

1066

Course Guidebook

Professor Jennifer Paxton
Georgetown University



PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

Copyright © The Teaching Company, 2012

Printed in the United States of America

This book is in copyright. All rights reserved.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above,
no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form, or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise),
without the prior written permission of
The Teaching Company.



Jennifer Paxton, Ph.D.

Professorial Lecturer in History
Georgetown University

Professor Jennifer Paxton received her undergraduate training at Yale University, where she earned honors in History and received the Henry Ellsworth Prize for her senior essay. She graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa in 1987 and was awarded a Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities to pursue her doctorate at Harvard University, where she worked under the supervision of Professor Thomas N. Bisson. She did her dissertation research at the University of Cambridge under the support of a Frank Knox Memorial Traveling Fellowship. Professor Paxton taught at Harvard University and at The Catholic University of America before completing her Ph.D. in 1999. For more than a decade, she has been a Professorial Lecturer in History at Georgetown University. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at The Catholic University of America as well.

At Georgetown, Professor Paxton has taught both halves of the medieval European survey, and she designed a course on medieval Irish history that regularly draws high enrollments. She also teaches the history of Western monasticism from the 3rd to the 13th centuries, and she has lectured in both the freshman research seminar program and the core humanities course for the doctorate in Liberal Studies. At Catholic University, she teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in medieval English and Irish history and is also undergraduate adviser for the Center for Medieval and Byzantine Studies.

Professor Paxton's research focuses on England in the period between the reign of King Alfred and the late 12th century, particularly the intersection between the authority of church and state and the representation of the past in historical texts, especially those produced by religious communities. She is currently completing a book entitled *Chronicle and Community in Twelfth-Century England* (under contract to Oxford University Press), a study of

how monastic historians shaped their narratives to project present polemical concerns onto the past. She has published articles in various edited volumes and journals, including *The Haskins Society Journal* (for one of which she was cowinner of the Dennis Bethell Memorial Prize for best article) and *Anglo-Norman Studies*.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Professor Paxton is past conference director for the Charles Homer Haskins Society, a scholarly society dedicated to the study of the Anglo-Norman realms in the central Middle Ages. She lectures regularly on medieval history at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia, and has been invited to speak on British history at the Smithsonian Institution and the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington DC. ■

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Professor Biography	i
Course Scope	1

LECTURE GUIDES

LECTURE 1

The Norman Conquest through History	3
---	---

LECTURE 2

England and Normandy before the Conquest	20
--	----

LECTURE 3

The Succession Crisis in England	38
--	----

LECTURE 4

The Battle of Hastings	56
------------------------------	----

LECTURE 5

Completing the Conquest	75
-------------------------------	----

LECTURE 6

The Aftermath of the Conquest	93
-------------------------------------	----

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The Ruling Families of England, 959–1087	111
Bibliography	112

Scope:

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. ■

The Norman Conquest through History

Lecture 1

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 argues 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?

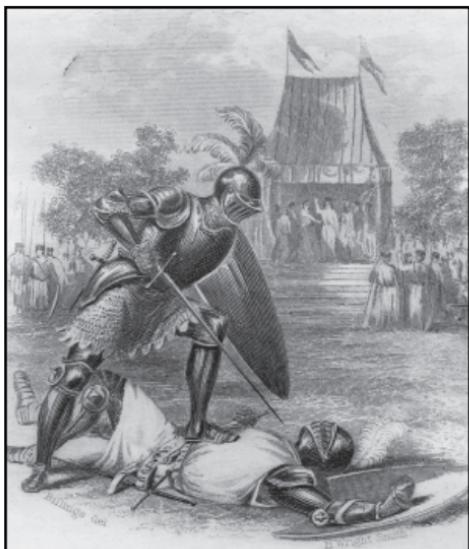
- In September 1066, Duke William of Normandy set out on one of the most daring enterprises the world has ever known: the conquest of England. He would soon defeat the English king, Harold, and earn the name by which we know him: William the Conqueror.
- William accomplished one of the most impressive 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 makes 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.



The Teaching Company Collection.

Images of Norman-Saxon conflict popularized by the novels of Sir Walter Scott do not paint an accurate picture of the era.

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 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 Reading

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?

The Norman Conquest through History

Lecture 1—Transcript

In September of 1066, Duke William of Normandy was waiting in a harbor in northern France for the wind to change and take him to his destiny. He was about to set out on one of the most daring enterprises the world has ever known: the conquest of England. He was about 38 years old, and he was at the height of his powers. The duke had gathered together a huge army of fellow Normans and men from other surrounding areas, and they were following him for one basic reason: They wanted to get rich. England was a place where fortunes could be made. The duke of Normandy was on his way to the battlefield of Hastings, where he would defeat the English king, Harold, and earn the name by which we know him: William the Conqueror.

Over the next six lectures, we're going to tell the story of how William accomplished one of the most impressive feats in history. We're going to trace how we get to 1066, what happened during that fateful year, and what changed as a result. We're going to get to know William the Conqueror, but we're also going to meet a very colorful cast of characters on both sides of the English Channel. We'll meet Vikings, Normans, and English people. We'll travel all over England, but we'll also spend a lot of time in Normandy—a very rich, very fertile province in northwestern France—and we'll need to make some detours to Scandinavia along the way as well. We'll be telling a story that astonished people when it first happened and still amazes people today. After all, conquering England is something that both Napoleon and Hitler tried very hard to do, but they failed. Was it brilliant strategy? Was it luck? Or was it a combination of the two? That's one of the questions we're going to try to answer in this course.

But there's another question that we're also going to try to answer: Why does it matter that William conquered England? Was it really a turning point in the history of England, and perhaps of Europe as well? Why should we care about it today? Until recently, this wouldn't have even been a sensible question, certainly not in England. Several generations of

English schoolchildren in the early 20th century grew up on a book called *Our Island Story*; it was a wonderful narrative history of England full of colorful personalities and invented dialogue, and it included all the great myths of English history: the story of how King Cnut rebuked the tides, how King Alfred burned the cakes—all of that sort of thing. It was very much the equivalent of reading about George Washington chopping down the cherry tree; if it wasn’t all true, then it should have been. That was the version of English history that generations of English children grew up on, and in that version, the Norman Conquest was central.

But not everyone was convinced. Back in 1930, two men named W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman wrote a parody of an English history textbook that they called *1066 and All That*. In the book, they promised to include “all the history you can remember,” including “103 Good Things, 5 Bad Kings, and 2 Genuine Dates.” Of those two dates they thought were really memorable and important, one was 1066, and you can tell they thought it was important from the title of the book, *1066 and All That*. But they were writing a parody. They were, in effect, making fun of the focus on “turning points” like the Norman Conquest of England. Did 1066 matter as much as English schoolchildren were taught to think it did?

Well, I think there are two main reasons why the Norman Conquest matters. The first reason is that the Norman Conquest truly made England a part of Europe. It joined England to Normandy and thus to France and the rest of Europe in a very fundamental way. We’ll see that before 1066, England was very much part of the Scandinavian world. The kingdom had been conquered by the Danes in 1016, and it had been ruled by a Danish dynasty for nearly 30 years. Furthermore, many inhabitants of England had very strong family ties with Scandinavia. However, after 1066, it was clear that England was going to be oriented towards France and the rest of continental Europe rather than towards Scandinavia. This meant that England was going to be a full participant in all the major cultural currents affecting Europe. The English church would be right in the middle of all the great changes taking place in religious circles in the 11th and 12th centuries. England would not be a backwater; it would be a major player. English history was going to be linked to the rest of European history from this moment on.

The second reason why the Norman Conquest matters follows directly from the first. England was transformed by this contact with the Continent. The language spoken in England, the literature read and enjoyed in England, and the castles and churches built in England were all very strongly influenced by what was happening in France. However, English culture and English institutions proved strong enough to hold their own. They were not simply swept away at the time of the Norman Conquest; they survived and blended with the new elements brought in to England by the conquerors. The result was a very rich hybrid of the two cultures—English and Norman.

Perhaps the crowning glory of this hybrid was the English language itself, a language with one of the largest vocabularies known to man, simply because it contains both a French and an English version for many words. You can “eat” (that’s English) or you can “dine” (that’s French). You can “meet” someone (that’s English) or you can “encounter” someone (that’s French). These pairs of words mean basically the same thing, but there are subtle differences that speakers and writers of English can take advantage of. English speakers just have more choice. One reasonable estimate puts the number of English words at about a quarter of a million, which is roughly twice as many words as you have in Spanish. Now, this is not to knock Spanish, by any means. Spanish speakers have a good comeback; they might retort that their vocabulary is smaller because Spain never got conquered by a bunch of Frenchmen—although the French certainly tried a couple of times. But the fact remains that this large vocabulary is part of what has made English the extraordinarily effective tool for communication that it is today. All of that is a legacy of the Norman Conquest. And of course England would go on to become one of the great imperial powers of world history; it would found colonies that would spread the English language, English culture, and English institutions all around the globe. I will have more to say about the effect of the Norman Conquest on the English language in a future lecture.

Before we plunge into the story of the conquest itself, I want to talk a little bit about how the Norman Conquest has been interpreted throughout history. I want to suggest that there have been, in a sense, many Norman Conquests of England. What I mean is that in every generation, people have reinterpreted

what the conquest meant. They have had different answers to the question of why it mattered.

It's a striking fact about history that historical events look different to people at different times and places; they simply view these events through a different lens. There are plenty of examples of this in American history. The American Civil War, for example, was interpreted very differently in the North and the South, and it also looks different to us today than it did before the modern Civil Rights movement. The same is true of the Norman Conquest, but the difference is that so much more time has passed between then and now. There has been time for many different views of the Norman Conquest to form. And opinion has at times been very sharply divided. Of course, in the immediate aftermath of 1066, feelings were very raw; this is quite understandable. We'll talk about that a bit later on. But the impressive thing is how strong people's feelings could be about the conquest even many centuries later.

I'm just going to give you a couple of examples of how interpretation of the Norman Conquest has changed over time. These changing interpretations tend to fit into existing political debates and cultural trends. Here's my first example: In the early 17th century in England, there was a fierce debate between the Stuart kings on the one hand and certain elements in the Parliament on the other. This is the period of the English Civil War when King Charles I was ultimately executed by a radical faction of the Parliament. The Stuart kings wanted to stress that Parliament only got its authority from royal power. Meanwhile, the Parliament was arguing essentially the opposite. According to the Parliament, the kings only got their authority from the people by way of the people's representatives in Parliament. Both sides used the Norman Conquest to back up their arguments.

The pro-Parliament side, led by a scholarly lawyer named Sir Edward Coke, took a very negative view of the Norman Conquest. Coke believed that before 1066, England had enjoyed a kind of primitive democracy in which power had, indeed, flowed up from the people to the kings. There were various Anglo-Saxon institutions, such as the local courts, that allowed basically for self-government. But then along came the Norman Conquest. Coke argued that the Norman Conquest had brought a cruel tyranny to England: The new

rulers were oppressive and arbitrary; they had swept away those venerable Anglo-Saxon institutions of self-government; and they had imposed on England a “Norman yoke” of oppression. This is the most extreme statement of the pro-English, anti-Norman view of the conquest, and it very much fit the agenda of the pro-Parliament side in the 17th century. They were making a direct analogy between the Norman oppressors of the 11th century and the Stuart kings of the 17th century. If you make the Norman Conquest look bad, and then you say that the Stuart kings are just like the Normans, then that helps you make your case.

Now the royalist side naturally took a very different view of the Norman Conquest. According to the kings’ supporters, the Norman Conquest had brought enlightened royal rule to England for the first time. The Norman kings had brought in all sorts of innovations that were very beneficial to England, and they had gotten rid of a lot of Anglo-Saxon baggage that was outdated and unhelpful. The government of England had only been enhanced by the imposition of stronger royal institutions. This is the extreme statement of the pro-Norman, anti-English view of the conquest. The royalists were really saying that both the Norman kings of the 11th century and the Stuart kings of the 17th century were enlightened despots, and that was a good thing.

Of course, the argument wasn’t really about 1066 at all. It was about England in the 17th century. Both sides were trying to use the Norman Conquest for their own political advantage, and both were really stretching the evidence much farther than it could really go. We will see that neither of these two versions of the conquest is accurate. The Norman yoke is an exaggeration, but so is the royalist view that the Normans brought civilization and enlightened rule to England for the first time. But this whole debate should tell us right away how important the conquest was to English people; its meaning really mattered. People believed that they could use specific views of the conquest to help defend a particular political point of view in the present.

I just want to give one more example of how attitudes to 1066 affected society very deeply even long after the fact. This is more about culture than politics. In the early 19th century in England, the English were not feeling very positive towards the French. They had just fought a long and bitter struggle against Napoleon, for one thing. At the same time, there was a wave

of pro-German sentiment. This trend was already very strongly pronounced when it got a very big boost due to the relationship between Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, who was a German prince. This was the period when Christmas trees became popular in England because Prince Albert wanted to see this German custom imported into his new home. At this time, scholars and the general public associated the Anglo-Saxons with the Germans. The flip side of this, though, is that many of them strongly associated the Normans with the French.

So there was a wave of interest in everything Anglo-Saxon, and quite a bit of anti-Norman feeling. Books about Anglo-Saxon heroes became hugely popular; in 1865, one of the big best sellers was a book about an Anglo-Saxon rebel named Hereward the Wake who defied William the Conqueror. I'll be talking more about Hereward in a future lecture. The Anglo-Saxon craze even led people to give their children very Anglo-Saxon-sounding names. I'm not talking just about relatively familiar ones like Alfred and Edith but also some pretty unusual ones like Egbert and Ethelwyn. Those were some of the trendy names at the time.

One fascinating example of this pro-Anglo-Saxon viewpoint can be found in the famous novel by Sir Walter Scott called *Ivanhoe*. The novel takes place during the reign of Richard the Lion-heart, which is a little more than a century after the Norman Conquest. It's about an Anglo-Saxon nobleman named Sir Wilfred of Ivanhoe and his quest to recover his lost inheritance and marry the fair Lady Rowena. In the story, Anglo-Saxons and Normans are still at odds with each other, even though the conquest is very old news by this point; it's over a century in the past. In the novel, there is still a sort of Anglo-Saxon old guard out there, almost a guerilla movement, a resistance movement—people who want to overthrow the upstart Norman dynasty and put a genuine English claimant on the throne.

I'm not going to go into the plot in detail; it's pretty complicated and it's not the least bit plausible. The scenario is completely inaccurate. We will see in our final lecture that Anglo-Saxons and Normans had pretty well become reconciled to each other by the time the events in the novel *Ivanhoe* take place. There is no surviving Anglo-Saxon claimant to the throne in the 1190s. But Sir Walter Scott wants to represent England as divided along ethnic lines;

it helps to drive his plot, and it fits the prevailing mood of the country in the 19th century. And the English public ate it up; they wanted to cheer for the Anglo-Saxons and hiss at the Normans. We are still enjoying the story today, of course: You can watch the marvelous old MGM movie version starring Robert Taylor, Elizabeth Taylor, and Joan Fontaine; there have been many versions made for TV; and there's even a Soviet film version made in 1983.

I could cite many other examples of ways in which the Norman Conquest has been used for some political or literary purpose or another, but I think the point is clear. In a sense, every generation since 1066 has had its own conception of the Norman Conquest and what it means. But what we're going to try to do in these six lectures is to figure out what the Norman Conquest means to us today.

I think it's time to get started. The story of the Norman Conquest really begins not with a battle but with a wedding, and for this we have to go back more than a half century before 1066 to the late 10th century, and to understand the wedding, we need to go back a century earlier to the late 9th century. This was a very difficult period for England. It wasn't even called England yet in the 9th century, because it was divided into many small kingdoms; the most important of these were Northumbria in the north, Mercia in the Midlands, and Wessex in the south and southwest. Then the Vikings came. One by one, most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were conquered by Viking armies. But then King Alfred, ruler of the kingdom of Wessex in the south, stemmed the tide. Slowly but surely his descendants reconquered the territory lost to the Vikings. They also managed to take advantage of the fact that the Vikings had basically cleared a path for them; there were no other Anglo-Saxon rulers left, so Wessex simply expanded and took over all of what we now know as England.

