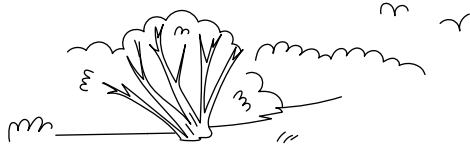


NORMANS



HOW HAROLD HUMBLLED HARDRADA AND HASTENED TO HASTINGS

England was thrown into uncertainty when Edward the Confessor died without an heir in 1066. Harold Godwinson, one of the country's most powerful landowners, seized the throne, but Harald Hardrada of Norway and William of Normandy both had claims on the kingdom. And both were willing to fight for it.

In September, Hardrada landed his army in the north but was beaten by Harold at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Then William crossed the English Channel with his Normans, and Harold marched his weakened army south to face him.

The two armies met near Hastings on 14 October. The battle lasted all day, and even by medieval standards it was a bloody and brutal fight. With the light fading, the Normans launched a final assault. Harold was killed – possibly by an arrow through his eye – and what was left of the English army fled from the field.



William marched on London and was crowned on Christmas Day, 1066, but he still had plenty of work to do to bring his new kingdom under control.

KING OF THE CASTLES

Unlike the English, the Normans were big fans of castles, and they built hundreds of them using the forced labour of ordinary English people. Cheap, quick to build and easy to defend, castles allowed the Normans to create centres of control wherever they wanted.



NOBILITY, NO DOUBT

After the conquest, English lands were given to (or taken by) William's followers. This wiped out the old English aristocracy, but it also created a new and powerful Norman ruling class. Norman England was very hierarchical, and everyone served someone in the class above them – apart from the king. In 1085, William ordered a massive survey (now known as Domesday Book) to find out who owned all the land in his kingdom, and to make sure he knew who owed him money and military service.

REVOLTING REVENGE

William still had to deal with revolts and rebellions for years after 1066. One of the biggest was in the north in 1069. William defeated the rebels and built more castles, and to punish them, he carried out what's now known as the 'Harrying of the North'. William and his men destroyed villages, fields and food stores, resulting in a devastating famine that killed maybe as many as 100,000 people.

There were other threats to his rule from the English, the Danes and even other Normans, but William kept hold of his kingdom until he died in 1087. His crown passed to his son, William II.

NORMAN PEOPLE

Just like a lot of sequels, William II was unpopular with the critics but actually reasonably successful. In 1100, while out hunting in the New Forest, he was shot and killed by one of his own men – historians still debate whether it was accidental or deliberate.

His younger brother Henry brought peace to England and introduced reforms to government. But when he died in 1135 – apparently after eating too much of his favourite seafood – he left no obvious successor, and England sank beneath the waves of a bitter and brutal civil war.

NORMANS

