

Norman England 1066 – c.1100

Part 1 – Conquest and Control

Causes	Events	Establishing control
Before 1066 England was very wealthy. It was ruled by Edward the Confessor 1042-1066. The most powerful family were the Godwins but the king also had close ties with the Normans in France after he spent his childhood in exile there. The North of England had a large Viking population after several periods of Viking rule, including Edwards predecessor Harthacnut. When Edward died 5th January 1066 it was unclear who would be king. There were four main contenders. Edgar Atheling was King Edwards great nephew and closest male relative. He was born in exile in Hungary but returned to England in 1057 and was treated as Edwards adopted son. However he was only 14 when Edward died and was not chosen as the heir. Earl Harold Godwinson was the most powerful man in England and had served as sub regulus (deputy king) for many years. Edward had resisted the influence of the Godwin family (briefly exiling them in 1051) but on his deathbed reluctantly named Harold Godwinson as his heir. Harold had the support of all of the English nobles and the Witan, except his brother Tostig. They had fallen out. Harold was crowned as king on the 6th January 1066. Duke William of Normandy was King Edwards distant cousin. Edward had close ties to the Normans through his mother and (according to William) promised William the throne during the 1051 dispute. William was a successful and brutal warrior, having proven himself in many military campaigns. When Harold became king he began to prepare an invasion force. King Harald Hardrada of Norway was a powerful Viking with a large and successful army. He claimed that as Edward had no sons a son of the previous king should be chosen. The previous king was the Viking Harthacnut who (according to Harald) promised the throne to Haralds father Magnus. Harald Hardrada had only the support of the exiled Tostig Godwinson but was determined to seize the throne by force.	The spring and summer of 1066 were spent preparing large armies. King Harold Godwinson waited for William on the south coast, leaving the defense of the North to the Northern Earls Edwin and Morcar. However, Harald Hardrada arrived first, defeating Edwin and Morcar at the battle of Fulford Gate. Harold led his army on a speed march across the length of the country, arriving at York in four days, catching the Vikings by surprise and defeating them at the battle of Stamford Bridge. Harald Hardrada and Tostig were both killed. Three days later William landed at Pevensey and built a castle there. Harold marched his army all the way back south, meeting William on the road near Hastings. Harolds army was exhausted. He had 7000 men, mostly peasant militia but with a core of professional Housecarls. They formed a strong shield wall on top of the hill. Williams army were fresh and well trained. He also had 7000 men with infantry, archers and 2000 elite knights. The first Norman attacks up the hill failed. However the Normans used a feigned retreat to lure Harold's men down the hill where they could be killed. By 4pm, after heavy casualties on both sides, the shield wall was broken and Harold was killed.	William still was not king. There was an attempt to crown Edgar Atheling but, after William burnt the countryside around London, Edgar surrendered. William was crowned king Dec 25th 1066. William tried to secure his rule by building Motte and Bailey castles all over England but still faced rebellions from all over the country and even his own Norman earls! 1068 Edgar Atheling, Edwin and Morcar led a rebellion in the North, killing the Norman Earl. William responded with the Harrying of the North. He destroyed all buildings, animals and food. In the winter, 100,000 people died of starvation. Hereward the Wake led a guerrilla war in the marshy fenlands of East Anglia. The marshes meant William could not use his army effectively. After many failed attempts to capture Hereward's base at Ely, Hereward was betrayed by some monks and William defeated the rebels.