This was all great until the 990s, during the reign of King Æthelred II, when the Vikings came back. They not only raided England without mercy; they held England to ransom. This is when the infamous Danegeld was first imposed; it was a tax that the English king collected so that he could pay protection money to the Vikings. One reason the Vikings were so successful is that sometimes they received safe harbor in Normandy, just across the English Channel. They would pop over to a port in Normandy, take on fresh

supplies, and then go back to raid some more in England. It's important to note here a fact that I'm going to explain in more detail in the next lecture: The Normans were basically Vikings who had settled down in France earlier in the 10th century; so the Normans and the Vikings were essentially cousins, and they often had pretty friendly relations with each other. It's a natural kind of alliance to see.

Understandably, this led to tensions between England and Normandy. It wasn't fun for the English to see their neighbors right across the Channel helping their enemies. After a very tense period in the 990s, England and Normandy made peace by means of a diplomatic marriage. In 1002, the English king Æthelred II married the sister of the Duke Richard of Normandy, a woman named Emma. She was renamed Ælfgifu for the benefit of her English subjects. This was a name that was common in the English royal family; presumably it was easier to say than "Emma." Interestingly, we have evidence that Emma really never took to her new name; she always liked Emma, so we'll call her that as well.

This was the first marriage for Emma, but it was the second marriage for King Æthelred. He was already the father of six grown sons, so it didn't seem likely at the time that any offspring from this new marriage would ever sit on the English throne. Still, Emma and Æthelred did go on to have two sons, Edward and Alfred, and a daughter, Godgifu. Godgifu was a very common Anglo-Saxon woman's name; we know it better by its Latinized form, Godiva. (But this is not the same Godiva as the Lady Godiva who took her famous ride through the streets of Coventry.) We don't know much about the relationship between the king and the queen, but we do know that Emma was given a very prominent role at court, and she seems to have made a deep impression on English churchmen. They still remembered her many gifts to English monasteries with affection and gratitude over a century after her death.

However, the marriage didn't fix the basic problem the English faced; they were still under attack from the Vikings. King Æthelred has gone down to history with a very unfortunate nickname. We know him as Æthelred the Unready, but that's not really what he was called during his reign. In Anglo-Saxon he was called Æthelred Unraed, which means Æthelred "no-counsel"

or “bad advice.” In other words, people thought the king listened to the wrong people and followed the wrong policies. Whether it was his fault or not, the reign was marked by faction fighting and betrayal, and none of that helped the English to defend the kingdom.

In 1009, England was invaded by a Viking named Thorkell the Tall. King Æthelred asked for help from his brother-in-law, Duke Richard of Normandy, and the invasion was beaten off. So far, the English-Norman royal marriage was doing its job. However, in 1013, another more imposing Viking named Sweyn Forkbeard invaded. Sweyn was a very formidable character indeed, and he was able to roam around England basically with impunity. The king sent Queen Emma and their children over to Normandy to take refuge with the her brother, the duke. Æthelred tried to hold out for a while on the Isle of Wight, just off the southern English coast, but then he, too, fled to Normandy. Æthelred was able to come back to England briefly when Sweyn died suddenly in 1014, but then Sweyn’s son, Cnut, came from Denmark to England to try to claim his father’s conquest. Æthelred himself died in 1016, leaving his oldest surviving son by his first marriage, a man named Edmund Ironside, to continue the fight against Cnut.

In the fall of 1016, Edmund was defeated by Cnut at the Battle of Ashingdon, and the two adversaries, Cnut and Edmund, agreed to divide the kingdom between them, but this arrangement ended very shortly thereafter, when Edmund Ironside himself died. (We’re not exactly sure how; there are stories that he was murdered.) Cnut then took over the whole kingdom of England. He was now king not just of England but of Denmark and Norway as well. Cnut is presiding over essentially a Scandinavian empire, including England.

But that was not the end of the story for the English royal family. There were still people out there who belonged to the legitimate succession of the Anglo-Saxon royal house. Here is where it gets a little bit complicated, because we need to remember that King Æthelred had been married twice, and he had left sons from both marriages. His most important son from the first marriage, Edmund Ironside, had briefly been king himself (we just saw), and he’s the only one who matters, because none of the others had surviving children. Edmund Ironside had two sons, and they were spirited out of England by Cnut. But then the king lost track of them; it’s amazing, but

true. The only one to survive was called Edward the Exile, and he actually married a German-Hungarian princess called Agatha. We won't see Edward the Exile again until Lecture 3, but just keep in mind that he's out there. He represents the elder line of the English succession from King Æthelred, the line coming down from Æthelred's first marriage.

Of course, there were also Æthelred's sons by his second marriage to Queen Emma, Edward and Alfred. They were known as the *Æthelings*, which is an Anglo-Saxon term that means roughly, "throne-worthy" or "in the line of succession." Another way to translate this loosely would be just to say that they are princes. But they are in Normandy, and that's where they stay for the next 20 years. They are brought up in Normandy. They would certainly have learned French, if they had not already learned it from their mother as small children. They doubtless became completely Normanized in outlook during their very long exile. They may not really have expected ever to set foot in England again.

And their exile was spent without their mother, because here is where the story gets a bit amazing. As we saw, Cnut has conquered England in 1016, but he realized that it was going to be a little difficult to hold onto it. And so in 1017, he sent for Emma to make her his queen. Remember that this is the widow of the man Cnut's own father had driven out of the kingdom of England.

Some historians think this was a marriage like Emma's first one, that is, it was basically agreed on between the English king and Emma's brother, the duke of Normandy. Maybe Cnut wanted Norman support just like Æthelred had done, and he was going to get it exactly the same way, by marrying exactly the same woman. There is another, very intriguing suggestion, though, and that is that Emma made the agreement with Cnut herself. According to this interpretation of the sources, Emma had quite liked being queen of England, and she was happy to get her old job back, even if she had to marry the son of her former husband's conqueror. On Cnut's side, Emma probably represented not just a Norman alliance but also continuity. She was well-respected by the Anglo-Saxon nobles and the churchmen, and she seems to have been highly competent. She was quite a bit older than Cnut, but that didn't seem to matter, and the couple produced a daughter

(who married the German emperor Henry III) and a son (Harthacnut). Queen Emma was once again at the center of English political affairs—apparently just where she wanted to be.

But she had basically left her two sons and her daughter by her first marriage to fend for themselves back in Normandy, and this is something that commentators at the time attacked her for. It doesn't seem like the act of a loving mother. It looks like the act of a woman desperate to stay at the center of political affairs. I don't think we need to judge Emma, though. I think we should simply be fascinated by her. But quite apart from the remarkable story of a woman who became queen of the same country twice, Emma is important because she represents the essential link between England and Normandy. Right now, we have Cnut on the throne, and the Scandinavian element in England is on the rise. But England was not done with Normandy yet. In the next lecture, we'll look at the very turbulent half-century between the Danish conquest of England in 1016 and the fateful year: 1066. We'll see that it was very much an open question throughout that period whether England was going to end up looking north to Scandinavia or south and east to Normandy.

England and Normandy before the Conquest

Lecture 2

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. Ælfgifu then vanished from history.



The Teaching Company Collection.

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 Godwins, 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 a 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 Reading

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?

England and Normandy before the Conquest

Lecture 2—Transcript

Welcome back. In our last lecture, I started to set the stage for the Norman Conquest by looking at another conquest of England, the Danish conquest of England under King Cnut. Cnut helped to ease the transition from English rule to Danish rule by marrying Queen Emma, the widow of the English king, Æthelred the Unready.

But the next half-century in England proved to be anything but stable. The question of the succession to the kingship dominated politics. There was never a time between 1016 and 1066 when it was clear who the next king was going to be, and in a monarchy, that is a recipe for instability. England was going to be ripe for conquest partly because of this inherent instability in the English state. Meanwhile, the future William the Conqueror was growing to maturity in Normandy, and the very difficult circumstances of his childhood there were actually going to turn him into the ideal man to take on the challenge of invading England.

In this lecture, we're going to look at England and Normandy in turn and see how we get to 1066. I'd like to start this lecture by going back to Emma, because she is, as I've said, the link between England and Normandy. Emma was a Norman princess who was married to the English king to make peace between England and Normandy. She was then married to the new Danish king of England to make peace between Cnut and his new English subjects. And she would ultimately give William the Conqueror his claim to the English throne because she turned out to be William's great-aunt.

Let's pick up Emma's story where we left off. In 1017, Emma marries the young King Cnut, and you can tell from the royal documents that survive from this period that Emma has quite a lot of influence. The order of the signatures on these documents was an expression of the pecking order at court. And on a lot of these documents you see Emma's signature right after the king's, sometimes even before the archbishop of Canterbury's, and that's pretty unusual. She is a major patron of English churches, so she is really

playing the role of queen to the hilt. This is what she apparently wanted. This is why she left her children from her first marriage back in Normandy. She wants to play this role of political adviser and patron.

But that is not the whole story, and here is where it gets a little weird: King Cnut had another queen—not a crowned queen, mind you, and perhaps not even an official wife in the sense of somebody who has gone through a ceremony in a church. But this other woman was very important in Cnut's life. This woman was named *Ælfgifu* of Northampton, and she became Cnut's concubine or his wife around the time that he conquered England. One very odd thing about this situation, among many, is the fact that the name *Ælfgifu* was the same name that Queen Emma had been given when she first came to England to marry *Æthelred* in 1002. It was a fairly common name. Now, I said in the last lecture that Emma never really cared for the name and didn't use it very much; that was probably doubly true after Emma married Cnut, because she was very well aware that this other woman, *Ælfgifu* of Northampton, was out there.

We have no record of the two women ever meeting face to face. Cnut was not a stupid man, after all. But Cnut had sons by each of these women. Emma had one son, *Harthacnut*, which means “tough knot.” (The name Cnut means “knot.”) *Ælfgifu* had two sons, *Sweyn* and *Harold Harefoot*. (Harefoot seems to have been a reference to his being a fast runner like a hare, or perhaps to his skill at hunting.) So you have sons by each queen—and that spells trouble. Whose son will inherit?

Later on, Emma commissioned a biography of herself which we know under the title *Encomium Emmae*, which means, “In praise of Emma” (so not a self-effacing work at all). In that text, it says that when Emma married Cnut, she made him promise that any son she had would take precedence over any sons Cnut had with other women, and we know exactly which woman she meant, of course. Now, there is no written record of this agreement. We can well imagine that this would have been a part of the discussions at the time of the wedding. But we really don't know what happened, because it was very much in Emma's interest to make it seem after the fact as if she had been given this promise about her own son inheriting the throne. So how did it happen? How did it work out?

It's important to remember here that Cnut rules a Scandinavian empire, and he needs help to keep this enterprise up and running. Cnut sent his son Sweyn (one of the sons by Ælfgifu of Northampton) to rule in Norway and his son Harthacnut (his son by Emma) to rule in Denmark. But then in 1035, Cnut dies unexpectedly. Sweyn by this point has actually been driven out of Norway by rebels, and he goes to Denmark to hang out with his half-brother Harthacnut. Neither of them is on the scene in England when Cnut dies.

But Ælfgifu of Northampton was there with her other son, Harold Harefoot, and Emma was there. And there was a huge fight over who would succeed Cnut. The two queens really went at it, though of course, at a distance. When Sweyn died, shortly after his father in 1035, Ælfgifu threw her whole support behind her younger son, Harold Harefoot. Emma, of course, wants Harthacnut to come back from Denmark to take over.

The battle got pretty nasty, and it seems to have been fought at least partly in the court of public opinion. The pro-Emma camp apparently spread rumors that Harold Harefoot was not actually the son of Cnut after all; he was really the result of some other liaison that Ælfgifu of Northampton had had with a lowborn Englishman. (I think from this you can tell how these women really did not like each other.) However, when it became clear that Harthacnut was too busy putting down a rebellion in Denmark to come to England in person, the English nobility ultimately rally around Harold Harefoot, and he becomes king. Ælfgifu of Northampton is now the queen mother, and Emma has lost.

But she does not give up. All of a sudden, it seems, Emma remembers that she has two other sons. They've been cooling their heels in Normandy all this time. They were the sons of her first marriage to Æthelred the Unready. These two princes, Edward and Alfred, have been in exile ever since the Danish conquest of England. And now Emma thinks of sending for them to see if perhaps they can make good their claim to the English throne.

What happened next is controversial. In 1036, Emma's two sons, Edward and Alfred, come to England, traveling separately, perhaps for the purpose of testing the waters. They almost certainly come at their mother's invitation, but that is not the story we get in Emma's biography, the *Encomium Emmae*.

The *Encomium* says that King Harold Harefoot forged a letter from Emma to the princes in Normandy, inviting them to come for a visit to England, and it further says that the king had been planning all along to betray the princes when they arrived. It wasn't Emma's idea for the princes to come to England at all. Now, this is probably nonsense. These princes are not going to come to England without checking with their mother. They are going to need her support because they don't know anybody in England. The *Encomium* has to invent this story about the forged letter because the visit to England ends tragically, so it's important to pin the blame for it on someone besides Emma; it has to have been someone else's idea for the princes to come to England.

The problem basically was that Edward and Alfred didn't have any support in England. The powers that be had lined up behind Harold Harefoot by this point. When Alfred did arrive in England, he was intercepted by men under the control of Earl Godwine who was a very strong supporter of King Harold Harefoot. (I'll have more to say about Godwine in a moment.) They took Alfred and his companions to the monastic church at Ely in eastern England, and there they attempted to blind him. This was something you did to your enemies because it was believed that being blind automatically disqualified you from the throne. However, they seem to have done a bad job of it, and Alfred died early in 1037 at Ely from the effects of the botched blinding. This was obviously a terrible episode, and it caused very bad feeling for many years. Alfred's brother Edward, of course, returns to Normandy, and Emma is forced into exile in Flanders.

So Harold Harefoot is on the throne, but he is a dissolute young lad; he likes parties a bit too much. In 1040, he dies suddenly—still a very young man—and *Ælfgifu* of Northampton vanishes from history; she must have known that without her royal son, there was there was really no future for her in English politics. This leaves the way open for Harthacnut, Emma's son by Cnut, who is still in Denmark. He finally arrives in England—very much with Emma's backing—and is crowned king. But he is not married and not in good health, so once again, the succession looks precarious. While Harthacnut had been in Denmark, he had actually made a pact with the king of Norway, King Magnus, that if either one died without heirs, they would inherit each other's kingdoms. This was a way of keeping the peace between England and Norway, because England and Norway are now

rivals since Sweyn had been driven out back in 1035. But it's also a sign of instability in England that there is even talk about giving the kingdom to the king of Norway. England is poised, perhaps, to become a Scandinavian possession again.

But that's not what happened. In 1041, Harthacnut sends for his remaining half-brother, Edward, to come to England from Normandy to help him rule. And that seems to have worked well for the next year or so, but Harthacnut died in 1042 with no heirs. Edward, the son of Æthelred and Emma, who is the man on the spot, becomes king. The Danish dynasty was out, and an English dynasty has been restored.

This should perhaps have been Emma's moment to shine, but it wasn't. Edward had her banished from the court; no one is sure why, but historians have speculated that Edward was never able to forgive her for abandoning him in Normandy to marry Cnut. It could also have been that since Edward was 38 years old by this point, he figured he could do without his mother looking over his shoulder all the time. So that was the end of a remarkable career. Emma lived the rest of her life out of the political mainstream, but I bet she missed it.

That's a lot of turbulence in England in just a few years. The throne changes hands a lot, and it's not clear whether England will look to Scandinavia or Normandy for its kings. But now Edward is on the throne, and he will rule for 24 years, which is a relatively long reign for a medieval king. However, his reign was very far from stable. In fact, the instability of Edward's reign was going to pave the way for the Norman Conquest in some important ways.

Let's look for a minute at the character of Edward. He is known as Edward the Confessor, which means that he was a very holy man. He does seem to have been very pious, and he was especially known for building the new abbey church at Westminster. This was an enormous undertaking, very expensive, and it certainly demonstrates that he was willing to put his money where his mouth was.

