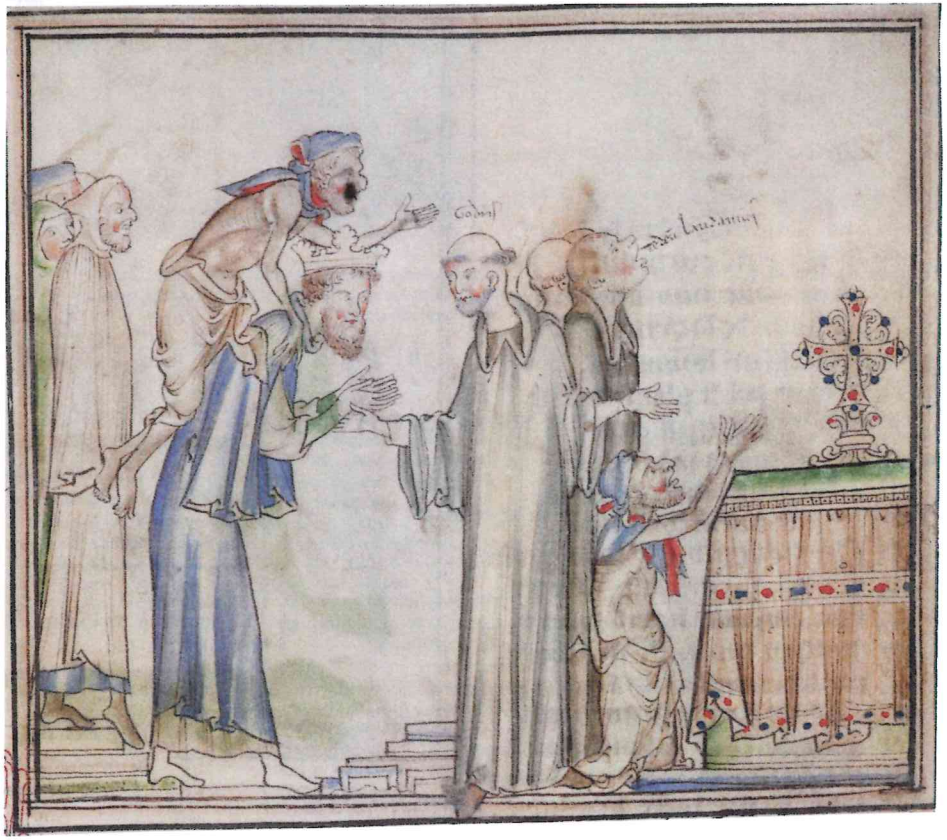
1 Too good to be true?

What was Anglo-Saxon England really like in 1065?



▲ An illustration from a manuscript written *c.*1240

The saintly king

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

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

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

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

Reflect

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

A 'Golden Age'

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

The Enquiry

In this enquiry you will learn about:

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

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

Record your ideas in a table like this:

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

Anglo-Saxon society in 1065

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

Record

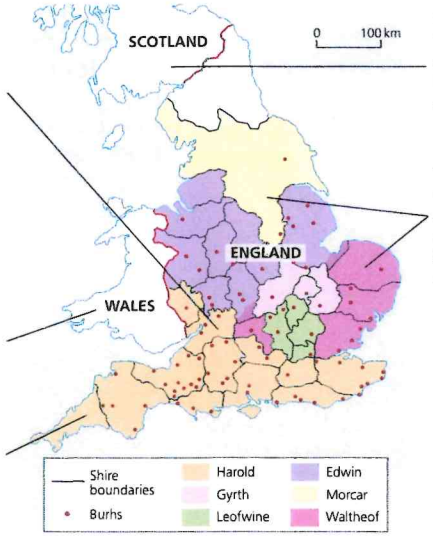
Make the first entries in your table as described on page 9.
Use the sub-heading 'Anglo-Saxon society'.

▼ Map of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom in 1065

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

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

Cornwall had many of the ancient British people who had lived throughout the country until the Anglo-Saxons arrived in the fifth century AD.



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

The people of the north and east of England were a mix of Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. The Vikings came from modern-day Norway, Denmark and Sweden and settled in these regions after about AD850.

The kingdom of England

In the tenth century, the rulers of Wessex led other Anglo-Saxon kings in wars to end Viking rule in the north and east. By AD954, the last Viking leader was defeated and England had become a single kingdom.

In France, kings struggled to control local lords who ran large regions as if they were private kingdoms. But, by AD1000, English kings had strong, central control. Their land was divided into shires. Most shires had several royal 'burhs'. These were fortified towns that kept the local community safe. This system was weaker in the north-east, but in most of England burhs developed, markets grew and trade prospered. Kings of England also supported trade by setting up royal mints that produced coins whose purity and value was trusted.

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

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

▼ Eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon coins

The people

Pages 11 and 12 describe the two million people who lived in England in 1065.

