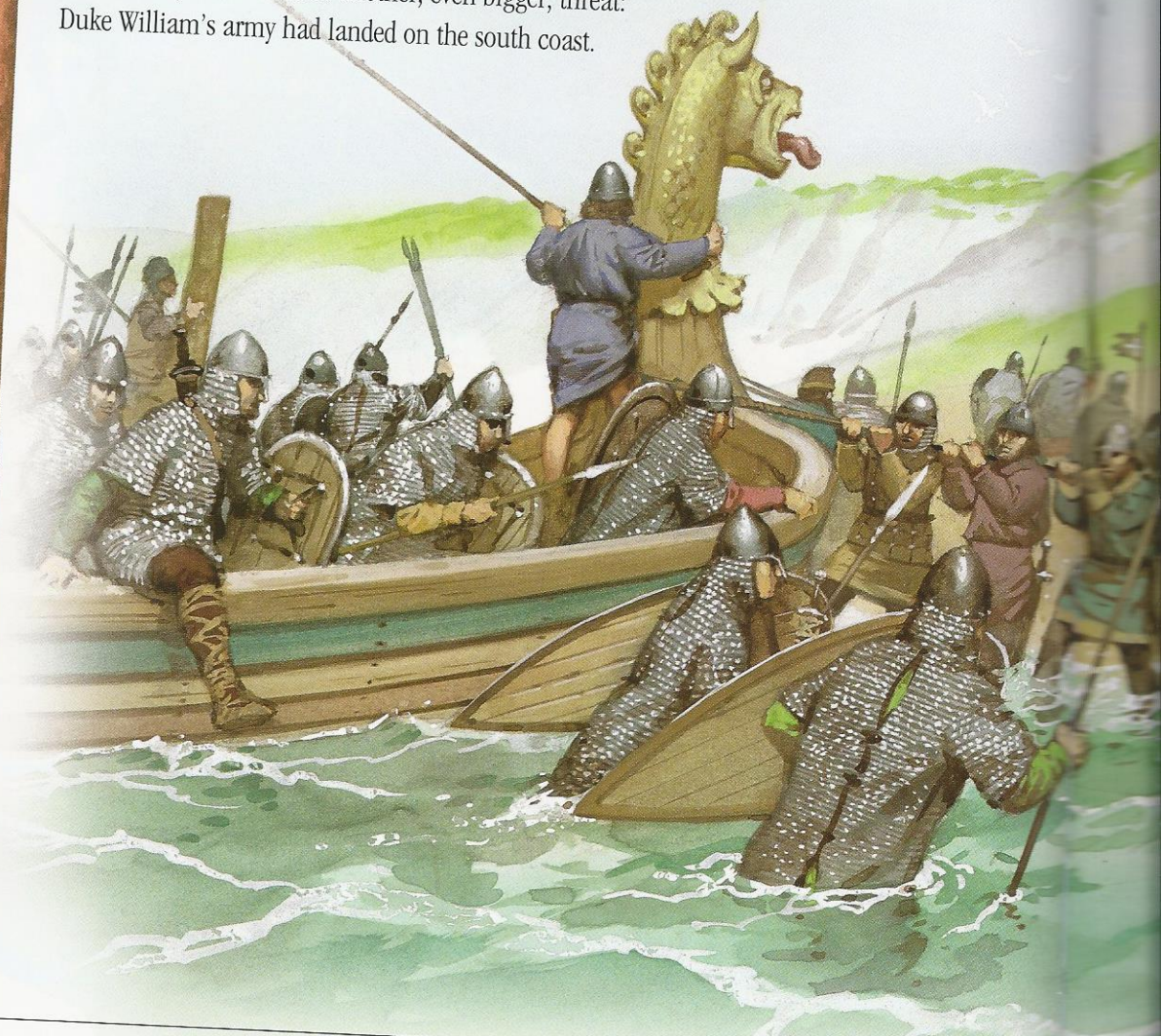


Norman Conquest

When King Edward 'the Confessor' died in January 1066, he was childless. Who was going to be the new English monarch? There were two candidates – Duke William of Normandy, and Harold, the son of Earl Godwin of Wessex. William claimed that the throne had been promised to him by Edward. But the Witan, or royal council, did not want a foreign ruler and recognized Harold as the new king.

Harold's first problem lay in the north, where a Norwegian army had landed and seized York. He marched swiftly north and defeated the invaders at Stamford Bridge. Almost immediately came news of another, even bigger, threat: Duke William's army had landed on the south coast.



- 1035** Death of Cnut; collapse of Scandinavian Empire.
- 1042** Edward the Confessor becomes king.
- 1051** Edward rumoured to have promised the English throne to William of Normandy.
- 1064** Harold Godwinson visits Normandy; Normans claim he promised loyalty to William.
- 1065** Harold's brother, Tostig, Earl of Northumberland, is expelled by rebels.
- 1066** Death of Edward the Confessor; William of Normandy claims the throne; William's army lands at Pevensey; William defeats Harold at the Battle of Hastings and is crowned king of England on Christmas Day.
- 1067–70** Normans crush rebellions in the north of England.
- 1077** Completion of the Bayeux tapestry.
Death of William I; his son William II, 'William Rufus', becomes king.



A mounted Norman knight is shown in this carving. In contrast, the English army had few mounted fighters.