However, he wasn't a particularly strong leader. He was, in fact, under the thumb of a powerful aristocratic family called the Godwinsons, led by Earl Godwine. They basically called the shots in England, and Edward was unable to do very much without their support.

You'll remember that Earl Godwine was the man who was blamed for the murder of Edward's brother Alfred. This understandably made the relationship between Edward and Godwine rather cool. But Godwine was so politically astute, and so rich, that Edward felt unable to rule without him. He even took the fateful step of marrying Godwine's daughter, Edith.

The reason this matters so much is that the marriage remained childless. This makes Edward the Confessor the third English king in a row to have no descendants; that's a real problem for political stability. At this distance in time, no one knows why there were no children. After the fact, there were reports that the marriage remained chaste, and that this was a special sign of Edward's piety. This is very unlikely to be true; Edward had every reason to want an heir. So it's a sign of just how powerful Earl Godwine was that Edward could not break free of this very inconvenient marriage. Edith was a very strong-willed person in her own right, and later on, she acted very much in her own best interest at the time of the Norman Conquest. (We will get to that in a future lecture.)

For now let's meet two other notable members of the very large Godwinson brood, two of Edith's brothers, Harold Godwinson and Tostig. They seem both to have been very able individuals, and their father, Earl Godwine, managed to get huge earldoms for them. (An earldom is a large territory that an official called an earl administers on behalf of the king.) In 1053, when Earl Godwine died, leadership of the family went to Harold Godwinson. He would remain King Edward's right hand man for the rest of the reign.

But it was a very turbulent period, as I've said. The hegemony of the Godwinsons did not please everybody. Some older, native families had been effectively shut out of power by the Godwinsons, who had Anglo-Danish ancestry. For example, when Earl Siward of Northumbria died in 1055, Tostig was installed as earl of Northumbria, despite the fact that Siward did have a young heir. But the Northumbrians never really accepted Tostig. He

levied unpopular taxes and generally behaved like an arrogant newcomer. Finally, in 1065, the Northumbrians revolted against Tostig's rule and drove him out of Northumbria. Tostig's brother Harold seems to have thought the rebels had a case and he didn't do very much to help put his brother back in place as earl of Northumbria. This led to an irreparable breach between the Godwinson brothers. Tostig went into exile with his wife's family in Flanders, but we will hear from him again.

So England in the years leading up to 1066 was split by serious faction fighting among the nobility, and even the Godwinson family itself was divided. Were things any better across the Channel in Normandy?

Well, perhaps not better, but certainly different. Normandy had a very distinctive history of its own, and that history definitely shaped the mind-set of the man who would become William the Conqueror. Normandy is a region of northern France on the Atlantic coast that had suffered particularly badly from Viking attacks in the 9th century. In the early 10th century, in fact, the French king named Charles the Simple had made a deal with a very enterprising young Viking named Rolf, or Rollo, that he would give up territory for the Vikings to settle in if they would become Christians and act as a bulwark against other Vikings. This region became known as Normandy because the Northmen lived there. That's where the name "Norman" comes from.

Now, throughout this period, the whole 10th century, the Normans were getting rid of most of their Viking characteristics, except, of course, for the ability to fight very fiercely; that they kept. They gave up the Norse language in favor of French; in fact, it was said that by the late 10th century, children had to be sent to the far reaches of western Normandy if they wanted to still learn Norse. So you see one very important characteristic of the Normans appearing: They are very adaptable.

Another thing that happened to the Normans while they were forgetting Norse and learning French is that they became Christianized. Of course, that was part of the deal; they had been pagans when the initial settlement of Normandy took place, and then they had to convert. When they converted, the region of Normandy had been pretty much emptied of churches during

the period of the worst Viking raids. That started to change in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. Norman dukes began inviting famous churchmen from other parts of Europe to come found new monasteries.

The dukes also gave their own close relatives very important jobs in the church; there was an archbishop in Normandy who was based in the Norman capital at Rouen, and he was almost always a member of the duke's family, and so were the bishops underneath him.

But not every relative of the dukes wanted to be a bishop, or could; there are only a certain number of slots. Here it's important just to point out that bishops in this period were not always very unworldly people. There were plenty of bishops in the 11th century who fought in battles, and lots of them had concubines. But still, there are a lot of younger brothers and cousins out there who can't become bishops that the dukes needed to find work for. These male relatives were typically made into counts. The counts served under the dukes, and they were in charge of the particular regions of Normandy. The idea clearly was that the duke should be at the top of a hierarchy, and the people under him would owe him everything because he was their lord and, in many cases, he was related to them.

Of course, it didn't always work that way in practice. 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 effectively (for example, if the duke was a child). And that was exactly what happened when a young boy named William took the ducal throne in 1035, the same year that Cnut died in England. This was the William who would grow up to be William the Conqueror.

William's father was named Robert. Robert was the son of the Duke Richard who had married his sister Emma to the English king, Æthelred. That made Emma William's great-aunt. Robert had succeeded his older brother, Richard III, who reigned for only a year before dying suddenly. Much later there were rumors that Robert had poisoned his brother to take the throne; we don't really have any evidence of this, but it's at least possible.

Now, Robert never got around to getting properly married, but he did have a liaison with the daughter of one of his officials, named Herleva. Herleva gave birth to a son named William, and Duke Robert publicly acknowledged him as his son. The duke may have been planning to find a proper royal bride later on, but then in 1034, he decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem—possibly to atone for his brother's murder—and so he prepared for the pilgrimage by making his nobles swear to accept little William as his heir. The fact that the child was illegitimate wasn't an insuperable obstacle in the 1030s; there had actually been earlier dukes of Normandy who were not so legitimate themselves. It wasn't until later that William got his rather insulting nickname, "William the Bastard." This happened because social mores in the 11th century were evolving. In the 1030s, it just wasn't that big a deal to be illegitimate, but by the end of the century, when people looked back on it, it was.

So Duke Robert named several guardians for his son, mostly very close relatives who were either important nobles or prominent churchmen; this is where that ducal policy of promoting family members in both church and state paid off. He was especially trying to put men around his son who would not see themselves as rivals for the throne. Duke Robert was surely expecting to come home again, but better safe than sorry. As it turns out, Robert died on the pilgrimage, and that left young William as the heir to the duchy of Normandy.

He was about seven years old when he became duke, and right away, there was trouble. The problem was that while some of the nobles felt very close to the new young duke, a lot of the other nobles saw their chance to assert their independence. One by one, the guardians Duke Robert had appointed for his son began to die off, or to be killed by their enemies. Little William's tutor was murdered. The worst episode concerned a guardian named Osbern fitz Arfast. He was with the young duke in a town south of Rouen when a man named William de Montgomery, whose father had been exiled from Normandy by the guardians, broke into the duke's bedchamber where Osbern fitz Arfast was also sleeping. He cut Osbern's throat right in front of the child. It was a tough way to grow up.

But this sort of experience only seems to have made the duke determined that he will grow up to get control over the rebellious nobles of Normandy. By the mid-1040s, he is fully mature and starting to show the skills that will serve him in good stead in his conquest of England. He has learned how to read men; he has learned how to decide who to trust. He has recruited a new group of ducal advisers to replace his guardians, and he rewards them well for their loyalty. He became especially adept at reconciling enemies to his cause. The young duke was turning into a very savvy politician and leader of men.

He had a very important ally at this time, namely the king of France, King Henry I. The dukes of Normandy were, of course, technically vassals of the King of France, which means that they were supposed to follow the kings to war if called on, and in return, the kings were supposed to help the dukes if necessary. Henry was old enough to be William's father, and he apparently made William a knight. This is a sign that the two men at this time were close; perhaps there was something of a father-son bond there. William relied on King Henry to help keep the rebellious nobles of Normandy in check, and in Normandy, this was a perpetual problem.

The most serious uprising that Duke William faced came in 1047. It was led by a group of his cousins who were disgruntled about being left out of the close circle of ducal advisers. The duke appealed to his overlord, the king of France, for help, and King Henry duly appeared. The combined forces of the king and the duke confronted the rebels in the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes, and they were victorious; most of the rebels were exiled.

This battle was a turning point for Duke William. He had proven himself in the field, and afterwards, he was able to confront enemies along his borders rather than just within Normandy itself. The duke was strong enough to fight alongside the king of France in an attack on the neighboring territory of Anjou, to the south of Normandy. But here, Duke William's martial prowess reportedly turned his strongest ally into his enemy. William was such a skilled fighter on horseback that King Henry is said to have gotten jealous of William. Supposedly he hated the duke from this point on. We don't really know if that's true, of course, but it certainly is true that William and the king of France grew apart, whatever the reason. And in the next big

confrontation of his reign, William would demonstrate that he had outgrown his old mentor.

This took place in 1054, when William was in his early 20s. Yet another rebellion had broken out in Normandy, but this time, instead of the king of France coming to help put down the rebellion, he was backing the rebels. This is actually, paradoxically, a sign of how powerful William had become; he was too powerful. The king of France did not want Normandy getting so powerful that it might start encroaching on his own territory. So he intervened on the side of the rebels. King Henry also sent his brother, Count Odo, to lead a force into Normandy across the River Seine. King Henry waited on the other side of the river to face Duke William in person. William's forces were also divided; he was a good enough general and a strong enough leader to rally his supporters and direct their actions at a distance. The French, under Count Odo, fought a battle against the duke's supporters at Mortemer, and the duke's side won decisively. When the news of the battle reached King Henry, he was dismayed and quickly withdrew to his own lands. The duke is now strong enough to do without his old mentor, and even to defy him. William had won his first big battle at Val-ès-Dunes with the help of the king of France. He won his next big battle at Mortemer against the king of France, and he didn't even have to be at the battle in person.

There is an interesting postscript to the Battle of Mortemer. One of the rebels who fought against Duke William was Guy, count of Ponthieu. Ponthieu is just to the north of Normandy. Guy was captured during the battle and spent two years in prison before he was finally released and did homage to Duke William. We are going to come back to Guy, count of Ponthieu, because he has a role to play in the struggle over the English throne. For now it is simply important to note that Count Guy and Duke William have this history with each other, and it's going to affect their relations from then on.

So where did the Battle of Mortemer leave Duke William? He has grown up in the school of hard knocks; he has seen people close to him murdered by his enemies, but he has survived; he has made very adept use of alliances, including the most important alliance of all, the one with the king of France—which he cultivated just so long as it was necessary for him; he had spent a couple of decades consolidating his hold on Normandy and sharpening his

skills as a warrior and a politician. Meanwhile, in England, there is a king who has faced serious challenges and has not really risen to the occasion. Edward the Confessor had not managed to overawe his own nobility, and he has failed at a very important job for a king: He has not produced an heir. We will see in the next lecture what happened when it was time for King Edward to decide who should succeed him.

The Succession Crisis in England

Lecture 3

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 a 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.



The Bayeux Tapestry depicts Harold's (*center right*) oath to William (*seated, left*) but does not answer the question of whether or not it was coerced.

- 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 Reading

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?

The Succession Crisis in England

Lecture 3—Transcript

Welcome back. In our last lecture we did a kind of parallel history. We looked at what was happening in England during the reign of Edward the Confessor, and we saw that King Edward wasn't very effective at asserting himself against his powerful nobles, especially the Godwinson family.

Harold Godwinson and his brother Tostig controlled much of England; plus, King Edward was married to their sister, Edith, so it was pretty difficult for the king to restrict their power even when he wanted to. This was true even though the marriage to Edith did not produce any children. And then, when Harold and Tostig fell out with each other, there was real trouble.

At the same time as this was going on in England, though, William, duke of Normandy was doing a very good job of showing his nobles who was boss. So the two kings were in very different positions. Today, we are going to look at how the relationship between the two men brought England and Normandy together when King Edward had to figure out what to do about the succession to the English throne. We'll look at Edward's various efforts to decide what to do about the English succession, and then we'll follow the story down to what happened in 1066 when he finally died, and the question had to be settled one way or the other.

Now, of course, Edward and William belonged to different generations. Edward was the son of Emma of Normandy; William was her great-nephew. There was an age gap of almost 30 years between William and Edward. Edward and William had certainly known each other in Normandy while Edward was in exile there. Remember that Edward lived in Normandy until 1041, and William by that point had already been duke for six years, though of course he was still a small child. So it would not have been a relationship between equals, but it's certainly possible that Edward got to know enough about William's potential to be suitably impressed. Edward may have observed William's sheer grit even as a small boy surviving the rough and tumble of Norman politics.

The reason I raise this possibility is that there are signs that in the early 1050s, King Edward thought very seriously about making William the heir to the English throne. This was at a point when the Godwinson family was temporarily on the outs with the king. Edward had sent his wife away to a nunnery while he figured out his next move, which may or may not have included getting into a new marriage that would produce an heir at last. But the king was about 50 at this point and may have concluded that it just wasn't going to happen, certainly not with Queen Edith and possibly not with any new wife either. We have several reports that in the early 1050s, Edward the Confessor sent word to William offering to make him his successor on the English throne.

Now, there is no English source that reports this, so perhaps we have a right to be suspicious. Perhaps this was made up later on so that it would look later on as if William had the official OK from King Edward to take the throne. I do think that some offer was probably made. The interesting thing about it is that if so, it was not King Edward's last word on the subject. One of the very confusing things about this period is that the king seems to have changed his mind about the succession several times. I think modern historians are confused because the king wasn't very sure himself about what he wanted to do.

Let's take the next piece of the puzzle. If this offer to Duke William did in fact happen, then we don't hear anything more about it from any source, English or Norman, and King Edward turned in a different direction altogether in the late 1050s as he tried to figure out the succession. He decided to try to find the heirs of his half-brother, Edmund Ironside. Now here we have to think all the way back to the first lecture. Edmund Ironside had been the son of King *Aethelred* by his first marriage, so he was Edward the Confessor's older half-brother. Edmund had briefly been king in 1016 when he and Cnut had fought it out, but then Edmund had died, and Cnut had taken over all of England. But Edmund had had two small sons, and they were sent away into exile on the Continent. People knew this at the time, but at that point, there certainly seemed to be no real possibility that they would ever come into play again as heirs to the English throne. No one was really sure what had happened to them.

But in 1054, Edward the Confessor sent out one of his bishops to try to track down the heirs of Edmund Ironside. By this point, the older son had died, but the younger son, Edward, had ended up at the Hungarian court, married, and had three children. This Edward is usually called Edward the Exile to try to keep him distinct from all the other Edwards.

Let's imagine for a second what it was like when this English bishop showed up at the Hungarian court. He must have said to Edward the Exile, basically, "Your moment has arrived. It's time to go home." Edward had been in exile since he was a few months old; it's extremely unlikely that he spoke any English. But a crown is a crown. He and his family were finally persuaded in 1057 to come to England to see what would happen.

The story does not have a happy ending for Edward the Exile. We have a report that when he finally arrived in England, after this whole effort to track him down and name him the heir, King Edward didn't get around to seeing him, and then, within a very short time of his arrival, Edward the Exile was dead. Conspiracy theorists have a field day with this. It would certainly have been in the interests of the Godwinson family to get rid of Edward the Exile. However, there is no proof of this, and King Edward did take care of the surviving children of Edward the Exile.

There were two girls, Margaret and Christina, and a little boy, Edgar. King Edward does seem to have intended that Edgar should grow up to be his heir, because he was referred to as Edgar *Ætheling*—that, remember, was the special title given to Anglo-Saxon princes who were seen as worthy of inheriting the throne. Now, just so we can keep track of the relationships here, little Edgar *Ætheling* is King Edward's half great-nephew on his father's side, while Duke William of Normandy is King Edward's first cousin once removed on his mother's side. So in terms of blood relation, that's not very close in either case.

But regardless of genealogy, the succession did not end up going either to William or to Edgar *Ætheling*, because the decisive factor turned out to be not blood, but power. The real power in England didn't lie with King Edward; it lay with the Godwinson family. So it's time to turn our attention back to them. The event I am about to describe is shrouded in mystery. It's

one of the most puzzling episodes in English history. People still disagree, often pretty strongly, about what happened, and I don't think there will ever be a good way of resolving the dispute, because the sources don't give us a clear picture of what happened.