1. The king

The king had many powers and duties. He:

- owned more land than anyone else
- raised taxes to pay for the nation's defence and for the burhs, roads and bridges that encouraged trade
- issued new laws
- was responsible for justice in all courts of law
- was expected to be a fine warrior
- was responsible for the work of the Church (unlike kings on the continent).

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

2. Earls

The king's chief advisers were the earls. These earls and the leading bishops formed the Witan, a group of advisers that even helped decide who should take the throne when a king died. Earls could not keep private armies but they gathered and led the king's 'fyrd' (armed forces) in times of war. They also held shire courts twice a year.

By 1065, the six earls shown on the map on page 10, came from just three families. Their intense rivalry, plots and murders made England unstable and had almost caused a civil war earlier in Edward's reign. Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, emerged as the richest and most powerful man in the kingdom. His sister Edith married King Edward. By 1065, Earl Harold effectively ruled England on Edward's behalf.

3. Thegns

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

▲ In this manuscript from c.1050, the King of England discusses royal affairs with his earls. Below them, thegns arrive on horseback at a royal burh

Reflect

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

▲ Cutting and collecting timber. From a manuscript made *c.*1030

4. Ceorls

Ceorls (pronounced 'churls') made up the vast majority of England's population. Some had special skills as carpenters or blacksmiths but most worked on the land. They grew crops, kept animals and collected timber for building and firewood.

The better-off ceorls lived mainly in the eastern shires. They owned some land and a house of their own. However, most ceorls had to pay rent and do work for the thegn whose land they lived on. They had to serve in the king's 'fyrd' in times of war and they were also expected to repair roads and bridges. They were trusted to take part in local decision-making and trials in local courts.

Some people have seen ceorls as the backbone of a freedom-loving, early form of democracy. But, by 1065, ceorls were far less independent than they had once been. They were becoming more tightly bound to serve the thegn on whose land they lived and worked, and who protected them.

5. Thralls or slaves

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

Very little written evidence survives about the lives of thralls but a valuable source is *Aelfric's Colloquy*. This is a school book, written *c.*990, to teach Latin. It is filled with invented characters discussing their work. Here, a thrall describes his daily routine:

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

▲ The remains of late Anglo-Saxon farming tools found by archaeologists at a site near Durham

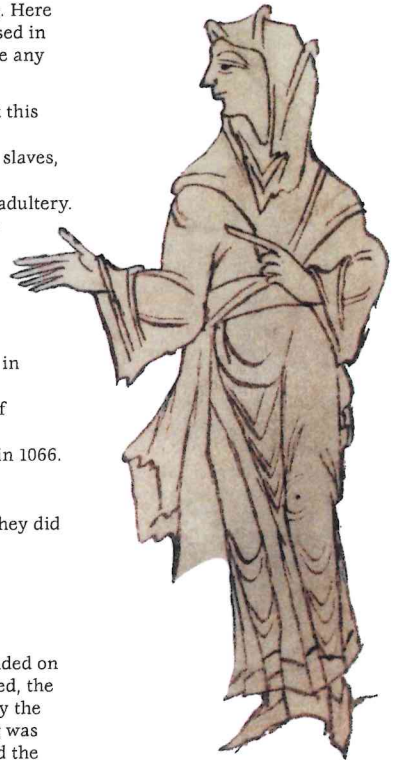
Reflect

1. Which of the artefacts (objects) above can you see in the image at the top of the page?
2. What do you think did most to affect the quality of life for ceorls and thralls?

Women

Historians have disagreed about the nature and quality of women's lives in late Anglo-Saxon England. The evidence is certainly confusing. Here are some statements about Anglo-Saxon women that have been used in books and articles on this subject. They are all true but do not give any single, clear message.

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



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

The value of life

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

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

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

Reflect

1. Which statements from the list above might support the idea that late Anglo-Saxon England was a golden age for women?
2. What is your own conclusion on the nature and quality of Anglo-Saxon women's lives?

Record

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

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

Anglo-Saxon religion

In 1065, the English Church had a bad reputation but it had not always been like this. At the start of the eleventh century, its leadership and blend of traditions and styles had given it a unique quality.

The character of the English Church

In the lands that we now call Italy, Germany and France, the Church had spread from Rome. Over many centuries this Roman Catholic Church developed its own ways of working and its own styles of art, with an emphasis on saints and angels. The Roman Catholic Church was brought to England in AD597 and Anglo-Saxons, who had been pagans before then, became Christians over the years that followed. They adopted the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

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

The illustration on the right is from an English church manuscript that was made *c.*1012. It is written in Latin and it is the opening page of one of the Gospels, the part of the Bible that tells the story of Jesus. It blends the Roman Catholic and the Celtic traditions.

The English language

Another sign that the Church was different in England is that parts of the Bible were often written, not in Latin, but in English or rather 'Old English'. This is the form that was still spoken around the year 1000. Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church insisted that the Bible should only ever be written in Latin so that its accepted meaning should not get lost in translation. It is a sign of the independence of the English Church that monks continued to write Bible extracts in the normal language of the people.

