ In 1072, William made an agreement with Malcolm of Scotland to acknowledge William's overlordship of Scotland. What that meant was not clear, and it caused trouble for many years. One part of the deal was that Malcolm had to expel Edgar Ætheling from his court.
- ✘ Edgar went on to have a long life full of adventure. He even went on Crusade, and he died in his bed at the ripe old age of 75.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Bennett, *Campaigns of the Norman Conquest*.

Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 What key qualities allowed William to consolidate his control of England after the Battle of Hastings?
- 2 Was there a failure of English leadership after the conquest? What might English leaders have done differently to mount a more effective resistance?



LECTURE 6

THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONQUEST

The new society created by fusing English and Norman cultures was dynamic and creative. Early ethnic tensions dissipated within less than a century. The church came to terms with changes in architecture and worship, to the great benefit of English religious culture. The conquerors' need to understand their new home and the older inhabitants' need to preserve their past led to a remarkable flowering of historical writing. England became more multilingual, and the English language was enriched by French vocabulary. These developments tied England to the Continent, as did the territorial connection to France, and England to participate in the European Middle Ages.

SURPRISINGLY SHORT-LIVED TENSIONS

- ✘ Both the English and the Normans were proud peoples with a long history behind them by 1066, so some tension was inevitable.
 - ♦ Many English monasteries had Norman abbots imposed on them, often against the will of the monks. This led to bloodshed in at least one case, at Glastonbury in 1083.
 - ♦ Some Norman men who adopted the English fashion of wearing beards and long hair were mocked for being too English—so the sentiment went both ways.
- ✘ The remarkable thing about this ethnic tension is how short a time it lasted, perhaps in part because the Normans were far more interested in continuity than innovation.
- ✘ The Normans did not value concepts of ethnicity. They intermarried with the English quite readily. Most often, Norman nobles married the daughters of Englishmen to inherit their lands.
- ✘ Many English lords who fought on Harold's side at Hastings had their lands confiscated as punishment for treason, but others became loyal servants of the new regime.
- ✘ William wanted to stress his identity as king of the English and heir to Edward the Confessor. He confirmed Edward's grants to churches and individuals. If people complained that his followers had seized land unlawfully, William investigated.
- ✘ William was not equally fair to the Normans and the English; he had to reward his Norman followers. But he was not invariably unfair to the English.

- ✘ When English landholders and monasteries accused Normans of seizing their lands illegally, William allowed the accusers to sue, and a lot of property was ultimately returned. Even land disputes between Normans were settled according to English law.
- ✘ One of the few changes the Normans brought to English administration was in language. Legal documents, previously written in English, were now produced in Latin.

▶ ANGLICIZING THE NORMANS ◀

- ✘ Within a couple of generations of the conquest, the Normans started to feel more at home in England. Distinctive clothing and hairstyles for English and Normans gradually disappeared by the 1090s, even at court.
- ✘ Normans and people of mixed heritage showed increasing interest in the history of England. The first few decades of the 12th century were a golden age for English history writing.
- ✘ The history writers were all clerics; many of them were of mixed English and Norman heritage. They had patronage thanks to their Norman heritage (usually their father's side) and an interest in and familiarity with English customs and traditions.
- ✘ Clerical historians wrote in Latin or Norman French. The patrons for these works were often French noblewomen who wanted to learn as much as possible about their new homeland.

THE NEW ENGLISH CHURCH

- ✘ Norman churchmen who came to England adopted English saints as their saints, respected English religious traditions, and capitalized on them to create publicity and patronage.
- ✘ Around the year 1100, there was a wave of relic translations, where the remains of a saint were moved to a new, bigger, and better shrine. In each case, a foreign-born abbot or bishop presided over the translation of an Anglo-Saxon saint.
- ✘ The English church was not unaffected by the conquest. William replaced most of the Anglo-Saxon bishops with Normans by attrition. The new bishops represented the reforming spirit of Normandy. Many English monks welcomed these changes.
- ✘ English church architecture changed dramatically. Norman churches were much larger and grander than their predecessors—the English version of Romanesque. The cathedral at Durham is the best surviving example of a Norman cathedral.
- ✘ Castle building was a destructive and controversial process. The Domesday Book shows a dramatic drop in the number of dwellings in towns where castles were built—houses destroyed to make way for the castles.
- ✘ Castles were also designed to make sure a town's inhabitants did not rebel. Plus, people had to pay taxes to help maintain the castles.