I'm talking here about an oath that Harold Godwinson supposedly swore in 1064 to support the claim of Duke William of Normandy to the English throne. Here we have a big problem with the sources. I've mentioned these sources a few times, so I think it's time to say a few words about them. They are very clearly divided into English sources and Norman sources. The English sources come in two varieties. Either they are contemporary, (they are written down as the events are occurring, more or less), or they're written much later (in the early 12th century, a half-century or so after the Norman Conquest). The main contemporary source is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which is a set of yearly records that were being kept at various English churches; the later sources are narratives written by English churchmen, and we'll be coming back to these narratives in the last lecture.

The Norman sources, on the other hand, date from just after the Battle of Hastings, when it was clear what the outcome was. There is certainly that the possibility that the Norman sources would want to shape the record of events to look good in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. There is equally the possibility that the later English sources would want to put the most favorable possible spin on the disaster of Conquest. That does not mean automatically that these sources are incorrect and the contemporary English sources are right; even sources written at the time can be politically motivated, or just mistaken, or they can leave things out that are inconvenient, so we do have to be careful in using these sources.

But here is what we can be pretty sure of: In 1064, Harold Godwinson ended up in Normandy, and there he swore one or more oaths to support Duke William's claim to the English throne. But what this all meant is very hotly disputed. The Norman sources say that King Edward sent Harold Godwinson to Normandy to reaffirm his intention to make Duke William his heir. The English contemporary sources gloss over this event, but the English sources written down much later confront the oath story head-on. They say that yes, there was an oath, but it was coerced; Harold was forced to swear it, and

everyone knew that an oath that you swore against your will was invalid in canon law.

Let's back up for a second and look at what seems to have happened when Harold set out from England. First, as a side note, I should mention that the English and Norman sources don't agree about why Harold ended up in Normandy. The Normans say he was on this official mission to reaffirm Duke William's claim to the throne; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has no entry for the year 1064, so we don't have a contemporary English source for this event. The early 12th century sources have various explanations for the journey to Normandy; one even says that Harold was just out fishing in the English Channel when he was blown off-course and crossed the Channel by accident. Nobody really believes that one.

Well, whether or not he was trying to go to Normandy, he wound up in Ponthieu instead, the territory just to the north of Normandy. There he fell into the hands of Guy of Ponthieu, the local count. We met him before, in the last lecture, when we talked about Duke William's struggle to gain control of his nobles. Guy of Ponthieu was one of the people who fought at the Battle of Mortemer on the losing side, and Duke William had kept him in captivity after the battle and made him do homage, so Duke William had a pretty strong hold on Count Guy. And now along comes Harold Godwinson and drops in Count Guy's lap.

Well, word of this must have gotten back to Duke William pretty quickly, and he saw an opportunity. He got Guy to cough up Harold. Now, it's important here to note that Guy's plan would certainly have been to hold Harold for an enormous ransom. That's what you did in those days; if the most powerful man in England lands at your doorstep, you're going to take advantage of that. But William swoops in and gets him released without a ransom, which certainly puts Harold in William's debt. But William takes something more valuable than a ransom: He takes an oath (or more than one) that Harold will support William's claim to the throne.

Here I want to quickly mention another Norman source that I haven't talked about before: It's the Bayeux Tapestry, and that depicts all the events leading up to the Norman Conquest through the Battle of Hastings. The tapestry

isn't really a tapestry; it's technically an embroidered cloth, but the name has stuck. It's actually one of our best sources for the events of the Norman Conquest. We're going to come back to it again and again, because it's our only visual depiction of what happened. There is also a running text that goes with the pictures, but a lot of times, the text is pretty vague, and one might even suspect, deliberately so.

The Bayeux Tapestry depicts Harold's oath in a way that actually allows for multiple interpretations. The text here just says that Harold swore an oath, but it doesn't say exactly what it was, or whether he swore it voluntarily. Still, by the time the tapestry was made, around 1070 or a little after, everyone in Europe knew the official Norman version of the oath story.

According to this version, the oath was voluntary. Harold was just reaffirming what his own king, Edward the Confessor, had commissioned him to affirm. It's possible this was true, and it's even possible that Harold saw it in his own best interest to be on William's good side in case William did become king. There was possibly a deal between the two men that would have essentially kept the Godwinson family in their very high position under a future King William. So we can't by any means discount the possibility that Harold would see this oath as a good deal for him. The later English sources, though, say that the oath was coerced and thus invalid.

Now, why did the story of the oath matter so much? It was because of what happened in 1066. If Harold had in fact sworn to support William's claim to the throne, then in January of 1066, when King Edward the Confessor died, Harold broke that oath. When William got the oath out of Harold, whether it was coerced or not, he was trying to take out a little insurance. William wanted to be sure that the most powerful man in England next to the king was going to back his claim to the throne when the time came. But Harold did not back William. Instead, he became king of England himself.

Let's shift our focus back from Normandy, where the oath took place, to England, where King Edward the Confessor is on his deathbed. His health had been failing for some time, and by late in 1065, it was clear he was dying. Edward had been overseeing renovations to Westminster Abbey, and he just managed to get through the dedication of the abbey before his final

illness really took hold. He died on January 4 or 5, but before he died, he designated his successor. At this point Duke William may have received a nasty surprise: Edward did not choose William of Normandy, but instead, his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson.

Nobody really disputes the fact that King Edward named Harold as his heir on his deathbed. There were good arguments for the king to do so: Harold had the support of the king's close advisers, the witan or council; he was the most powerful man in England; he was clearly the best able to step in and be king on day one, so to speak. There was probably not a huge amount of support among the English nobles for bringing in a foreigner as king. So maybe Edward the Confessor went with Harold because he genuinely saw that this was the most practical alternative. Maybe Harold pressured him. We'll never know.

One interesting fact to note, though, is that nobody seems to have thought of making Edgar Ætheling king. Remember, he was the son of Edward the Exile, who had died shortly after arriving in England. But Edgar Ætheling was about 15 years old at the time, and apparently he was not a precocious leader. Now, Duke William at the same age was already out fighting and knocking his nobles' heads together, but Edgar Ætheling was not that sort of person. So he was just passed over; nobody bothered him. Harold didn't worry about keeping him in captivity or anything; he just ignored him.

But Harold couldn't ignore William of Normandy. Right away, after Harold took the throne, William began planning his countermove. Now, we don't know, of course, how long William had really had his eye on the English throne. We aren't sure how serious the overtures from King Edward the Confessor had been at various points, or how much William had been counting on them. But it was clear right from the start when Harold took the throne that William was going to try to get rid of him and become king in his place. And to do that, he was going to have to fight on two fronts: the military front (of course, and we're going to get to that in the next lecture). But there was a second front that Duke William did not neglect: That was the public relations front; William wanted to win the battle for public opinion.

Now, when I use the phrase “public opinion,” I am not talking about a mass public like we would have today. I’m really talking about a restricted audience: the major nobles in Europe (the people William would want to ally with, like the king of France or the count of Flanders), especially the pope. This was a period when papal approval could really help you. It would help morale a lot if you could be seen to be fighting on the side of the church, and the pope was the best person to give official approval to any enterprise—this would be seen very dramatically a few decades later when the pope called for the First Crusade, and literally thousands and thousands of people obeyed the call—so the pope’s approval was worth having.

In order to get the pope’s approval, Duke William sent a delegation to Rome, and he supplied them with talking points. There were two main themes the Norman delegation wanted to hit. First, the Normans argued that William was the rightful ruler of England and that Harold had broken his oath to support William’s claim to the throne.

Oath-breaking was a very serious matter in this society. A lot of times, making people swear oaths was the only means of trying to ensure that people did what they promised to do. Remember that this is a world with no police force and pretty rudimentary courts; everything depended on oaths and the fear that people had of damaging their reputations if they broke their oaths. Breaking an oath was very dangerous to the social fabric. Plus, an oath was a promise to God. That was something that the pope would take very seriously; he would want Harold Godwinson punished for breaking his oath.

The second theme the Normans stressed to the pope, and this was perhaps the most important thing from the pope’s perspective, was Duke William’s promise that if he became king of England, he would reform the English church. Now the English church needed a lot of reforming. The archbishop of Canterbury in 1066 was a man named Stigand. He had taken over as archbishop back in the early 1050s when the Godwinsons had driven the previous archbishop of Canterbury (a Norman, by the way) into exile. So Stigand was not really a fully official archbishop, but he was definitely pro-Godwinson. After all, he owed the Godwinsons his job. Stigand was not exactly the most rigorous church leader, and the pope may have seen a very

good opportunity to send Duke William into England to clean a little house in the English church.

William had, after all, taken reform in Normandy very seriously. He had been trying to get rid of corrupt clergy. He was bringing in a lot of very famous Italian churchmen to reform old monasteries in Normandy and to found new ones, as well. So William had some credibility with the pope. And the pope did finally approve of William's effort to conquer England. We are told that he gave William a papal banner to fight under, which was a pretty powerful symbol at that time.

So preparations for the Norman invasion are proceeding. William is gathering allies, he's lobbying the pope. But wait! King Harold has more than just Duke William to worry about. We don't have just Harold and William competing for the throne in 1066. Believe it or not, there's yet another claimant; there's another Harald who wants to be king of England.

Before we figure out who this second Harald is, I want to pause for a minute to talk again about the family dynamics of the Godwinson clan. You might remember from the last lecture that Harold Godwinson had a very talented younger brother named Tostig. Tostig had been earl of Northumbria until the Northumbrians rebelled and kicked him out. Tostig probably expected his big brother Harold to help him out, but Harold didn't. We don't know why. Maybe he thought the Northumbrians had a point about the way Tostig was ruling them; maybe he was quite happy to see his talented little brother shunted to the sidelines. We do know that their sister Edith, the queen, seems to have felt that Harold had treated Tostig pretty badly. And later on, Edith was not Harold's strongest ally.

Now, Tostig's wife was Judith of Flanders, a close relative of the count of Flanders, so when Tostig was driven out of Northumbria, he went and took refuge with his in-laws in Flanders. But he wasn't done with England yet—not by a long stretch. Tostig seems to have been totally infuriated when he heard that Harold, his brother, had taken the throne. Right away he started making plans to invade England. He went around seeking allies to support him. He even seems to have contacted Duke William of Normandy to explore joining up with him, but nothing came of that. In May of 1066, Tostig raided

the southern coast of England, but then his brother Harold called out the English army and drove him away.

Tostig was undaunted, though. He called on the most powerful ally he had managed to recruit: King Harald Hardrada of Norway. So this is our second Harald. We'll always use his nickname, Hardrada, so we can keep the two King Haralds straight. Hardrada means "stern counsel" or "hard ruler."

That's a good nickname for him, because Harald Hardrada was an amazing figure in his own right, probably the last of the great Viking leaders. He was 51 years old in 1066, and in this period, that makes him something of a grizzled veteran. He has a long career behind him already. He'd been driven out of Norway in 1030 in a power struggle, and he ended up leading his own band of warriors in eastern Europe, where he fought on behalf of Prince Yaroslav the Wise. Harald Hardrada then took his warriors south to Constantinople, where he served in the famous Varangian Guard of the Byzantine emperors. Next he made his way back to Russian territory, married the daughter of Prince Yaroslav, and finally ended up back in Norway, where he engineered his succession to the throne after the Norwegian king, Magnus. So this was a famous warrior with an impressive track record—a very good ally for poor exiled Tostig to recruit.

Plus, Harald Hardrada has just a hint of a claim to the English throne. It was very, very tenuous, but here's how it goes. Way back in the 1030s, when Harthacnut was king of Denmark and trying to become king of England, Harthacnut had made an agreement, as we saw in the last lecture, with King Magnus of Norway that since neither of them had any children, if either one died, they would inherit each other's kingdoms. Now, Harald Hardrada had succeeded to the throne of Norway after King Magnus, so he claimed that he had inherited this claim to the English throne if the English king died without heirs. This meant that when Edward the Confessor died without heirs, Harald Hardrada should automatically have become king of England.

It's pretty thin. Magnus himself hadn't in fact pressed this claim in 1042, when Edward the Confessor became king; Magnus had his hands full with other matters at the time. Harald Hardrada probably wouldn't have done anything about the claim to the English throne if Tostig hadn't shown up. But

Tostig did show up, needing an ally. So Harald Hardrada decided to embark on one last big Viking adventure—although of course, he didn’t know it was his last adventure at the time.

Meanwhile, starting from the late summer of 1066, King Harold Godwinson is waiting in England for William to attack. That’s the invasion he’s really worried about. He is poised in the south of England, waiting for word from Normandy, but the Normans don’t arrive. Finally, on September 8, he can’t keep his army together any longer, and he lets them go home. And that’s exactly when he finds out that Harald Hardrada and his own brother Tostig have landed at the other end of England, in Northumbria, and they’re marching towards York. And this invasion has a big initial success. On September 20, Harald Hardrada and Tostig go up against an English defending army led by two earls, Edwin and Morcar, at the small town of Fulford near York. Morcar was Tostig’s replacement as earl of Northumbria, so it must have been especially satisfying for Tostig to defeat him in battle. But both English earls survived.

Meanwhile, King Harold Godwinson knows he needs to counter this threat, so he reassembles the core of his army and races north. He catches up with the invaders at Stamford Bridge, just east of York. Now, Harald Hardrada and Tostig are feeling pretty confident after their victory. They’re in fact negotiating with the city of York for a surrender.

But on September 25, just five days after Fulford, Harold Godwinson appeared. He had pulled together his army and had marched over 200 miles in just a few days. He marched straight through the city of York and right up to the astonished invading army. There is a great story that was told about the battle. The progress of the invaders was supposedly held up at one point by one Norwegian warrior singlehandedly defending a narrow bridge. This warrior held off every English attacker, until finally, an English soldier took a small boat, maneuvered it under the bridge, and then stuck his spear up through the planks of the bridge, thus killing the warrior and paving the way for the English rout. There is also some suggestion that the Scandinavian forces were not at their best because they were still hung over from celebrating their victory at Fulford. Perhaps the most likely explanation for the English victory, though, is that the Scandinavian soldiers happened to be

divided into two groups when the English came upon them, and furthermore, they seem not to have been wearing their chainmail coats. (The lone soldier on the bridge was apparently one of the only ones who had his on.)

Whatever the truth of these stories may have been, the Battle of Stamford Bridge was a total victory for the English. Both Harald Hardrada and Tostig were killed, and the Scandinavian invasion was at an end. It was a huge achievement for King Harold Godwinson. But he was now at the wrong end of England to meet the Norman invasion that was about to arrive.

The Battle of Hastings

Lecture 4

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 since it was not part of their feudal obligation to help him try to conquer it.
- 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.



© Jupiterimages/Getty Images/Photos.com/Thinkstock

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 Reading

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?

The Battle of Hastings

Lecture 4—Transcript

Welcome back. We left off at the end of our last lecture with something of a cliffhanger. King Harold Godwinson had just defeated the combined forces of King Harald Hardrada of Norway and his own brother, Tostig Godwinson, at Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire. That put an end to the Scandinavian invasion of England, but another invading army was about to set out. King Harold of England had barely had time to celebrate his victory in the north when he got word of the arrival of the Norman fleet in the south. In this lecture, we're going to find out what happened when Harold raced south to meet the invaders.

But first, let's back up and talk a little more about how the Normans prepared for their invasion. I started to tell the story in the last lecture from one angle. I talked about Duke William's campaign to win over the pope and get him to support the Norman claim to the English throne. But now we need to look at the logistical preparations for the conquest, the actual military preparations. How exactly do you plan for an invasion? What do you need? Well, two things: men and ships.

Let's talk about the men first. It's important to point out that William actually had to persuade men to go along with him to England. He could not just make them go. It wasn't actually part of their feudal obligation to him as duke to try to conquer England. One of the Norman narrative sources says that some of William's men raised some pretty serious objections. They were worried that it would be hard to get together enough ships; they were afraid of the Channel crossing, which could be dangerous under the best of circumstances; and they thought the odds were against them, because of course the English would outnumber them overwhelmingly when they arrived.