Record

As you read pages 14–15, add entries to your table as described on page 9. Use the sub-heading 'Anglo-Saxon religion'.

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

Reflect

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

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

The religion of the people

Very few English people could read. Gospels like the one on page 14 were for priests, monks, nuns or the wealthy and highly educated rulers of England. As so often in history, it is very hard to know what went on in the minds and hearts of the poorer people who made up the majority of the population.

Worship

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

The Church all over England was proud of its own local traditions. The Pope in Rome complained that the English had too many saints who were often local people who were highly thought of after their deaths. In theory, new saints could only be made by the agreement of the Pope, but the English ignored this ruling.

Behaviour and belief

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

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

Reflect

1. This stone cross was made in the north of England where Celtic Christianity was strong. How might you guess this from its decoration?
2. Some historians say that the sermon that criticised the behaviour of the English at the time of the Viking invasion proves that people were not deeply religious. Others disagree and say that a sermon of that type is sure to exaggerate. What would your own interpretation be?

▲ An Anglo-Saxon ring, *c.*900

Missed opportunities

At the end of the tenth century, England had some of the most impressive church leaders in Europe but their influence had not been allowed to flourish.

St Dunstan

Dunstan was a monk from Somerset who became Archbishop of Canterbury in AD960. He spent hours in prayer but also devoted himself to art. He was highly skilled as a musician, an engraver and an illustrator. The image shown here was almost certainly drawn by him. It shows the figure of Christ. Many historians believe that the monk kneeling humbly at Christ's feet is a self-portrait of Dunstan. He was generous and unselfish. Once, when a powerful Anglo-Saxon lady left Dunstan a fortune, he spent it all on improving the monasteries of England.

Dunstan set the English church high standards.

- He worked to end corruption and greed among church leaders.
- He worked to improve the education and commitment of the priests, monks and nuns.
- He insisted that priests should not marry.
- He organised the rebuilding of many churches, abbeys and monasteries, often helped by donations from local thegns or earls who wanted the monks and nuns to pray for their souls.

Soon after he died in 988, English Church leaders declared Dunstan to be a saint. They would probably have continued the church reforms of Dunstan but, at the start of the eleventh century, England was again suffering from raids by Vikings. In 1011 these raids destroyed much of Canterbury.

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

▲ The figure of Christ, from a tenth century manuscript

King Edward

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

In 1051–52 there was a power struggle in England. Godwin, who was Earl of Wessex at the time, objected to the rising power of Edward's foreign-born friends and forced the King to replace Robert with a new Archbishop of Canterbury. His name was Stigand.

Stigand

This picture of Archbishop Stigand was woven into the famous Bayeux Tapestry. It gives his name in Latin.

Stigand became a priest as a young man. He impressed people more for his skills of efficient administration than for any spiritual gifts. He did little to try to improve the quality of the church or the priests. Instead he served the King and Earl Harold as an adviser.

By 1065, Stigand was both Bishop of Winchester and Archbishop of Canterbury. Holding two church positions at once and being paid for both was called the sin of 'pluralism' but Stigand refused to give up the post as bishop. He was also accused of 'simony', selling off church posts to the highest bidder. This was the sort of corruption that St Dunstan had tried to end.

Stigand kept his influence because he had the support of Harold Godwinson, the Earl of Wessex. With Harold's support, Stigand gained land in ten shires and became very rich indeed, making some generous gifts to churches and monasteries.

In Rome, the Pope, who was head of the whole Roman Catholic Church, was deeply upset. He insisted that Stigand had to give up his post at Winchester and come to Rome for an official blessing. Stigand ignored him and stayed in England.

Reflect

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

More problems with priests

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

Below the archbishops and bishops were the thousands of priests who worked across the nation. Compared with most of Europe at the time, many English priests were poorly educated. The Pope also criticised the English Church for allowing its priests to marry, something that had been discouraged on the continent for hundreds of years. In the eyes of the Pope, this was another sign of the backwardness and low standards in the English Church in 1065.

▲ Archbishop Stigand from the Bayeux Tapestry c.1075

Record

Complete the entries in your table as described on page 14.

Anglo-Saxon culture

Some historians have emphasised the quality of art, literature and buildings as evidence of an Anglo-Saxon 'golden age'.

Record

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

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

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

Within a few years, the jewel had been handed over to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford where it has been kept ever since. Most experts now believe that the jewel was once attached to a long and slender wooden pointing-stick that would have been used to identify words and images in old manuscripts. It probably belonged to a monastery. Some believe that it was one of several such pointers that were sent around the country in AD890 by Alfred the Great, the King of Wessex who started the English fightback against the Vikings at the end of the ninth century. In the opinion of many, it is the single most impressive work of art from Anglo-Saxon times, a sign of remarkable skill.

