

## William the Conqueror



In 1066, England would be invaded, this time for the last time, by a people from Europe. The Normans are often thought of as French or Frankish because Normandy is part of modern-day France. The Normans were in fact descendants of the "**Norsemen**" or the Northern men of Europe. The Normans were more Viking than Frank.

The Viking Normans had descended from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden to settle on the Northern coast of what is now France. Here they established kingdoms and created a system of government and rule commonly called the **Feudal System**. The Normans, like their Viking ancestors were known as often reckless and daring warriors who aligned themselves with each other with pledges of loyalty to successful Kings. This idea of loyalty and local lords or chieftains supporting Kings is a basic component of the Feudal system.

The Normans by this time had slowly converted to Christianity and were looking for new lands to conquer. They knew of the riches of Britain from their Viking ancestors and looked across the English Channel for new opportunities.

### **The Feudal System**

The Feudal system was a social system that can best be described as being based upon the idea of land ownership, loyalty to a king and the support of religious leaders. This idea of "land, loyalty and faith" would be carried to England. Land was where wealth was created. If you were a King and owned land, you could extract food and resources to make yourself wealthy and powerful. You would need people to work the land for you and you would need soldiers to make sure that you remained in control of those people. In the Feudal System, the King owned all the land, and he would **lease** or grant land to others in order to make sure the land was worked and to provide him with wealth. In return, these Lords or Barons would pledge their loyalty to the King and would provide him with wealth and soldiers. The church also played an important role in feudalism because church leaders, in return for being given land and gold from the King, would preach to the people that it was their duty to obey and work for the King. While the people worked hard miserable lives, they were promised their reward after they died if they obeyed. Essentially, Feudalism was a very effective way to govern a lot of people who would then produce the wealth for those at the top.

**Norsemen** - Another name for the Vikings. The term "Norse" meaning a reference to people from the North or Northern parts of Europe like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

**Feudal System** - a system of governing based upon land ownership, loyalty to a king and co-operation by the church to insure that people work the land and obey their king.

**Lease** - to allow another person the right to work your land or use your property for a fee and you still retain ownership.

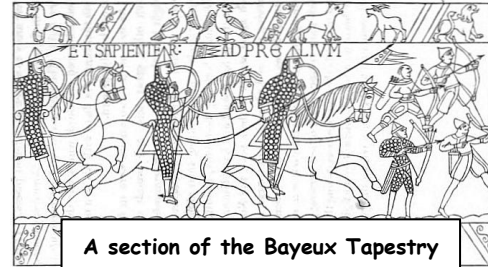
## William the Conqueror

William the Conqueror was a Norman King who would become the last person to successfully invade Britain. William was able to do this through careful planning and a reliance on a new military innovation, the mounted knight. A mounted knight was a heavily armored soldier and horse who would be a modern-day equivalent to an armored tank. These monstrous horses and heavily armored soldiers could charge onto a battlefield and decimate an opposing army. These Knights would become the most powerful fighting force in Europe until the English innovation of the Longbow.

### The Battle of Hastings and the Bayeux Tapestry

At the Battle of Hastings in 1066 AD, William defeated his Saxon opponent King Godwinson with the use of his mounted knights. It was a hard fought and violent battle that is believed to have included over 17,000 soldiers.

William himself brought close to 10,000 soldiers complete with supplies and horses across the English Channel. This was no small feat for someone in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. William is said to have taken nine months to build, supply and train his invasion force. Once on British soil, William quickly built-up fortifications and prepared himself for a definitive battle that would take place at a place called Hastings.



A section of the Bayeux Tapestry

The Battle of Hastings is best described in the famous **Bayeux tapestry**. The Bayeux tapestry is a 230 foot long, hand embroidered tapestry that depicts the events of the Battle of Hastings. In the Bayeux tapestry we can see how the Normans boarded their ships to invade England and used their mounted knights to defeat the Saxons. It was **commissioned** or created shortly after the battle and is not only an example of an early historical record, but also an example of how a victor can define his or her historical legacy by providing documentation of their version of events. There is no doubt that the Bayeux tapestry is an astonishing piece of historical evidence that records the style and weaponry of the Battle of Hastings, but there is also evidence that it favors a Norman version of events and is not completely **non-biased**, meaning that some events depicted in the tapestry have been used to justify the Norman side of the story.

Once William became king of England, he quickly used the feudal system to rule. The Normans would eventually replace all of the Saxon rulers and even to this day, the modern-day Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain is a direct descendant of William the Conqueror.

**Bayeux Tapestry** - a 230 foot long, hand embroidered depiction of the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066. It is famous for its detail and its insight into what life was like in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Commission** - to be paid or hired for doing a job.

**Bias** - to favor one side over another. Newspaper reporting should be non-biased meaning that it simply tells the facts and presents both sides of a story.

## William the Conqueror

**Directions:** READ the handout entitled; "Early Middle Ages - William the Conqueror" and then answer the following questions:

1. Use your handout to provide definitions for the following terms: (1 mark each)

Norsemen	Feudal System	Lease
Bayeux Tapestry	Commission	Bias

2. On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions using **COMPLETE SENTENCES**:

- a. In your own words, describe who the Normans were and why are they often confused with being called "French"? (2 marks for quality of response and inclusion of details)
  - b. In your own words, describe how the Feudal System worked in order to govern and created wealth. (2 marks for the quality of your response and evidence of thought and effort)
  - c. In your own words, describe who William the Conqueror was and what was the Battle of Hastings? (2 marks for quality of response and evidence of insight)
3. Using the Feudal System diagram that you sketched out last class, create your own, colored version that depicts how the Feudal System worked (include responsibilities of each division).

You will be marked out of 5 for quality of work, and evidence of effort

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_ /17