These are all fair points, and it's easy to imagine that William's advisers would bring them up at the time. But, and this is a very important point, they obviously came around, because you just didn't get people to do this sort of

thing under compulsion, not in the 11th century. You could only get people to turn out for big offensive campaigns if they felt it was in their interest to do so. It's a sign of the strength of William's leadership that he managed to persuade so many people that if anyone could conquer England, he could.

So who went? Altogether, there were perhaps 7,000 or 8,000 men in the army, which for that time was a really large force. I mentioned way back in the first lecture that William's army was made up of men not just from Normandy but from neighboring areas as well. There were men from all over northern France, but the largest non-Norman contingent came from Brittany, which is just to the south and west of Normandy; it's another peninsula that juts out into the Atlantic. William had a long history of intervening in the politics of Brittany, which were very complicated, and he had actually fought a war in Brittany in 1064 and 1065. The duke of Brittany didn't have a very secure hold over his vassals, so lots of them decided to throw in their lot with William and try to gain lands in England. So there was a pretty large group of Bretons in William's army.

There were also quite a few soldiers from Flanders in William's army. Here I want to take a minute to explain the Flemish connection, because it allows me to introduce a fascinating character we haven't met before: William's wife, the duchess of Normandy, whose name was Matilda of Flanders; she was the key to why William was able to recruit a lot of Flemish soldiers for his invasion force.

Her father was a Flemish count, Matilda was also the granddaughter of a French king, and that means she was a very rich prize for William. In fact, he had been so determined to marry her that the marriage went ahead even though the Church opposed it; apparently William and Matilda were too closely related, and that was against the rules. Indeed, the couple had to promise to found a pair of monasteries to make up for their sin in getting married without official permission. They did found the monasteries in the Norman town of Caen, and they went on to have one of the most successful royal marriages in English history. Incidentally, Matilda was actually buried in one of those monasteries in Caen, and her epitaph is there and it mentions her royal descent, so it was clearly something that mattered a lot to her.

But in the context of the Norman Conquest, the thing that mattered most about Matilda was that she was rich. She could really help out, not just with persuading Flemish soldiers to join in on the invasion, but also with paying for the most expensive items William needed: ships.

Now, it's important to note that rulers in Western Europe in the 11th century usually didn't have a lot of ships at any one time. They couldn't afford to have a big navy all the time. They would assemble ships as they needed them. So the fleet that William gathered together was very much an ad hoc creation. And he didn't build all the ships from scratch himself. He asked a lot of his major vassals to contribute ships. We know this because of a really fascinating document that has survived called the ship list. It literally lists the ships that were assembled for the fleet and which vassals contributed them.

Some of these ships clearly existed already and were just acquired for the purpose of the invasion, but a lot had to be built from scratch. We actually see this on the Bayeux Tapestry the construction of ships getting ready for the invasion. There is a later tradition that Duchess Matilda contributed the largest, most impressive ship of all, a ship called the *Mora*, to be her husband's flagship. Certainly Matilda's very lavish gift to her husband would have been a good example to set for his vassals. It's very clear that William and Matilda made an excellent team.

Now I just want to say one more word about ships. The ships were not just meant for carrying men; they had to transport horses, too. Of those 7,000 or 8,000 men who were going on the expedition, about 1,000–2,000 of them were mounted soldiers. All those horses had to cross the Channel also. We see pictures of this on the Bayeux Tapestry.

So William had his men and he had his ships. By late July or early August of 1066, his invasion force was gathered together in the mouth of the Dives River waiting to cross the Channel. But the wind would not cooperate. It's actually harder to sail across the English Channel than it might seem. It was fairly 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.

The delay was so long, in fact, that some historians have speculated that it was deliberate. Maybe William was waiting for an opportune moment; perhaps he had spies in England briefing him about the state of King Harold's military forces. It would have been especially important for William to follow the progress of Harald Hardrada's invasion of the north, which also was no big secret. William might have been hoping to invade the south of England just when he knew his enemy was busy in the north. But it remains true that when William set out for England, he may not have known which Harold he would have to fight, Harold Godwinson or Harald Hardrada.

This is very interesting speculation, but if so, if it was a deliberate delay, we should be even more impressed by William's ability to plan the logistics of the invasion because of the fact that it was so difficult to keep a fleet assembled, waiting around, doing nothing. After all, if you've got eight thousand men sitting around, you have to feed them, and that was not an easy task in the 11th century. One historian has actually estimated the number of cartloads of grain that would be needed to feed all those men and horses, and also the number of carts required to get rid of all the manure the horses would produce. It's a staggering number; it would be many thousands of cartloads. But apparently the troops never got out of hand. That's a definite testimony to William's leadership and to the very high morale among the troops. They trusted that their leader was going to take them to victory and make them rich.

In mid-September, the fleet moved to Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme, which is actually not in Normandy itself, but in Picardy, just to the north of Normandy. One report says that the fleet had actually set out from the Dives River, but that it was driven into the mouth of the Somme by storms. On the other hand, this move may have been deliberate; William may have wanted to move the fleet to a place where crossing to England would be shorter, a place where the English Channel is narrower than the original assembly point of the fleet. Finally, on about the night of September 27, the fleet set sail.

The story of the crossing is very dramatic, though again, it may have been improved upon after the fact to highlight William's achievement. The fleet was sailing under cover of darkness, but the duke wanted to make sure the ships didn't actually try to land on an unknown shore before daybreak, so

he told his captains to anchor off the coast and watch for a lantern that he would display on his flagship, the *Mora*; when they saw the lantern, they should proceed.

However, the ships became separated during the crossing when fog rolled in, and William's shipmates were panicking, because it seemed as if they were all alone on the sea. However, the duke convinced them that everything was OK; he very ostentatiously ate a meal, and then one by one, as the dawn broke, the masts of all of the other ships in the huge invasion fleet came into view, until all the masts together looked like a forest of trees on the water. And they knew it was going to be OK.

So now William and his fleet finally arrive off the coast of England. They land in Pevensey, in Sussex. There was a good natural harbor there, and the fleet met with no resistance. Pevensey was the site of an old Roman fort, and William's men took advantage of the location and strengthened the fortifications. Then William marched inland a few miles to Hastings, where he and his men built a castle on a cliff. He then pretty much dug in and waited for reinforcements to arrive from Normandy.

Of course, his men were not idle during this time. They were out searching for supplies; in other words, they were pillaging. This was a standard tactic in medieval warfare. It killed two birds with one stone: It fed your own soldiers, and it also denied food to your enemy. In this case, it may have done something more: It may have provoked William's enemy into battle.

Here we come to one of the main puzzles of the Norman invasion. When William landed in the south, word traveled very fast up to King Harold, in Yorkshire, who had of course just won his great victory at Stamford Bridge. Harold must have thought, "Oh, no, not again." But he saddled up and raced south to meet invasion number two. And military strategists have been second-guessing that decision ever since.

To understand why, we need to keep in mind an essential fact about medieval warfare: It was not about battles—at least, not most of the time. Battles were risky things; you could lose a battle. Medieval military leaders did not have very tight control of their troops; almost anything could and did happen in a

battle, including the very real possibility that your men would turn and run away. So most military leaders preferred to avoid battles whenever possible. In fact, William the Conqueror fought very few battles in his career. Most warfare consisted of two main elements: sieges and harrying.

A siege is pretty straightforward: That's when you settled down to try to starve out your enemy in a castle or town or some other fortified location. But most people today don't really grasp the importance of harrying. It could be a very deliberate, very destructive affair. It was designed both to provide food for your own army and deny it to your enemy, as I've said. But it also literally aimed to destroy your enemy's productive capacity way out into the future. That meant that pillagers would not just steal crops but burn any crops that they couldn't carry away; they would kill livestock; they would set fire to houses and other buildings; they would destroy farm implements. It could be literally a scorched earth policy, and that is apparently what William's troops were doing in the area around Hastings in early October of 1066.

The reason this matters is that the lands around Hastings were King Harold's own lands; they belonged to his earldom of Wessex. He still held Wessex even though he was now also king of England, so William was hitting Harold where he lived. He was destroying Harold's own territory, and thus, he was making a very public demonstration of Harold's shortcomings as king. Not only was Harold failing to defend the kingdom, he couldn't even defend his own personal estates. I think it was a pretty bold and brilliant propaganda move.

And that may be why King Harold hurried south to meet William. It would probably have been smarter in a strict strategic sense not to do so. Harold could have merely waited for William to exhaust the supplies that he could pillage around Hastings. William's men might have gotten bored or otherwise disenchanted and gone home. But that policy, that wait-and-see policy, would have taken nerves of steel on Harold's part. It's pretty hard to watch another man burn your lands.

Another factor in Harold's decision simply may have been overconfidence. He had, after all, just beaten the greatest living Viking in battle at Stamford Bridge. He had raced north and taken Harald Hardrada by surprise. Why not

race south and take William by surprise? But if that was the idea, it didn't work, because William was warned that Harold was coming. We've seen that perhaps the Norwegian soldiers at Stamford Bridge were hung over when Harold attacked them, but the Norman soldiers in the south certainly weren't; they were ready.

But Harold chose to fight. One of the controversial aspects of Harold's decision to fight a battle against William is the fact that the English army was almost certainly not at full strength. They were undoubtedly tired, first of all; they had marched across country and back in only a few weeks. But they may have been seriously reduced in number as well. Much of the army had dispersed, and Harold had to recall the troops to their duty, but a lot of them had not rejoined the army by the time the Battle of Hastings was fought. Some historians have faulted Harold for going ahead, but others have said that he had to stop the bleeding, so to speak, and deal with the threat from William right away.

I don't intend to settle this controversy one way or the other. It's easy to be a Monday morning quarterback. But it's time now, at last, for the battle to begin.

Harold had gathered his forces at London, but then he marched south to a meeting point about eight miles north of the town of Hastings. This was clearly intended as a sort of rallying point for the men from Harold's lands throughout the southeast. Harold may have assumed that he would have time to gather more reinforcements before he had to go actually into battle with William. He didn't have any archers or cavalry with him yet, and maybe he wanted to wait for them to arrive. On the other hand, Harold may have hoped that he could surprise William the way he had surprised Harald Hardrada. But in the event, William moved first.

It was early on a Saturday morning on October 14. William moved his men north from Hastings to Harold's position, which was actually quite a favorable one. Harold was protected by woods on his flanks, and in front of him there was a stream and some marshy ground. It was a good defensive position. Harold's forces were also at the top of a ridge, where they could form the classic shield wall. It's literally a wall made of the shields of the

soldiers interlocked with each other in a long line. In circumstances like these, when you are up on a hill with difficult terrain in front of you, all you really need to do is hold that shield wall firm and you should be fine. In fact, I bet no one would have faulted William for refusing battle under those circumstances.

But William probably knew that time was not on his side. The English army was only going to get bigger from now on. The more he ravaged their lands, the angrier they would get, and the more time there would be for soldiers from farther away in England to arrive. It was also going to get harder and harder to feed 8,000 men and 2,000 horses. It was William who needed a battle.

The duke deployed his soldiers in a very traditional manner. He divided his forces into three contingents: He commanded the center contingent comprised of his own Norman followers; on the left flank he put the soldiers from Brittany under their leader, Count Alan; on the right flank there was a more miscellaneous group of soldiers from neighboring parts of France. Each of these three contingents was organized in the same way: In the front were the archers; next there were the foot-soldiers with their spears and shields; finally, in the rear, there were the cavalry.

Now, it's important to note that the cavalry were not going to lead the charge. It wasn't a good use of cavalry to send them right at a strong shield wall. Horses didn't like to charge right at a bunch of men with spears and axes. The idea was to try to weaken the shield wall first and then let the cavalry come in and finish it off.

But the battle did not go exactly according to plan. First of all, the archers were not very effective. Remember that the English army was up on the top of a hill. It's not easy to shoot uphill and have the arrows land exactly where you want them. Apparently, the arrows were missing their targets; they either went right over the soldiers and landed behind them, or they stuck in the soldiers' shields. It has to have been pretty alarming to have one of these arrows go thudding into your shield, but the English soldiers nevertheless held firm. That's what shields were for.

So the Normans went to their second option, the footsoldiers. They were going to have to charge uphill, don't forget, and then confront the English shield wall. But they did it, or at least they tried. But they were beaten back by a hail of missiles of all sorts. One source says there were all sorts of things being thrown at the Normans: spears, axes, stones tied to sticks. One thing, of course, they don't have is arrows because there are no archers at the battle; at least, they're not mentioned. This is probably, as I've said, because there hadn't been time for the English archers to assemble. If so, it was a serious disadvantage for the English.

However, for the moment the things they were throwing were having the desired effect, and the Norman soldiers had to withdraw. It was time to send in the cavalry. But they didn't have any better luck than the archers or the footsoldiers. The horses were pretty spooked by the huge axes that some of the English soldiers were carrying. These are two-handed battle-axes, and they can cut the head right off a horse with one blow. This was not encouraging, and apparently, the Norman cavalry began a retreat that threatened to turn into a rout; remember, that's one of the risks that military leaders wanted to avoid by avoiding battle altogether. The Norman sources say that the soldiers from Brittany were the ones who were the fastest to retreat; unfortunately, we don't have the Breton side of the story.

To make matters worse, the word seems to have gone out among the Norman soldiers that William had been killed, which was of course another outcome that military leaders wanted to avoid—not just for obvious reasons, but because the death of the commander quite often caused his forces to disintegrate.

So this was looking like just another unsuccessful assault, just another confirmation that the shield wall was still the best defensive tactic around. But here is where William's brilliance as a general seems to have turned the tide. When he realized that his troops feared he had been killed, he took a calculated risk. He removed his helmet and rode back and forth along the lines of troops, showing his face and shouting that he was not going to be defeated. This helped to stem the rout.

Then the Normans got some help from the English. The English should have just stayed put in their shield wall, but some of them actually pursued the retreating soldiers. It's not clear whether they were ordered to do so or whether they were simply tempted by the sight of the retreat; they may have thought they would have easy pickings. But once the English soldiers had come down off the high ground, their tactical advantage was lost, and they quickly became disordered. Then the Norman cavalry were able to swing around and pick them off.

Now, William may have seen this and decided, if it worked by accident, let's do it on purpose. And so he got his soldiers to execute a feigned retreat; that is, he got them to reenact the real retreat that had just worked out so well for them a couple more times. Each time the Normans retreated, a few more English soldiers would be tempted to follow them, and each time, more English soldiers would be cut down in their turn. Now, William did not invent the feigned retreat; it was an established cavalry tactic. But it wasn't necessarily an easy one to pull off, and it's definitely a testimony to William's skill in the field that he was able to execute this maneuver not once but several times. Of course, it doesn't say very much for the English soldiers and their leadership that they fell for the tactic more than once.

But the question of English leadership brings me to one of the most controversial parts of the Battle of Hastings. We know the Normans won, and we know that King Harold Godwinson was killed in the battle. But we don't know how he was killed exactly, and we also don't know when. And the question of when he was killed could make a big difference in evaluating his leadership in the battle. If he was killed quite early on, then most of the battle happened without his leadership and can't really be blamed on him. If he survived until late in the proceedings, then we really do have to say that William outgeneraled him. Only one source says that Harold died early in the battle; the rest suggest that he survived until quite close to the end, and the battle took almost the whole day. So probably, Harold is on the hook for the defeat.

Now how did Harold die? This is another point historians can't be sure of because the sources disagree, and they do so in a very interesting way. The Bayeux Tapestry seems to show Harold being pierced in the eye with an

arrow. By the early 12th century, the story was that he was struck in the eye by an arrow, and that was clearly widespread. In fact, a new wrinkle had been added: It was said that William had told his archers to aim high so that they would reach their targets up on the hill; this was clearly to correct for the earlier situation where the arrows were simply hitting the English shields. Maybe this was just embellishment added after the fact to make it look as if this was William's brilliant idea when in fact, it was just a lucky accident.