Reflect

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

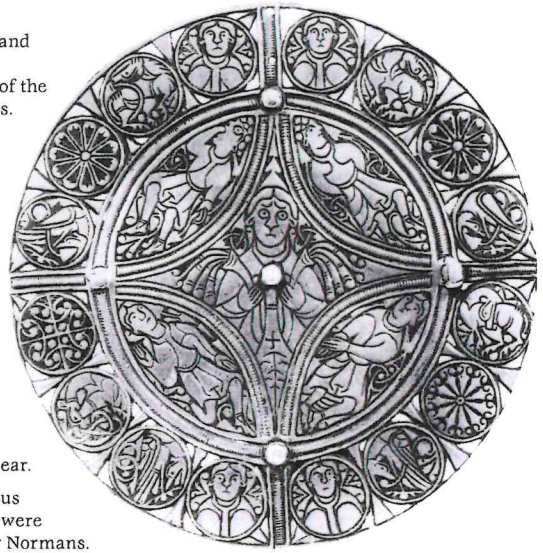
Art

Some of the finest art produced in Anglo-Saxon England involved engraving. You have already seen how they engraved the stone cross on page 15 and the borders of the Alfred Jewel on page 18. Here are two more examples.

The Fuller brooch

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

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



▲ The Fuller brooch, c.890

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

We have evidence that Anglo-Saxon England was still famous for its metalwork and engraving skills in the 1050s when an English chronicler from the abbey at Evesham praised the Abbot there as a great craftsman in metalwork. One Norman chronicler mentioned how foreign merchants travelled to England to buy works made by English craftsmen. He described English men as 'outstandingly skilful in all the arts'. He added that English women were highly skilled at weaving with gold thread and at embroidery. We can see this in the Bayeux Tapestry which was embroidered by English women on the orders of their new Norman masters.

Reflect

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

Reflect

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

A case

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

◀ An Anglo-Saxon case from the late eleventh century

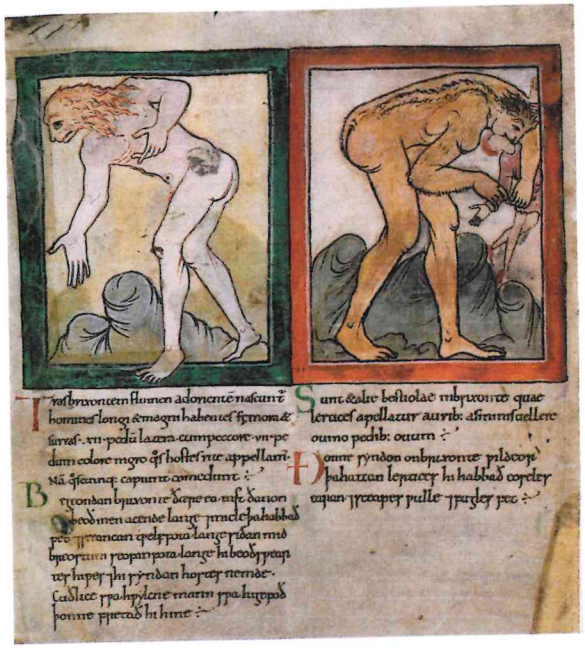
Literature

You have already seen images from books made in Anglo-Saxon times on pages 11, 13, 14 and 16. These are all from Church manuscripts but the Anglo-Saxons' literature was rich and varied.

'Science'

The image of men collecting wood on page 12 is not from a religious document. It is from a calendar that is found in a curious semi-scientific manuscript written around the year 1000. It contains a map of the world, information about astronomy and a description of far off places called 'Marvels of the East'. The image opposite shows two of the many strange creatures that were believed to live in the east. One is half man and half lion. The other is a giant, eating a human being.

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



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

Fiction

The most famous Anglo-Saxon work of fiction is 'Beowulf', a poem that is over three thousand lines long. It was first written down sometime between AD700 and 1000. It is set in Scandinavia, the home of the Vikings, and it tells the violent story of how a warrior named Beowulf hunts down and slays a monster and then the monster's mother. Even if it was not originally written in late Anglo-Saxon times, the poem was certainly still popular then. Like most literature from the time, it would have been spoken out loud for an audience rather than read by an individual. The story is still read today in its original form or in modern translation. It has even been made into a television series.

History

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

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

Miscellany

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

Reflect

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

Buildings

The Anglo-Saxons built almost entirely in wood, clay and straw. In fact, the Old English word for a builder was 'timbrend'.

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

Even though they were often made of wood, some Anglo-Saxon buildings were remarkably fine. We know this from written descriptions, often recalling what a building looked like before it was burned down. With timber walls and thatched roofs, fire was a constant threat. One eleventh-century writer praised a nunnery at Wilton in Wiltshire. Although it was fairly small, he compared it with the temple of Solomon that is described in the Bible. It had fine wooden carving, beautifully painted plasterwork, a winding staircase, polished precious stones and golden ornaments. He also delighted in the quality of the garments worn by the nuns, another reminder of the English skills of weaving and embroidery.