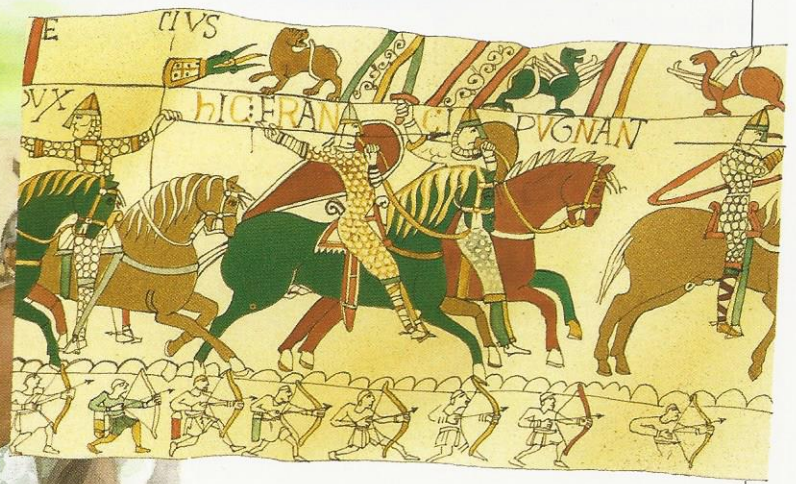
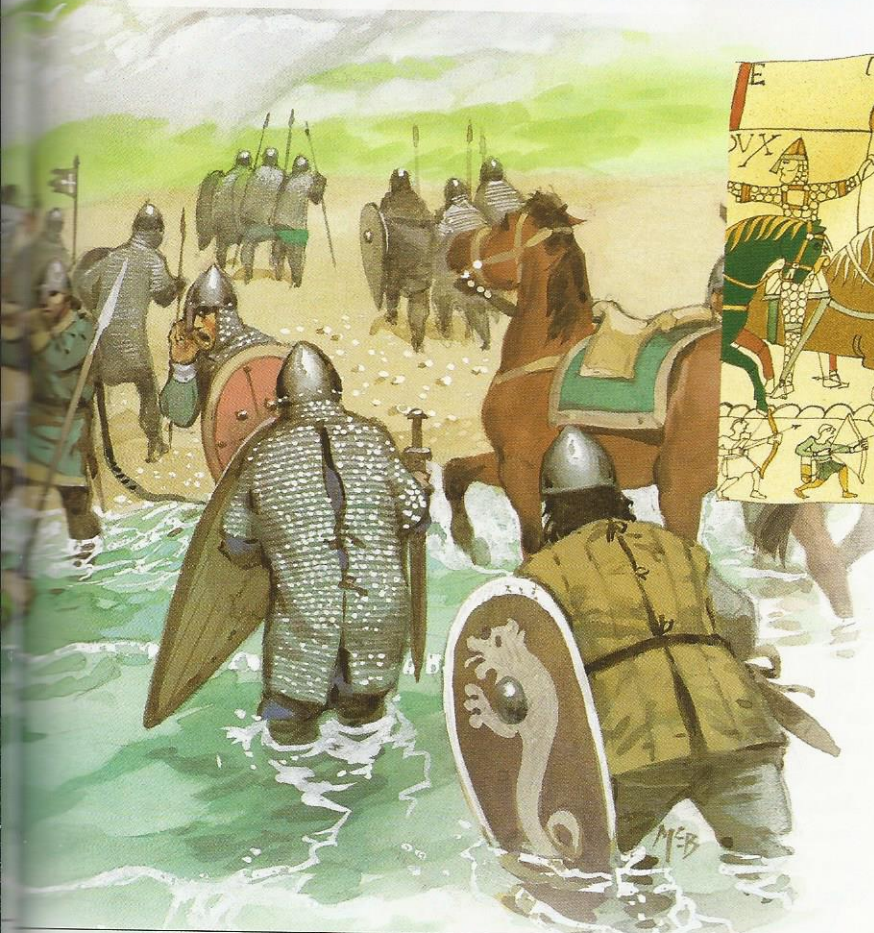
Turning his weary troops around, Harold hurried to face the Normans at Hastings. The battle was even at first, with the English lines standing firm on a hilltop. Then William's footsoldiers pretended to retreat and the defenders rushed down after them. This was fatal. The Norman cavalry closed in on both sides and butchered the English, and Harold himself was killed.

After his victory, William captured the ports of Romney and Dover, then advanced towards London. At Berkhamsted, he was met by the last remaining English leaders, who surrendered and promised loyalty to him. William the Conqueror was crowned on Christmas Day 1066 as king of England, in Westminster Abbey.

The Norman army crossed the English Channel to Sussex and, deciding against scaling the chalk cliffs at Beachy Head, landed slightly to the east, at Pevensey. In their ships, they brought with them cavalry horses and timber forts, ready to assemble. Their heavily armoured cavalry and skilled archers played a key part in the battle at Hastings.



The map shows England and Wales after the Norman invasion. The major castles throughout the land served as bases for imposing control or conquering the surrounding areas.



The Bayeux tapestry was made, probably in England, after the conquest. The embroidered linen strip, 69 metres long, tells the story of the invasion, from Harold's visit to William in 1064 to his defeat at Hastings.

William I was a strong, though just, ruler. He died in 1087, after being hurt when his horse stumbled. His son William Rufus succeeded him.