But here is the odd part of the story: Experts looking at the Bayeux Tapestry now aren't sure that the figure people have traditionally identified as Harold really is him, and if so, if he is really clutching at an arrow in the eye. The figure may have originally been simply holding a spear, but part of the shaft has been damaged over time, and now it looks like an arrow instead. If that is the case, where did the arrow story come from that people were telling in the early 12th century? We don't know for sure. It's one of the mysteries about the Battle of Hastings that we will probably never solve. But the fact that it is 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. This is just what happened in war.

And probably around the same time Harold was killed, the English shield wall finally broke. All of those feigned retreats had weakened the shield wall until it finally couldn't withstand the Norman assaults any longer. Many English noblemen were killed, including several of King Harold's brothers. These were brothers who had stayed loyal to him—not like Tostig, the one who fought against him at Stamford Bridge.

There is a postscript to the battle that is rather sad, and it concerns the fate of Harold's body, which is also a bit uncertain. Apparently, his face was unrecognizable, so the body had to be identified by markings either on his body or on his armor. A much later story says that his common-law wife, Edith the Fair, finally identified the body. One report says that Harold's mother Gytha offered William her son's weight in gold so that she would be allowed to bury the body, but William refused and had the body buried in a cliff overlooking the harbor. Another report says that once the body had been identified, it was buried at Waltham Abbey, a monastery that Harold

had founded. Now, this report comes from Waltham Abbey itself more than a hundred years later, so perhaps we should treat it with a little bit of skepticism; they very much wanted to be able to claim that they had the body. We're never going to know for sure where King Harold found his last resting place.

So why did William win the Battle of Hastings? There was certainly a lot of good luck involved. His men could have panicked when they thought he was dead; he could have been killed when he took his desperate gamble of showing his face to rally his men. But there was some very good generalship at work as well. That long apprenticeship in Normandy had paid off.

But now it was time for William to make good his conquest. He had won a battle. Would he win the war? We'll find out in the next lecture.

Completing the Conquest

Lecture 5

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 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 William's 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, Huntingdon, and 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.



© iStockphoto/Thinkstock

The Pennine Mountains of northern England proved no barrier to William's army, even in wintertime.

- 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 Reading

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?

Completing the Conquest

Lecture 5—Transcript

Welcome back. In our last lecture, we saw William win the Battle of Hastings, during which the English king, Harold Godwinson, was killed. But that was just one battle. William wasn't king yet. In this lecture we're going to look at how he completed the conquest of England. We'll see how he used a combination of diplomacy and clever military tactics to take control of London without a battle. We'll also see how he won over the church so that he could get himself crowned king, and then how he spent the early years of his reign responding to rebellions. Not until the 1070s can we really say that William's hold on England was secure.

But William demonstrated the same kind of patient resolve that he had shown when he was trying to deal with rebellious nobles in Normandy. He did not give up. He met each threat to his rule as it arose, and he was ruthless if he had to be. He earned his nickname William the Conqueror just as much by what he accomplished after the Battle of Hastings as he did on that one fateful day.

Let's pick up the story on the day after the battle. William has won. What does he do now? His first priority is to get himself crowned king. In medieval society, there was an automatic respect for kings that came from the association between kingship and divine authority. Kings have a special authority that mere nobles don't, even very powerful nobles like the duke of Normandy. So he wanted to be crowned.

That meant two things. He needed to get to London, and he needed to get the approval of the church. London had become the traditional place for English coronations. That's where Edward the Confessor had been crowned. Since William is claiming that he is the rightful heir to Edward, it's a very good idea to follow Edward's precedent to the letter. Of course, Harold Godwinson had done the same thing for the same reason; he had been crowned in London. William was certainly aiming to be crowned in Westminster Abbey, the great

church that King Edward had only just managed to dedicate right before he died. So London was the target.

But William did not march directly to London; he wanted to be sure of his position before he got there. He wanted to build a solid foundation for his rule. What we can see is William covering all the bases, thinking ahead to the possible political and logistical ramifications of his victory. So first he took a pause to let his men recover from the battle. Then he actually marched east from Hastings, towards Dover. William seized control of Dover (Dover was the main port that had access across the English Channel), and he built a castle that still stands. In fact, Dover Castle had a royal garrison stationed in it until the 1960s. Control of Dover was going to help with supplies and communications.

Let me pause here for a minute to say something about castle building. It was a huge part of William's strategy, but it took place usually in two phases. Castles could be very hastily thrown together just by building a wooden tower on a hill, and then putting earthworks all around it—that was the beginning. Then you could come back later and rebuild in stone, as you had time. So William's castles at this point are improvised very hastily, with the view of completing the construction in stone later on. Nevertheless, even these very rudimentary castles could make a site quite formidable.

After William builds the castle at Dover, he then goes to Canterbury, which is the main religious center, of course—the seat of the archbishop of Canterbury. We need to remember here that the archbishop of Canterbury at this point is a man called Stigand; he is a strong supporter of Harold Godwinson, but he's holding office under somewhat questionable circumstances. Stigand wasn't there in Canterbury at the time; that was probably smart of him. William thus secures Canterbury, so there wasn't going to be a lot of resistance out of Stigand, because Stigand doesn't have access to his own resources.

William then attempts to march on London for the first time. He goes up the Thames Valley as far as the southern suburbs of the city, but there he did meet with resistance. You may remember back in Lecture 3 when we talked about the Scandinavian invasion of the north of England, I mentioned the Battle of Fulford Gate; this was the victory that Harald Hardrada and Tostig

won when they first arrived in England. It was news of this battle that had caused Harold Godwinson to race up north to meet the threat. The Battle of Fulford Gate had been a huge defeat for the English, but the two leaders of the English army were able to escape; they were two earls who were brothers: Edwin, earl of Mercia, and Morcar, earl of Northumbria. Well, at this point, in October of 1066, Edwin and Morcar are in London; they hadn't been at the Battle of Hastings. Now they're in London, and they are rallying what is left of the English resistance.

The two earls were now supporting the claim to the throne of Edgar *Ætheling*. Now, we have to remember, he is the grandson of Edmund Ironside; he is the legitimate heir to the Wessex dynasty. But clearly, he was not a very prepossessing figure. Nobody had really considered making him king back in January of 1066 when Edward the Confessor had died, despite the fact that he had this excellent genealogical claim to the throne. He was only a teenager, and he doesn't seem to have been the most charismatic figure in the world. But now Edgar *Ætheling* is all the English have got. So the earls, Edwin and Morcar declare for Edgar, and apparently, Edgar is happy to go along. The English leaders also have Archbishop Ealdred of York on their side. He's in London also. Clearly, the English are not prepared to just give in to William.

So William is facing resistance outside of London. At this point he does something rather brilliant: He goes away. He contents himself with burning the southern suburbs, and then he marches west in search of easier targets. William is probably thinking all along of how he can put pressure on the English leaders who still survive. So he marches west to the town of Winchester, and by the end of October, he has Winchester under his control.

Now why this town in particular? Winchester was the financial capital of England; it was the traditional site of the Anglo-Saxon treasury. So by seizing Winchester, William now has a stranglehold on royal finances. And Winchester—just like Dover—is ideally placed along the south coast for receiving reinforcements from Normandy. Of course, the number of Normans who want to join William in England is going way up now; he has just won the Battle of Hastings. Nothing succeeds like success.

Then William's next move is to turn north. He's basically making a big circle around London so that he can approach from the north. But along the way, he stops off at the town of Wallingford; Wallingford is where Archbishop Stigand had taken refuge. William shows up there with his army, and Stigand, rather smartly, decides it's a good idea to surrender. This surrender was crucial. Stigand was a very questionable archbishop of Canterbury—it's true—but he was still the leader of the English church, and when he bowed to the inevitable and accepted William's victory, he was bound to carry most of the English church along with him. William then built a castle to secure the town. This is what he's doing wherever he goes.

We can be sure that William did everything he could to spread the word about these various successes, because the real audience for this news is back in London. After he left Wallingford, he marched east again—still to the north of London—and his army went about rather systematically harrying the lands around Bedford and Hertford. This process took up much of the month of November in 1066. Here, the purpose here is twofold: first, to make the English think twice about continuing to resist, and second, on a very practical level, to cut off the main supply routes to London from the north.

The strategy worked. The heart seems to have gone out of the English leaders holed up in London. One by one they contacted William and arranged to submit to his authority. This was true for the earls, Edwin and Morcar, and even for Edgar *Ætheling* himself. These English leaders agreed to a kind of honorable captivity, where they wouldn't be imprisoned, but they would have to stay with William's court where he could keep an eye on them. And there was another very important person who surrendered to William: Archbishop Ealdred of York.

York was the seat of the other archbishopric in England besides Canterbury. There was always a bit of rivalry between Canterbury and York, and one of the things that Canterbury liked to do to score points against York was to make a big deal out of the traditional right of the archbishop of Canterbury to crown the king. But William didn't want to be crowned by Stigand because his status as archbishop was questionable. The pope was hoping, clearly, that William could do something about Stigand, get rid of him somehow—

that was one of the reasons why the pope was backing William's invasion. William doesn't want there to be any doubt about whether his coronation is valid, so William wants to find someone else to crown him. And here comes Archbishop Ealdred of York. He's not the archbishop of Canterbury, but he is an archbishop. So when Ealdred surrenders to William's authority, the ingredients for a coronation are really starting to come together.

William had been patient, and it paid off. He had waited out his opponents. He had taken the time to consolidate his hold on the southern ports to protect his supply lines from Normandy. He had demonstrated his resolve by harrying the lands around London. And then he did something that he had learned to do in Normandy: He brought his enemies into the fold. He convinced them that there was something in it for them if they surrendered.

And that's how he found himself, just two months after the Battle of Hastings, on Christmas Day, 1066, getting crowned king by Archbishop Ealdred of York. The archbishop probably had very mixed feelings that day. He may not have been thrilled to be crowning this Norman conqueror king of England, but he was probably pretty delighted, at the same time, that he was presiding at a royal coronation instead of Archbishop Stigand.

But the coronation did not go off without a hitch. There was a moment in the coronation service when the congregation was supposed to acclaim the new king—mind you, they're using the traditional English coronation service. Now, while the coronation was going on inside Westminster Abbey, William's guards were stationed outside the abbey to prevent any trouble. When the people inside shouted out their acceptance of William as king—this is a traditional part of the service—the guards didn't understand what they were saying, because, of course, they were saying it in English. The guards outside apparently thought that the shouts were a sign of a rebellion breaking out, so they set fire to some of the wooden houses surrounding the abbey, perhaps to try to create a kind of firewall of protection around the abbey. It took some time to restore order. This episode is pretty clearly symbolic of some of the misunderstandings that were going to make the early years of William's rule in England very turbulent ones indeed.

But for now, William's in good shape. He has been crowned king; he has the powers that be in England at least officially on his side. Even Queen Edith is on his side—this is the widow of Edward the Confessor, and, let's not forget, the sister of the man William had just defeated at the Battle of Hastings. Queen Edith makes a deal with William. Incidentally, it seems to have been a very good deal indeed. She kept her estates, and she lives quietly but comfortably until her death in 1075. Edith was a very good politician who knew her own self-interest; this was another person that William manages to conciliate.

For the moment, William felt secure in England, and so, in March of 1067, William went home to Normandy. This might at first seem amazing. But remember, he had possession of all the major leaders of a potential English resistance: He had the earls, Edwin and Morcar; he had Edgar Ætheling; he had Archbishop Stigand. But William also needed to go home to check on things in Normandy and to allow some of his men to do the same thing; many of them had estates in Normandy that they needed to go back and take care of. William left some of his forces in England under the leadership of his most trusted lieutenants, and he took the English leaders who had surrendered to him back to Normandy with him.

As I said, these English leaders weren't kept in close confinement or anything, but they did have to deal with being put on display at William's parties. William would invite people to come and see the English and their unusual dress and appearance. One of the things that clearly distinguished the English from the Normans at this point was the fact that the Normans were close-shaven and the English wore beards. You can see this on the Bayeux Tapestry; that's how you tell the people apart, who were the Normans and who were the English. So William's friends would come to stare at the English with their extravagant facial hair. It can't have been all that much fun for William's involuntary guests.

But the peace in England didn't last for long. William had imposed a large geld, or tax, before he left England, and by late in 1067, a serious revolt against the tax had broken out in Exeter in the southwest. The situation was even more dangerous than it might have been otherwise due to the fact that Harold Godwinson's mother, Gytha, was holed up in Exeter; she was clearly

intending to rally any remaining supporters of the Godwinson cause. William responded quickly. He crossed to England from Normandy in December of 1067—that’s normally not a good time to sail across the English Channel—and he laid siege to Exeter.

After 18 days, the town negotiated a surrender, and William built a castle to secure the town—we’ve seen this pattern before. One of the ways William succeeded in conquering England was by building a network of castles wherever he needed to hold territory. We’ll come back to castle building in the next lecture, but for now, it’s just important to note that William is thinking all the time about how to hold what he conquers; he’s not going to let all his work go for nothing.

After the siege of Exeter, William apparently thought the worst was over, since he felt secure enough to bring over his wife Matilda to be crowned queen of England. William and Matilda were very close. They seem to have gotten along extremely well. 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—so it was important to William that she be acknowledged as queen. It was also a very good sign of his secure grasp on the English throne that he could have his wife crowned queen.

Matilda’s coronation took place in May of 1068, and William brought over the captive earls, Edwin and Morcar, so that they could be present at the coronation to give a little official English gloss to the occasion. But this apparent state of harmony between William and the earls was not going to last.

We now enter into the most dangerous time of William’s rule as king. He had now been king for almost two years, and so far, he had mostly made his authority felt in the south of England. It was time for him to extend his reach into the north, which was always much harder to do. The kings of Wessex had had a hard time with this in the 10th century when they were expanding their rule out of the southwest over the rest of England. Harold Godwinson’s brother Tostig had had the same problem, with enormous consequences, as we have seen. William was about to find out for himself why the north was always so troublesome.

In the summer of 1068, the English lords in Northumbria rebelled. The king responded by using the tactics that had proved effective for him so far. He marched north into Mercia and built a castle at Warwick. He then continued north to Nottingham and built a castle there. The center of northern resistance was at York, but when the leaders saw what William was up to in Warwick and Nottingham, they decided to negotiate. Notice, William is very good at putting pressure on his opponents without actually bringing them to battle. William was then able to march into York, build the inevitable castle, and then he turned south, building castles as he goes along—at Lincoln, at Huntingdon, at Cambridge. By the end of 1068, the king feels secure enough to go back to Normandy again. His methods seem to be working.

But William had reckoned without the fierce resolve of the northerners. The king had appointed a new Norman lord to be earl of Bamburgh, which is in the far north of England. But this new Norman lord, Robert de Commines, apparently allowed his followers to ravage the lands of the earldom unchecked. In January of 1069, Earl Robert was staying in Durham, in the house of the bishop of Durham. A group of northern rebels forced their way into the city and began killing all the Normans they could find. Remember, they could tell them apart by whether or not they have beards. Then they surrounded the house where Earl Robert was staying, and when he wouldn't surrender, they burned the house down with Earl Robert inside.

At this point, of course, there's no going back—they have burned their bridges. The rebellion only grew. It's not clear how much was planned in advance, but after the killing of Earl Robert, people began to flock to the rebels, and the rebels even had an alternative claimant to the throne. They gathered at York and chose Edgar Ætheling as king.

Why, one might ask, is Edgar Ætheling available to be elected king? Wasn't he a prisoner at William's court? Well, no. At some point after Queen Matilda's coronation, the high-ranking English figures who have been kept at William's court, people like the earls Edwin and Morcar, had begun slipping away. Edgar Ætheling had fled to Scotland. Apparently, he just didn't seem dangerous enough for William to keep a really close eye on him. But now the king had reason to regret his leniency, because the rebels had a genuine member of the Wessex dynasty to rally around. It's pretty clear that Edgar

was meant to be mostly a figurehead, but his symbolic value was huge, so William had to take the threat seriously.

And he did. He hurried back to England from Normandy and raced north. The rebels had taken control of York and were besieging the Norman garrison inside the castle. William 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. Edgar Ætheling had gone back to Scotland. At this point, the king of Scotland, Malcolm Canmore, married Edgar's sister, Margaret. This meant that the king of Scotland had a big stake in seeing Edgar Ætheling become king of England, because that would make him the king of England's brother-in-law. None of this made King William happy.