Burhs

There were only three castles in England by 1065 and these had all been built very recently by the friends of King Edward who had brought the design from Normandy. Far more common were the royal burhs that were built all over England (see page 10). These were surrounded by walls to keep the local community safe from attack. A few of these were made from stone, usually in towns originally built by the Romans. One of these was London or Londenburh, as it was called by Anglo-Saxons. Winchester was the capital of England in late Anglo-Saxon times but London was the largest burh and was growing in importance.

In most cases, however, the burh was defended by large earthworks of ditches and ramparts, with a strong wooden barrier. The photograph below shows the remains of a section of the Anglo-Saxon earthworks at Wallingford in Oxfordshire.

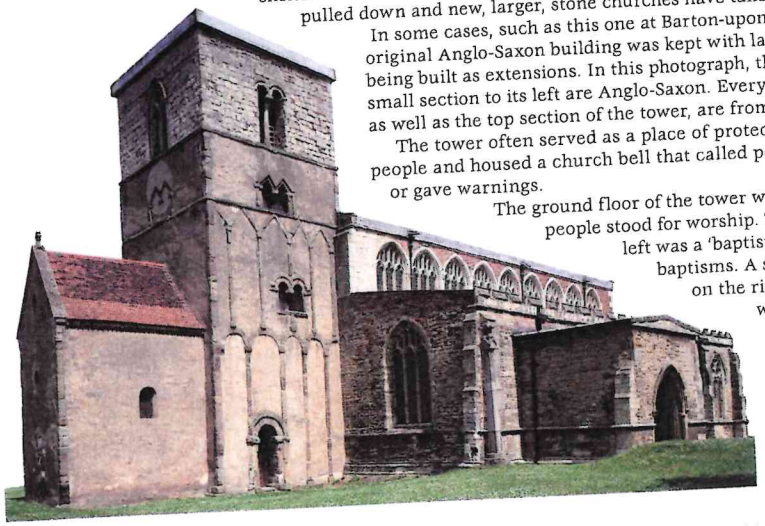
Reflect

How useful is the photograph of the thousand-year-old defensive earthworks at Wallingford for someone studying Anglo-Saxon burhs?

▼ Remains of the Anglo-Saxon burh defences at Wallingford in Oxfordshire. Photograph taken in 2006

Churches

St Peter's Church, Barton-upon-Humber



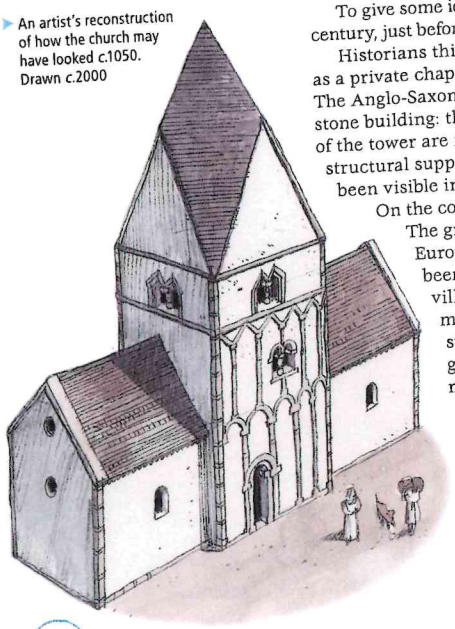
The only stone building that most Anglo-Saxons would ever enter would have been a church. Even though some still gathered for worship around a stone cross (see page 15), many villages had built first a timber and then a stone shelter in which to worship. Over the centuries most of these have been pulled down and new, larger, stone churches have taken their place.

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

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

The ground floor of the tower was where the people stood for worship. The section on the left was a 'baptistry', set aside for baptisms. A similar-sized area on the right of the tower was where the priest stood at the altar to lead worship. It was demolished long ago to make room for the extensions on the eastern side of the church.

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



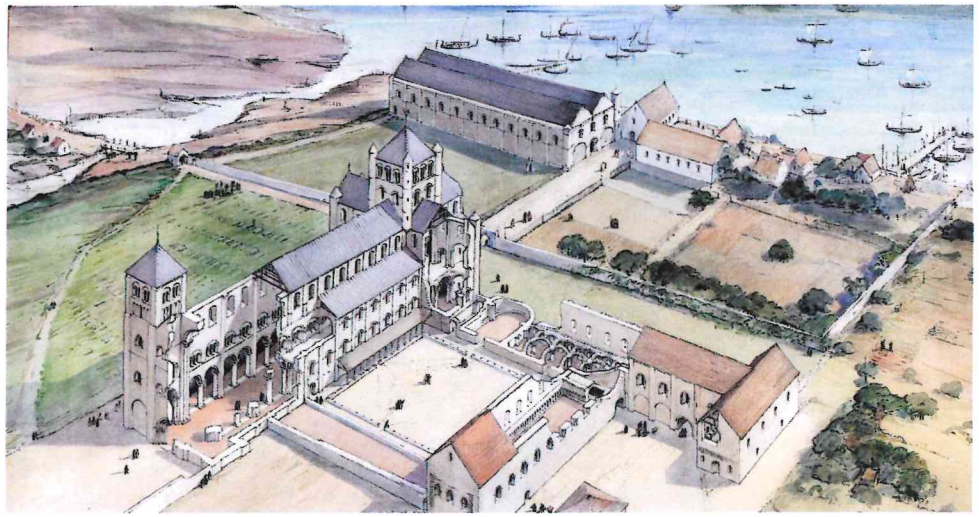
To give some idea of how the church may have looked in the eleventh century, just before the Norman Conquest, an artist has produced this drawing.

