

THE NORMAN CONQUEST – EXTRACT

The Norman Conquest was the invasion and occupation of England by the Normans in 1066. The conquest was led by William, Duke of Normandy, who became King William I of England.

The Norman Conquest completely changed England and the English language. It introduced French language and culture into England. It is even considered to be one of the most important occurrences in English history.

Are the Normans French or Vikings?

The Normans are the descendants of Viking invaders in France. They were given the land of Normandy, France, in the early 1010s, by King Charles II, as a protection deal to defend France from more Viking invaders. The Normans assimilated into French society, converting to Christianity and speaking the French language.

Society

Normans

A warrior-focused society that came from Denmark and Norway. They adopted French culture after settling in Normandy.

Anglo-Saxons

A more organized society with a Roman system of government. They spoke Old English, a Germanic language.

Government

Normans: The Norman Duke had the power to call out a general levy.

Anglo-Saxons: The king controlled land divided into shires and hundreds.

How it happened

1066 was a momentous year for England. The death of the elderly English king, Edward the Confessor, on 5 January set off a chain of events that would lead, on 14 October, to the Battle of Hastings.

The Normans landed at Pevensey in Sussex on September 28, 1066.

The Battle of Hastings was fought on 14 October 1066 between the Norman army of Duke William of Normandy and an English army under King Harold. It lasted all day, and was exceptionally bloody even by medieval standards. When Harold was eventually killed and the English fled, the way was open for William to assume the throne of England.

Effects of the conquest

The Norman Conquest ended Anglo-Saxon England

The Norman Conquest introduced French as the language of the elites

The Norman Conquest eliminated slavery

The Norman Conquest introduced Norman abbots and monks to England

The Norman Conquest introduced legislation against clerical marriage

The Norman Conquest introduced Latin and Anglo-Norman into official documents and records.

After the Battle of Hastings, William built Battle Abbey on the site of the battle to mark his great victory and atone for the bloodshed. On Christmas day 1066 he was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey.

Once England had been conquered, the Normans faced many challenges in maintaining control. Historians estimate the number of Norman landholders at around 8000.

William's followers expected and received lands and titles in return for their service in the invasion, but William claimed ultimate possession of the land in England over which his armies had given him de facto control. Henceforth, all land was "held" directly from the king in feudal tenure in return for military service.

To find the lands to compensate his Norman followers, William initially confiscated the estates of all the English lords who had fought and died with Harold and redistributed part of their lands. These confiscations led to revolts, which resulted in more confiscations, a cycle that continued for five years after the Battle of Hastings.

Legacy

One of the most obvious changes to English culture after 1066 occurs in people's names.

The Norman Conquest left a lasting impact on English history, including the language we speak today.