And the revolt in England wasn't over, either. New rebels joined the cause. And then the Danes arrived. That's right, we're not quite finished with the Scandinavians. The Danish king, Sweyn Estrithson, had sent a fleet to help the rebels. King Sweyn was actually the cousin of King Harthacnut of England, who had died way back in 1042, so King Sweyn claimed some sort of right to the English throne himself. But the English rebels have elected Edgar Ætheling, so it's not clear exactly what Sweyn Estrithson was trying to do in helping the rebels. In any case, he wasn't risking his own safety. The fleet was led not by him personally, but by his brother and his son.

Now, a Danish fleet on the loose is a serious thing—these are Vikings, remember. King William was way in the south, hunting in the Forest of Dean, when he got news that the Danes had arrived. Before he could act, the Danes had met up with the English rebels and stormed York. This time, the rebels captured both Norman castles (remember, there are two by this point), and they massacred the garrisons.

William wasn't able to move north right away. First he had to mop up some other rebels along the way, but when he appeared at York, resistance collapsed. There was just something about William; people did not want to go up against him. Edgar Ætheling fled back to Scotland, to the court of King Malcolm. That did still leave the Danes to deal with; they had withdrawn into the estuary of the Humber River, but William didn't have any ships to attack the Danes, so then he did something that doesn't seem that impressive

in a conqueror, but it actually shows how clever he was: He paid the Danes to go away. Sometimes being a good leader means knowing when you can deal with a problem simply by throwing money at it.

But William was going to treat his English enemies very differently. Here we come to the most infamous episode of William's reign. He got a lot of criticism for it at the time, but even so, he was acting well within the bounds of normal practice in medieval warfare. We have seen that war was more about pillaging your opponents than it was about winning big battles, so William punished the rebels by deliberately destroying the productive capacity of the counties of Yorkshire and Durham.

This episode is known as the “harrying of the north.” It involved burning crops, slaughtering livestock, destroying farm buildings—anything that would make it clear that he was a force to be reckoned with. Huge swaths of territory became quite literally scorched earth. William meant to teach the north a lesson, and that lesson could still be read in the landscape almost two decades later. At that point, a great survey was taken of English lands known as Domesday Book. Domesday Book records the yearly income of English estates both in 1066 and in 1086, when the survey was taken. In many places in the north, the value of estates had dropped dramatically between 1066 and 1086; this was because of the effects of the harrying of the north.

By January of 1070, William has restored order again in York, and he has re-garrisoned both the castles. But there are still rebels out there in Cheshire, in the west of England, near the Welsh border. So William displayed his customary energy. He undertook an impossible march in the winter weather, across the Pennine Mountains. A later chronicler tells us that the non-Norman troops almost mutinied during this campaign. They said they “could not obey a lord … who commanded them to do the impossible.” Apparently, the Norman troops were tougher; they took the harsh conditions in stride. The result of this harrowing march was that William showed up in rebel territory completely unexpectedly—they had no idea he could get there—and won the campaign again, without needing to fight at all. William's energy and determination have paid off. Then he did the same job of harrying in the area around Cheshire that he had done in the north.

William set the seal on this successful campaign by having himself re-crowned by a papal legate at Easter, just to emphasize his right to the throne, and he also finally got rid of Stigand, that questionable archbishop of Canterbury. He was able at last to make good on his promise to clean house in the English church.

But he was still not secure on his throne. There was going to be one more big push by the rebels in the summer of 1070. I think it's a sign of the strength of the English resistance that the rebels didn't give up, even in the face of William's relentless punishment. Some English leaders took refuge in the fenlands of eastern England, in the area around the monastery of Ely. At the same time, King Sweyn of Denmark finally appeared in person, and the rumor was that this time he was coming to claim the crown for himself. Sweyn was definitely the most serious rival William had faced so far. He was a crowned king in his own right, and he had a Viking fleet. But William once again paid off the Danes. In June of 1070, the Danish fleet sailed for home.

That still left an English rebel force in the fenlands, including the earls, Edwin and Morcar, but the real leader of the rebels seems to have been a shadowy figure known as Hereward the Wake. You may remember I mentioned in the first lecture that there was a best-selling book in the 19th century about Hereward the Wake. He seems to have been a minor English nobleman from Lincolnshire, and he had lost his lands after the Norman Conquest. The story of Hereward as it developed is full of elements that are clearly legendary. But one thing we do know is that Hereward took refuge in Ely, and King William came up to besiege him.

The siege lasted into the following year. King William had to build a causeway to try to get at the rebels because of the marshy terrain. This is period during the siege when some of the legends about Hereward are set. Supposedly he went into the king's camp disguised as a simple potter so that he could gather information about the king's plans. One interesting thing to note about the disguise is that he shaved off his beard; clearly, if he had a beard, he might be recognized as an English nobleman. The disguise apparently worked until some of the king's servants began taunting Hereward, and of course he took the bait; he reacted as a full-blooded hero would and fought back, and then he just barely escaped with his life.

It's a great story, but the reality is a lot murkier because ultimately, Hereward seems to have surrendered, and some evidence suggests that he got a royal pardon and lived the rest of his days in quiet obscurity. Again, perhaps we see King William's special combination of ruthlessness and prudence here. William was steadfast enough to persevere in the siege at Ely, which was a long grind, but he was flexible enough to pardon a rebel when it made sense to do so.

Hereward's revolt was the last major revolt led by English rebels. Both Edwin and Morcar met their ends shortly thereafter in obscure circumstances, without causing further trouble to the king. In 1072, William made an agreement with the Scottish king, Malcolm Canmore, to acknowledge William's overlordship over Scotland. Exactly what that meant wasn't clear, and it caused trouble between England and Scotland for many years, but one very concrete part of the deal was that Malcolm had to expel Edgar Ætheling from his court. That was probably pretty tough to swallow for Malcolm's wife Margaret, who was of course Edgar's sister. But that effectively neutralized the threat from Edgar Ætheling. Incidentally, 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, the not-quite king of England. It's quite a life story.

But let's return to King William. It had been six years since the Battle of Hastings. William had been through numerous sieges and harryings, but he had also spent a lot of time persuading his enemies to submit to his authority. He had used all the means at his disposal to consolidate his hold on England, and he had succeeded. In our final lecture, we'll look at the consequences of that success.

The Aftermath of the Conquest

Lecture 6

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 led 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. Domesday Book shows a dramatic drop in the number of dwellings



© iStockphoto/Thinkstock

William truly became an English king, stressing continuity with Edward and justice for his English subjects.

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 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.
- 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.



© Stockphoto/Thinkstock

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

- 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 Reading

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?

The Aftermath of the Conquest

Lecture 6—Transcript

Welcome back. So far in this course, we have focused mostly on the military aspects of the Norman Conquest, on how William actually accomplished the conquest on the ground. That was one of the questions I set out to answer in this course. In this last lecture, I want to look a little bit at the long term consequences of the conquest, so that we can return to the question I raised at the beginning: Why does the Norman Conquest matter? But before we assess those long-term cultural consequences, I want to talk for a few minutes about what it was like for the generations immediately after the conquest. Were the Normans and the English antagonistic towards each other? Or did they get along?

Well, there are certainly signs of ethnic tension after the conquest. Both the English and the Normans were proud peoples with a long history behind them by 1066. After the conquest, many English monasteries had Norman abbots imposed upon them, often against the will of the monks. This actually led to bloodshed in at least one case, at Glastonbury in 1083. A new abbot tried to bring in customs from Normandy that the English monks did not agree with, and people came to blows. There is also evidence that 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.

But the remarkable thing about this ethnic tension is how short a time it lasted. One reason for this may have been the fact that the Normans didn't do very much on an institutional level to perpetuate it. They were far more interested in continuity than they were in innovation.

For example, the Normans didn't change the law to favor themselves except in a few instances. There is one notorious legal change, and it's one that isn't understood very well. This is the so-called murdrum fine. The word "murdrum" is related to the word "murder," and it is indeed a penalty for murder, specifically for secret murder—when you find a dead body and nobody knows what happened (or at least, nobody admits to knowing).

The murdrum fine was a penalty imposed on the surrounding community if someone was found dead, clearly due to foul play, and there was no explanation. The idea clearly was to put financial pressure on the perpetrator to confess his crime for the good of the rest of the community. Or maybe somebody who really did know what happened would rat out the culprit.

This provision actually dated back to the Danish conquest of England during King Cnut's reign, when the law was instituted to protect Danes from being picked off one by one by the English. The law hadn't been enforced much in recent years, but the Norman kings revived it. This time they substituted Normans for Danes, so that Normans would be protected from assassination. Gradually over time, the law came to be extended not merely to "Normans," but to all free people—that is, non-serfs. So the specific ethnic meaning did not last; it became simply a matter of social class.

One reason for this blurring of ethnic identity in legal terms was that the Normans themselves didn't place a huge value on concepts of ethnicity; they didn't care so much about the purity of their Norman descent. You can see this by the fact that they intermarried with the English quite readily. Many Norman nobles married the daughters of English landowners so that they could inherit their lands. And it actually went the other way, too; in a few instances, English men married Norman women. William the Conqueror himself gave his niece Judith in marriage to an English nobleman, Earl Waltheof, who had actually been one of the English rebels in 1068. William thought it would be a politically astute move, and he clearly did not object to his niece marrying an Englishman.

There is one very ironic fact about Earl Waltheof's Norman marriage: Waltheof had survived a revolt against King William led by English people—he'd been pardoned for that—but then he got involved in a revolt in 1075 led by Normans, and that was the one that got him killed. He was at a wedding feast with some of the Norman lords to whom he was connected via his Norman wife, and that's where this revolt got cooked up, right at this wedding feast; that's where the conspiracy was hatched. Waltheof apparently got swept up in the plot, but it was revealed very early on. The Norman plotters were pardoned by King William, but Waltheof did not get a pardon. That's because the English custom was to exact the death penalty for treason,

and Waltheof was English, so the king said, “You’re English; you have to be treated under English law.” Waltheof was the last English rebel to die in the generation of the conquest.

We have a paradox here in this encounter between English and Norman, and it’s perfectly summed up in the fate of poor Earl Waltheof. He died because he was English, but he had only fallen into the crime of treason because he was drawn into it by his Norman in-laws, who clearly trusted him enough to plot with him.

Ethnic identity in this period is fluid enough to accommodate many different responses to conquest. Of course, many English landowners lost their lands. All the lords who fought on King Harold’s side at the Battle of Hastings had their lands confiscated because the idea was that that was officially treason; William is claiming that he’s already king of England by right. But there were other English lords who survived and became loyal servants of the new regime. One reason for this was that William the Conqueror wanted to stress unity as much as possible. And for William, the best way to do that was to embrace his identity as king of the English.

For one thing, he founded his rule on a sense that he was legitimately king of England as the legal successor to King Edward the Confessor. This was the whole rationale he had used in approaching the pope in trying to get his blessing for the invasion; he was just going to England to claim what was rightfully his. William was very careful to stress continuity. He confirmed grants that Edward the Confessor had made both to churches and to individuals. And if people complained that some of the king’s followers had seized land unlawfully, William investigated.

Now, I don’t mean to claim at all that William was equally fair to the Normans and the English; that is obviously not true. He had to reward his Norman followers, and he did. But he wasn’t invariably unfair to the English. Of course, in the rough and tumble years right after the conquest, a lot of Normans did seize lands from churches and from lords who hadn’t necessarily fought at Hastings on the losing side—so in other words, people who shouldn’t have had their lands confiscated. These greedy and violent Norman lords were remembered with great bitterness. For example, the

house chronicle of the Abbey of Ely calls one of these lords, a man named Gilbert Picot, an “insatiable monster” who wanted to swallow up all of Cambridgeshire. However, King William did allow Ely to sue people who had seized the abbey’s lands, and remarkably, a lot of property was ultimately returned to the abbey’s control. William very much wants to look like a king who respects the legal traditions of his newly won kingdom.

Perhaps the most dramatic instance of this insistence on legal continuity came at the famous Trial of Penenden Heath in 1072. This was a lawsuit that took place between two antagonists, neither one of whom was English. It was a dispute between Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury, who had been William’s choice to replace the unfortunate Archbishop Stigand (he is actually Italian, but he’d spent his career in Normandy), and the other antagonist is the king’s half-brother, Odo, bishop of Bayeux, whom William had also made earl of Kent. So you’ve got two foreigners in court. Despite the fact that neither party is English, the dispute is settled according to English law. When doubts arose about exactly what procedure they should be following, King William called upon a very old English bishop, Æthelric of Chichester, who came in to brief the court about English legal custom. He was so old and infirm that he actually had to be brought to court in a cart. This was obviously a striking fact that people remembered—it was quite a visual—and it was a great piece of propaganda for King William. He really cared about English law.

So one of the reasons that there wasn’t as much ethnic tension as we might expect is that the Norman administration did a lot to smooth over the discontinuities of the conquest. The message was pretty clear that the Norman regime is not going to sweep everything away with a new broom. Though of course, they do change certain aspects of administration—certain important things. For one thing, they switched the language of administration from English to Latin. Previously, a lot of royal documents had been written in English. Within a few years of the conquest, all royal documents were being written in Latin. So there were definitely changes. But enough stayed the same for England to still be recognizably England to the English themselves.

As for the Normans, a curious thing happened within a couple of generations of the conquest. They started to feel more at home in England. One way we

see this is the gradual end of distinctive clothing and hairstyles for English and Normans. By the 1090s, during the reign of William the Conqueror's son, William Rufus, we have reports that men at court are wearing their hair long like the English. It used to be something that you were made fun of for, but now, people are OK with it; it's no longer automatically an occasion for ridicule to look English.

That's a fairly frivolous example, but there's a more serious phenomenon we can point to, and that's namely the increasing interest among people of Norman or mixed background in the history of England. The century after the Norman Conquest, particularly the first few decades of the 12th century, turned out to be a golden age for history writing in England. We have more really good narrative sources for English history in this period than we do for any comparable period of the Middle Ages. A striking fact about the men who wrote these histories, all of whom were clerics, is how many of them were of mixed English and Norman heritage. Many of them seem to have been the product of marriages between Norman fathers and English mothers. As such, these historians had access to privilege due to the patronage opportunities their fathers could provide, but they also had a knowledge of the English language and a strong interest in English history and traditions.

I can pick one example to stand for many: This is a historian named Orderic Vitalis. He was a monk at the monastery of Saint Évroul in Normandy, but he had been born in Shropshire, in the west of England, quite close to the Welsh border; that's where his Norman father was stationed as a chaplain in the household of a Norman lord. When Orderic was 10 years old, his father sent him to be a monk in Normandy. Orderic writes very movingly of what it was like to be sent so far from home all alone, and he notes that when he arrived in Normandy, he could not speak French. So in his case, the language was being lost very quickly—perhaps because he grew up in Shropshire, which was not an area where large numbers of Normans were settled.

Orderic was fascinated by English history his whole life, and he was definitely pro-English as far as the Norman Conquest was concerned; he did not believe that the Norman Conquest was a good thing. But he did think that the defeat at Hastings was a just punishment by God for the sins of the English. He wrote a history of his own church that included all sorts

of historical digressions about English affairs and Norman affairs, and you definitely get the impression that it's all one big story for Orderic; you can't tease it apart. Other historians of mixed background wrote in a similar vein, and their work helped to bridge the gap between English and Norman, partly because the works seemed specifically designed to appeal to this broad audience.

Orderic and the other clerical historians wrote in Latin, but starting in the early 12th century, works of English history were written also in Norman French. One of the most important of these was a French version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle by a man named Geoffrey Gaimar. The patrons for these works were often noblewomen from Normandy or elsewhere in France who had a desire to learn as much as possible about their new homeland. By reading or hearing these stories, the Norman elites gradually came to believe that England's history was their history, too.