Historians think this church, like many at the time, was built by a thegn as a private chapel. This was increasingly common by the eleventh century. The Anglo-Saxon preference for building in wood can still be seen in this stone building: the various arches and pillars that can be seen on the wall of the tower are made in stone but are purely decorative. They provide structural support for the building. They are like the shapes that would have been visible in a timber-framed tower.

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

Reflect

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



▲ Westminster Abbey and Westminster Palace as they may have looked c.1065. A reconstruction by artist Terry Ball, c.1990. The artist has shown a 'cut-away' view of parts of the abbey to show its interior

Westminster Abbey

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

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

Reflect

What made Westminster Abbey such an impressive building?

1066

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

Record

Complete the entries in your table as described on page 18.

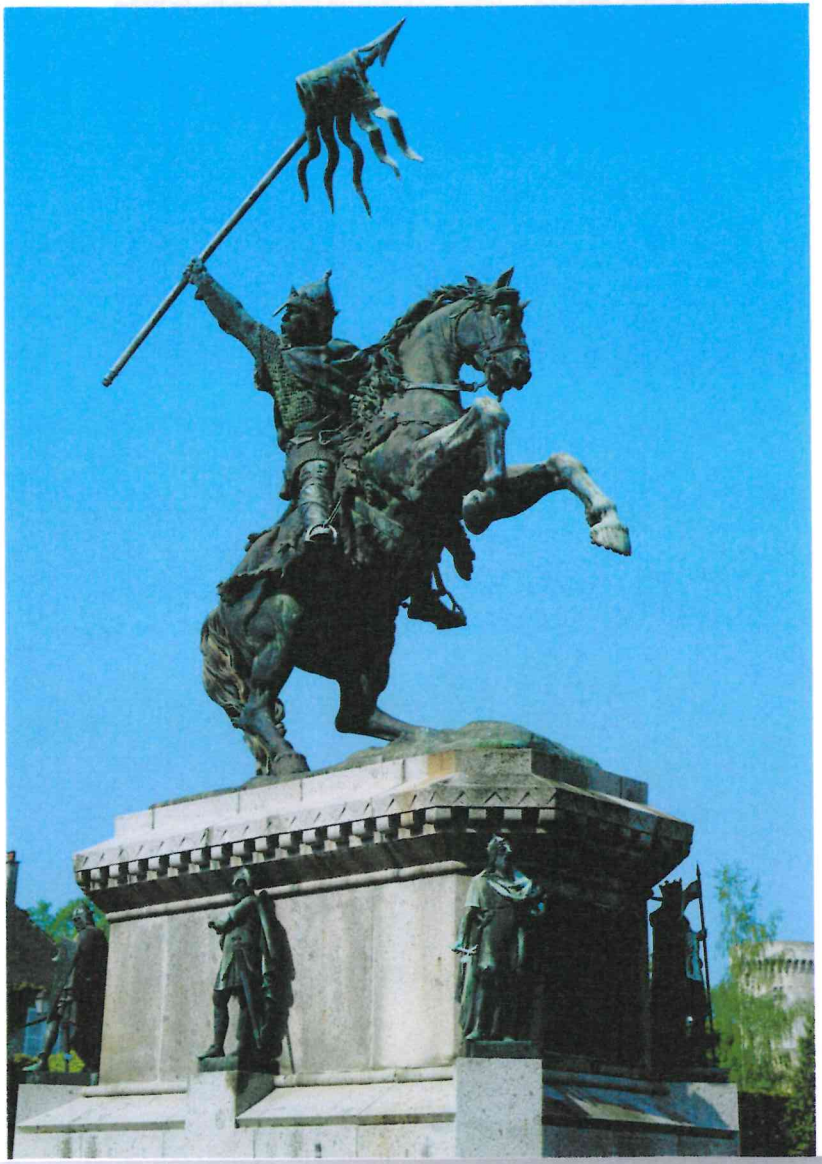
Review

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

2

'Lucky Bastard'?

What made William a conqueror in 1066?



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

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

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

- Rollo the Walker (so-called because he was a giant of man and no horse could carry him)
- William Longsword
- Richard the Fearless
- Richard the Good
- Richard III (who did not rule long enough to win a good name)
- William's father, Robert the Magnificent.