TOWARD A NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE

- ✘ The Normans did not make the English abandon their own language in favor of French. It would have been difficult, and it was not really necessary.
 - ♦ Latin, the language of the church, could act as a common language.
 - ♦ Fairly quickly after the conquest, we see many scattered references to people who have the word “interpreter” added to their names as an occupational designation.
 - ♦ The Normans, having once spoken Norse, quickly learned French when they settled in Normandy. They quickly learned English when the need arose.
 - ♦ All those mixed marriages produced a lot of bilingual children.
- ✘ French was the prestige language because it marked you as a member of the elite. This remained true in England down to the 15th century, if not beyond.
- ✘ It was not uncommon for the elite to speak both languages on a daily basis—French to a spouse or guests and English to the servants.
- ✘ Many words from French got adopted into English, often with a high-class association—for example, to “dine” (French) versus to “eat” (English). French speakers began adopting English words, too, although this was not well as well received on the Continent.
- ✘ The result of this linguistic mixing was the remarkable English language we know today, with its very subtle vocabulary that can express all different shades of meaning.

ENGLAND BECOMES EUROPEAN

- ✘ England was now tied to Europe in a way that it had not been before. It would be closely involved in French affairs for the next several centuries because the English kings still owned land in France.
- ✘ The amount of land England controlled in France fluctuated over time. Much was lost in the early 13th century. The last holding—the port city of Calais—was not surrendered to the French until 1558.



Ruins of Corfe Castle, in Dorset, one of the many castles William built to subdue the English populace

- ✘ The need to take care of the French lands meant that the kings were frequently absent from England, and this may have given a boost to the development of English bureaucracy.
- ✘ The traffic in ideas between churchmen in England and Normandy linked England with the most important new work being done in canon law and theology.
- ✘ Many English students went to study at the new university in Paris in the 12th century, and their experiences in Paris created such a demand for higher education at home that England produced its own university at Oxford by the 1160s.
- ✘ English literature was strongly influenced by contacts with the Continent, and vice versa. Stories about King Arthur derived from Celtic-speaking areas of Britain crossed the English Channel and became tales of chivalric romance at the courts of the great nobles of France.
- ✘ By the end of the 12th century, the Normans had fully embraced their new home, which made them seem less foreign to the English. In a text written in the 1180s, the English treasurer said it was no longer possible to tell English from Norman.
- ✘ Postconquest England was a far cry from the ethnically polarized society that *Ivanhoe* portrayed. In fact, England became in many ways the best of both worlds.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Hugh Thomas, *The English and the Normans*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

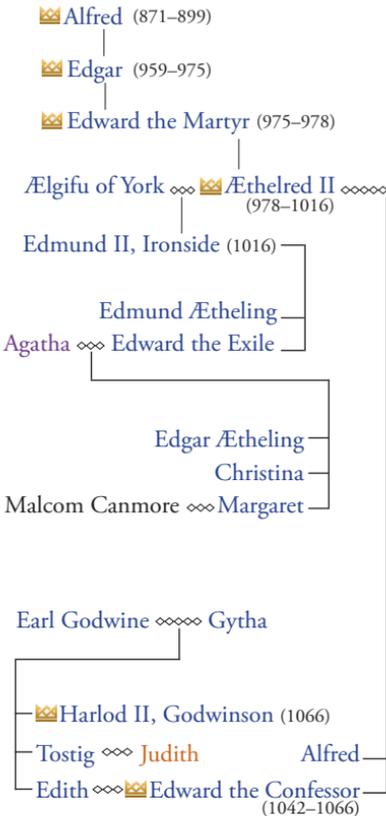
- 1 All in all, is it possible to say that the Norman Conquest had a positive effect on England?
- 2 What might England have looked like if the Norman Conquest had never taken place?

FAMILY TREE

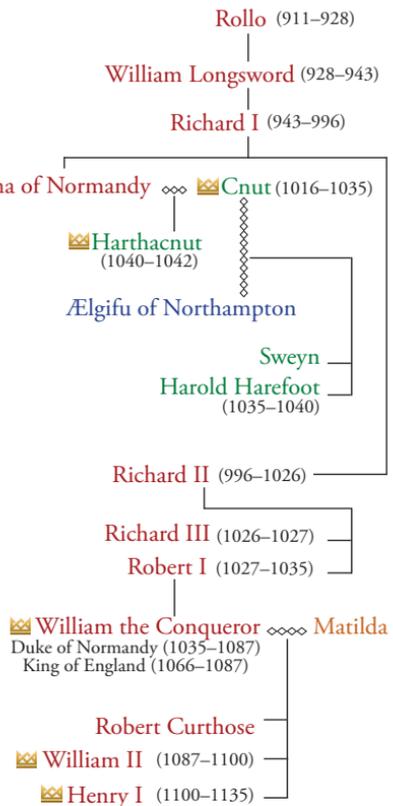
LEGEND

- House of Wessex
- House of Normandy
- House of Denmark
- King of Scotland
- Queen of England
- German-Hungarian Princess
- 👑 Crowned King of England
- ∞ Marriage

ENGLAND



NORMANDY



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