And the Norman churchmen who came to England also became convinced that English saints were their saints. There is some evidence that a few of the bishops and abbots that the new Norman kings put in place were skeptical about the claims to sanctity of some of the Anglo-Norman saints who were venerated at the shrines in English churches, simply because they didn't know anything about them. Nowadays, though, scholars are less convinced that there ever was any great Norman effort to purge the English church of questionable saints, because on the whole, the churchmen that the Norman kings brought into England respected the traditions that they found in place in England. If anything, they wanted to capitalize on these traditions to create publicity for their churches because publicity meant donations. Around the year 1100, a generation after the conquest, there was a wave of relic translations at various English churches. A relic translation is a ceremony where the remains of a saint are moved from their current resting place to a new shrine—usually bigger and better shrine. This happened at Canterbury and at Ely and a number of other churches, and in each case, the presider was a foreign-born abbot or bishop presiding over the translation of an Anglo-Saxon saint.

At these occasions you have English and Norman standing side by side, venerating these saints, and often they are historical figures from the English

past, such as Saint Æthelthryth or Saint Audrey at Ely. Æthelthryth was a genuine 7th-century Anglo-Saxon queen. The result of all of this joint worship is that English and Norman are united in their respect for an English saint, and so the Normans are slowly assimilated into the religious culture of the English church.

That doesn't mean at all that the English church is unaffected by the conquest; that would be very far from the truth—and we've already seen the problems at Glastonbury. William didn't fire all of the Anglo-Saxon bishops when he came to the throne, but he replaced them by attrition, so that by the end of his reign, the English bishops were almost completely foreign-born, and they were chosen because most of them represented the reforming spirit that was at work in the churches of Normandy. Archbishop Lanfranc had trained at the great abbey of Bec in Normandy, and he had been abbot of the abbey in Caen that William had founded to atone for his marriage to Matilda that had been a little bit uncanonical. Lanfranc brought with him many other clerics of the same stamp, and they brought a breath of fresh air to the English church. Lanfranc reformed the customs of the church of Canterbury and improved the liturgy. Similar work was being done at many other English churches, and it wasn't always resisted by English monks; many of them did welcome the changes. The English church certainly benefited in the long run from the Norman Conquest, just as William had promised the pope that it would.

One very visible change to the English church was of course in its architecture. One of the most important initiatives of the postconquest period in England was the wholesale replacement of older English churches with much larger, much grander churches in the style that we know of as "Norman"; it's basically the English version of Romanesque. These were massive buildings in stone with very solid walls, comparatively high ceilings, and quite a lot of very sophisticated sculpture. There are hints that some of this building work was resisted; some monks were sad to see the old churches go. But once they saw the big, beautiful new churches—and particularly, once they reaped the benefits of the pilgrim trade as laypeople flocked to see the churches also—the laments died away. Some of these churches look a lot like castles, and indeed, several of the most impressive early Norman cathedrals were built in places that had seen a lot of fighting during the early years of William's reign. If you look at the surviving Norman

portions of Ely Cathedral, you can see this very clearly. The towers look like turrets in a castle. The cathedral at Durham is the best surviving example of a Norman cathedral. It still dominates the town from its central location. It's on a promontory above the River Wear, and it would have been even more awe-inspiring and dominant when it was built in the late 11th century.

I have said that some cathedrals looked like castles, but what about actual castles? There was much more controversy about the building of castles because that process was often much more destructive than church building. At least when you are building a new church on the site of an old church, the site is already in use as a church. But castles were a new phenomenon, and when William built a castle in a town like Warwick or Nottingham, he had to clear a site to do so, and that meant knocking down houses. This was urban clearance of a very radical kind.

The process can clearly be seen in Domesday Book. Some of the towns where castles were built show a dramatic drop in the number of dwellings because of all the houses that had to be destroyed to make way for the castles. The inhabitants of these towns surely felt a lot more ambivalent about the castles than they did about the cathedrals because the castles were, after all, designed to make sure that they did not rebel—plus, they had to pay taxes to help in the upkeep of the castles.

So the Norman Conquest very dramatically affected the townscapes of England. There might be a castle and a cathedral that hadn't been there before, and many of these buildings are still there today; they permanently affected the street plan of many English towns.

Now I want to return to a topic that I mentioned in the very first lecture—namely, language. How did the Norman Conquest affect language in England? One of the important things to note right away about the Norman Conquest is an obvious one because this course is in English, not French. The Normans did not manage to make the English abandon their own language in favor of French. During some conquests in history, the conquerors have tried to impose their own language on the conquered, but the Normans didn't do this. Why?

One answer is that it isn't actually all that easy to make a whole population stop speaking one language and start speaking another. And it didn't turn out to be all that important to stamp out English because there were other means by which the new Norman rulers could communicate with their subjects besides trying to make them all learn French. For one thing, there was Latin, the language of the church. One of the reasons that the transition from English rule to Norman rule went so smoothly is because of Latin; it could act as a common language.

Another reason is that fairly quickly after the conquest, there seemed to have been an abundance of interpreters. In fact, we see scattered references all over to people who have the word "interpreter" added to their names. It's an occupational designation; clearly, there were a lot of people with a flair for languages who made their living, at least in part, by translating for the new Norman rulers. The Domesday Survey alone must have employed dozens if not hundreds of interpreters; royal clerks spread out across the countryside questioning local juries about land ownership—all of these conversations had to be translated from English into French. So there was really no need for the Normans to force their subjects to learn French either—nor could they have done so very easily, anyway, in a period before mass public education.

On the other hand, the Norman lords very quickly learned English themselves. Remember, the Normans had learned French quickly in Normandy—they started out speaking Norse and they switched to French—so now they learned English quickly in England. All those mixed marriages produced a lot of bilingual children.

Now, it was still very prestigious to speak French as well, because that marked you out as a member of the elite. This remained true in England down to the 15th century, if not beyond. I'll come back to that point in a moment. The essential point here is that French and English had a very long coexistence as languages spoken, read, written side by side with each other, often by the same people. This meant that French could have a very strong influence on English because the same people were speaking the two languages, in some cases on a daily basis. A member of the elite might speak French to his wife or his noble guests, and then he might speak English to his servants or his estate manager.

Now today, we have quite a lot of bilingualism in American society, and we see that fairly easy, you can get a kind of hybrid language evolving. Sometimes people talk about “Spanglish,” which is a kind of mixture between English and Spanish in which the vocabularies of the two languages interpenetrate each other. That is clearly what happened with English. A lot of words from French just got adopted into English, often words with a kind of high-class association, like the example I started the course with: to “dine” versus to “eat”; the first is French, the second is English. Someone who spoke French at one social level might drop the word “dine” into the conversation when speaking English in another context, and the borrowing stuck.

Incidentally, the borrowing clearly went the other way as well; people speaking French would mix in English words. This was not well received when English-born speakers of French traveled to the Continent. Everybody made fun of the French spoken in England. In the 12th century, a Welsh writer named Walter Map claimed that there was a fountain in Marlborough, the water of which could cause the drinker to speak garbled French. He apparently felt that most English-born speakers of French had drunk rather liberally from that fountain.

So maybe the French spoken in England wasn’t the greatest from the perspective of, say, Paris. Still, the result of this linguistic mixing was the remarkable language we know today, with its very subtle vocabulary that can express all different shades of meaning. It’s not the only subtle language in the world, by any means, but it is a language where you can read the history of a people in every single sentence.

I mentioned just now the fact that French was spoken in England for hundreds of years, and now I want to say a bit more about this French connection. One of the most important things that changed as a result of the Norman Conquest was the fact that England was now tied to the Continent of Europe in a way that it hadn’t been before. Through much of the two centuries before 1066, England had been really a part of the northern world, the Scandinavian world, but after 1066, that changed dramatically. Indeed, England was going to be very closely involved in French affairs for hundreds of years after 1066 because the English kings still owned land in France, and they went back

and forth between England and their French lands on a regular basis. The amount of land that England controlled in France fluctuated a lot over time. Much of the land was lost in early 13th century, but then the English fought the Hundred Years' War with France in the 14th and 15th centuries to try to get it back. The last piece of French territory that England controlled, the port city of Calais, was not surrendered to the French until 1558.

This close connection to France had two important consequences. 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 kingdom had to function even when the king wasn't there. It was certainly not a coincidence that the system of royal accounting known as the Exchequer got a huge boost under the reign of William the Conqueror's youngest son, Henry I—Henry had to spend more than half of his reign dealing with business in Normandy, and it was very important that royal finance in England could continue without him.

In addition, 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. English students went in large numbers 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. This process would certainly have taken much longer without the ease of traffic across the Channel that the conquest brought about. For comparison, Scandinavia didn't get a university of its own until much later—1477.

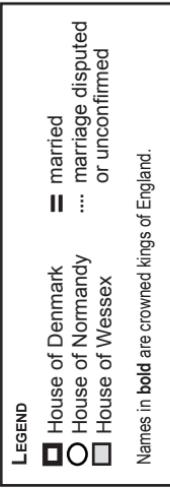
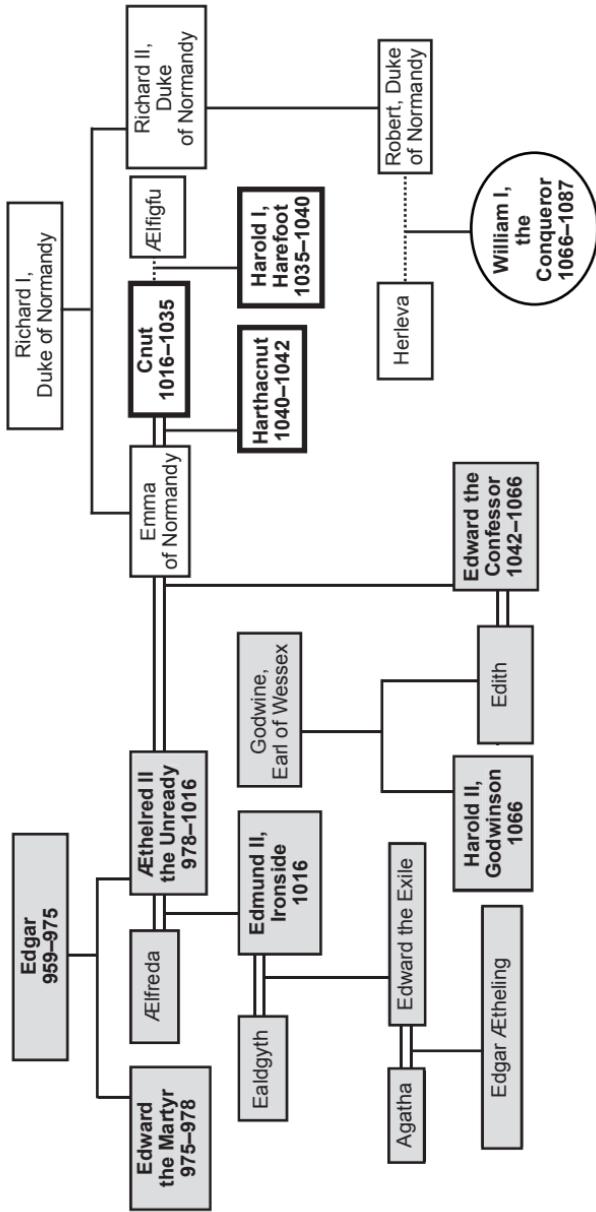
And of course, English literature was strongly influenced by contacts with the Continent, but here the traffic went both ways. Stories about King Arthur that were derived from traditions in the Celtic-speaking areas of Britain filtered through England across the English Channel. There they got turned into tales of chivalric romance at the very sophisticated courts of the great nobles of France, such as Marie of Champagne, who was the patron of Chrétien de Troyes. Chrétien de Troyes was the first writer to add Sir Lancelot to the story of King Arthur. Then those tales in turn came back to England in French to be read and enjoyed by the bilingual English elite.

But the English audience didn't have to rely on continental writers alone. They could listen to stories from English history told in French verse. One popular story concerned an English nobleman named Guy of Warwick who had a lot of the standard chivalric adventures (he slew a dragon, he won the hand of a beautiful lady, that sort of thing). But the story is set during the reign of King Athelstan in the 10th century—you can't get more English than that. Clearly, the English elite, many of whom have Norman ancestry, were very comfortable identifying with English history.

In short, by the end of the 12th century, the Normans have fully embraced their new home, and this fact helped to make them seem less foreign to the English. In a text written in the 1180s to explain the workings of the Exchequer, the English treasurer says that it is no longer possible to tell English from Norman because they have blended together so completely. Now, the author is speaking about the elites only. It's still clearly the case that members of the lower ranks of society were of pure English stock. But by the late 12th century, you don't see much sign that the elites are resentful for their Normanness; they have gone native.

So that's a far cry from the kind of ethnically polarized society that the novel *Ivanhoe* portrays for the same period. I think this picture I have tried to paint of a hybrid society is much closer to the truth. That's the Norman Conquest as we see it today. It was certainly violent, it definitely brought change, but in the end it also led to a very valuable blending of cultures. England became in many ways the best of both worlds. It's an impressive story of both resistance and reconciliation: two French words that the English borrowed and made their own.

The Ruling Families of England, 959–1087



Bibliography

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Translated and edited by Michael Swanton. New York: Routledge, 1998. Translation of the most important contemporary English source for the Norman Conquest.

Barlow, Frank. *Edward the Confessor*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970. Detailed and judicious biography of Edward the Confessor.

———. *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty*. New York: Longman, 2002. A study of the extended Godwinson family and their role in English politics.

Bates, David. *Normandy before 1066*. New York: Longman, 1982. A study of the duchy of Normandy that focuses on the ruling methods of the dukes before the Norman Conquest.

———. *William the Conqueror*. London: Philip, 1989. An up-to-date biography by the foremost scholar of the documents of William's reign.

Bennett, Matthew. *Campaigns of the Norman Conquest*. Chicago: Osprey Publishing, 2001. A detailed study of the military aspects of the conquest with abundant maps and illustrations.

Brown, R. Allen, ed. *The Norman Conquest of England: Sources and Documents*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995. Collection of primary sources relating to the Norman Conquest with extensive commentary.

The “Carmen de Hastingae Proelio” of Guy, Bishop of Amiens. Edited by Catherine Morton and Hope Muntz. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972. Controversial narrative source about the Norman Conquest.

Chibnall, Marjorie. *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. A study of how interpretations of the Norman Conquest have changed through the centuries.

Crouch, David. *The Normans: The History of a Dynasty*. London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2002. Masterfully written dynastic history of the Norman dukes who became kings of England.

Douglas, David C. *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact upon England*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1964. Biography of William the Conqueror that attempts to account for the Norman Conquest by considering William's previous career in Normandy in detail.

Encomium Emmae Reginae. Edited by Alistair Campbell with supplementary introduction by Simon Keynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. A text commissioned by Emma to present her political career in the best possible light.

The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers. Edited by R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Narrative of the Norman Conquest by the former chaplain of William the Conqueror.

The “Gesta Normannorum Ducum” of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni. 2 vols. Edited and translated by Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992–1995. Narrative source about the Norman Conquest composed shortly after the event by a Norman monk.

Golding, Brian. *Conquest and Colonisation: The Normans in Britain, 1066–1100*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. A study that focuses primarily on the aftermath of the conquest.

Huscroft, Richard. *The Norman Conquest: A New Introduction*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2009. An extensive guide to the Norman Conquest.

Lawson, M. K. *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. London and New York: Longman, 1993. The only full-length biography of King Cnut in English.

Morillo, Stephen, ed. *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996. An anthology of primary sources and modern interpretations of the Battle of Hastings.

Searle, Eleanor. *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840–1066*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. A study of the social mechanisms that governed society in the duchy of Normandy before the Norman Conquest.

Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1997. A comparative study of two fascinating queens of England.

———. *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*. London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1989. A detailed history of late Anglo-Saxon England that stresses the continuities across the Danish and Norman Conquests of the 11th century.

Thomas, Hugh M. *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066–c.1220*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

———. *The Norman Conquest: England After William the Conqueror*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008. A guide to the Norman Conquest focusing especially on the long-term impact of the conquest.

Williams, Ann. *The English and the Norman Conquest*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000. A study of the aftermath of the conquest primarily from the English perspective.

Wilson, David M. *The Bayeux Tapestry in Color*. New York: Knopf, 1985. Reproduction of the Bayeux Tapestry with commentary.