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

Reflect

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

The Enquiry

In this enquiry you will learn how William achieved his remarkable success and decide how he was able to become King of England. Maybe you will agree with the historian John Gillingham. In 1996, after carefully studying William's career and how he managed to defeat Harold at the battle of Hastings, Gillingham decided that William was, in fact, very fortunate to take the English throne. He recommended that William should really be remembered as 'William the Lucky Bastard'.

This enquiry will focus on William's invasion and conquest of England in 1066. You will see that there is plenty of room for disagreement between historians over several points in the story and you will need to make up your own mind about each of these. The story will unfold in three sections:

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

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

William's Norman background	William's personal qualities	William's opponents' weaknesses and errors	William's good luck

Normandy in 1065

As you can see from the map, Normandy lies in northern France. However, strictly speaking, there was no such country as France in the eleventh century. A 'King of the Franks' ruled the lands within the red boundaries shown on the map, but these were not called France until the thirteenth century. In England, the struggle to drive out the Vikings had led to the development of a single kingdom where the King had strong central power over all his lands. The King of the Franks had far less central control. The only lands that he could claim to rule directly were those shown in purple on the map.

The feudal system

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

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

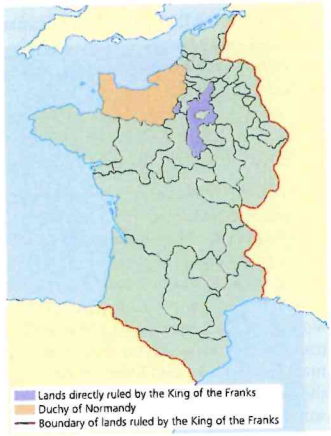
The strength of Normandy

Normandy was one of the strongest fiefs in France. It had started as a Viking colony in the early tenth century when Viking raiders sailed down rivers and struck deep into northern France. Its name means 'Land of the Northmen'.

The Vikings' first leader in this new French settlement was Rollo the Walker, whose statue stands below William's in the photograph on page 26. In AD911, having taken the land, Rollo became a vassal of the King of the Franks. Over the next century he and his descendants doubled their territory by conquest and by marriage alliances. They used brutal force to crush any rebellions but they also adopted the language, laws and forms of government of the French people they now ruled. They chose trusted men as local lords who governed each part of the duchy. By the time William the Bastard was born in 1028, Normandy was, in many ways, more stable than many other areas of France.

Record

Start making your notes as explained on page 27. You should find points to include under the first two headings..

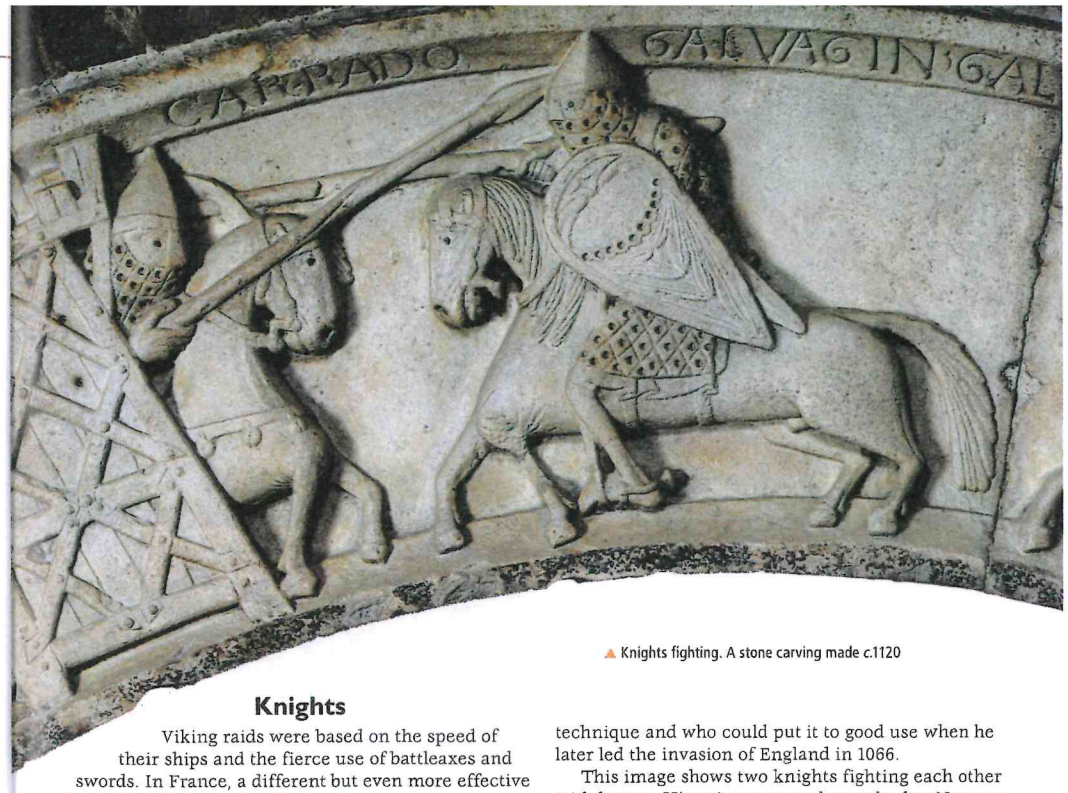


▲ France in 1035

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

Reflect

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



▲ Knights fighting. A stone carving made c.1120

Knights

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

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

New forms of fighting

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

This image shows two knights fighting each other with lances. Historians argue about whether Norman knights at Hastings used these weapons in this way or whether this approach developed later. In the Bayeux Tapestry, most knights seem to be throwing spears.

'Thugs'

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

Reflect

What made knights so effective in battle?

Castles

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

There were two main types of castle.

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

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

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

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

Normandy – stability and strength

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

Reflect

The two models above are both interpretations of eleventh-century castles.

1. How are they different from each other?
2. Why do you think they are different from each other?

Christianity and the Church

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

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

Normandy was becoming both settled and wealthy, with firm government, efficient taxation and strong trading links around northern Europe. And yet, soon after William was born in 1028, it faced a crisis.

▲ The Abbaye aux Dames in Caen, Normandy

William's early experiences

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

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

William grew in experience as he increased his control and his territory. He defeated enemies in battle and, like Rollo years before, he made a very useful marriage alliance. He took Matilda of Flanders as his wife in 1050. Flanders was a powerful county that bordered Normandy.

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

Reflect

What links can you find between the story of 'William's early experiences' and the information about Norman society on pages 28 to 31?

Record

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

Remember to use the headings given on page 27.

The succession crisis

Record

Continue making notes under the headings given on page 27.

▲ Edward the Confessor dies. From the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1075

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

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

Dying words

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

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

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

Reflect

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

From www.historyinanhour.com 'History for busy people', 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

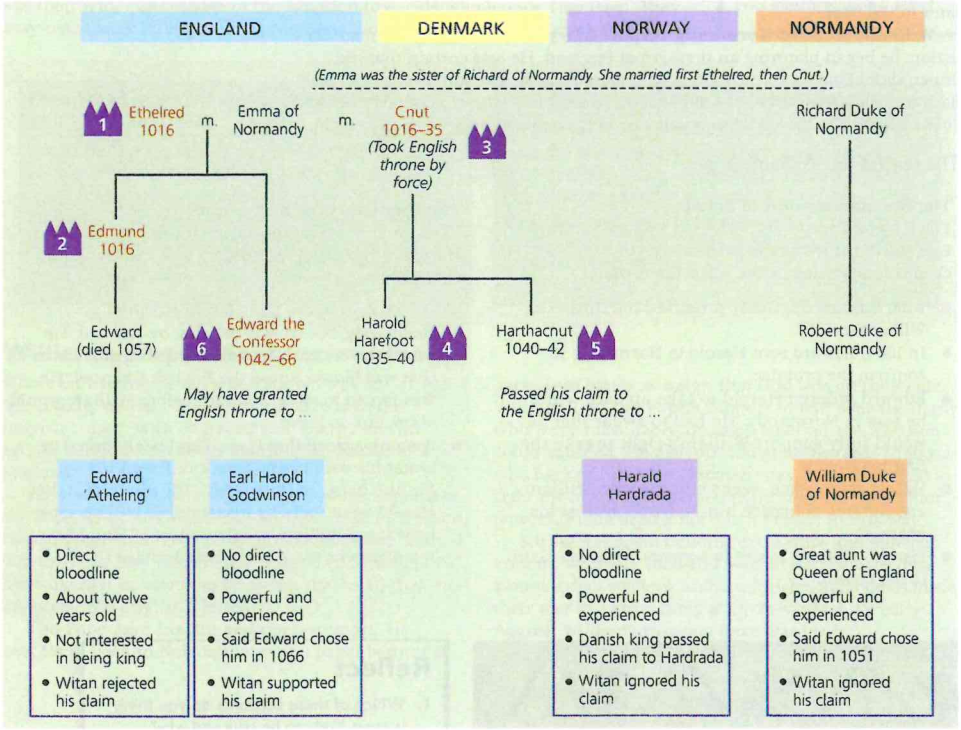
'My lord the King is dead'. She took a breath. 'These were his last words. "I do prophesy the Witan will choose Harold Godwinson to rule England in my place. He has my dying voice."'

The claimants

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

In eleventh-century England, the throne did not automatically go to the nearest living relative of the King. Ideally, the person who would take over needed to meet the following criteria:

- be in the 'bloodline' of the previous king (that is being directly related)
- be chosen by the previous king
- be chosen by the Witan (leading nobles).



The new king – Harold II

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

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

Reflect

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