



—WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER—



Overview

William I, also known as **William the Conqueror** (c. 1028–1087), was the **first Norman King of England**, reigning from 1066 until his death.

Born in **Normandy, France**, he was the illegitimate son of Duke Robert I of Normandy. Despite this, he became **Duke of Normandy in 1035** and successfully defended his rule against rivals.

His most famous achievement was the **Norman Conquest of England in 1066**. After defeating King Harold II at the **Battle of Hastings**, William claimed the English throne, marking the start of **Norman rule**.

He introduced **feudalism**, built castles like the Tower of London, and ordered the **Domesday Book**, a great survey of England's lands and resources.

William died in 1087 and was buried in Caen, Normandy.



Answers to Important Questions and Key Vocabulary

What was William I's claim to the English throne?



- William argued that King Edward the Confessor (who ruled England from 1042 to 1066) had promised him the throne years earlier. Edward and William were distant relatives (second cousins), and William had once been a guest at Edward's court.
- William also claimed Harold Godwinson swore an oath of loyalty in 1064. However, when Edward died, Harold then claimed the throne for himself. William declared Harold as an illegitimate king.

Key Vocabulary

Monarchy

William I

Normandy

Edward the Confessor

Norman Conquest

Illegitimate

Harold Godwinson

Feudalism

Domesday Book

Reform

Rouen

Invasion

Legacy

What was Normandy at the time of William?



At the time of William the Conqueror, Normandy was a powerful duchy in northwestern France, located along the English Channel. It was a semi-independent territory under the rule of the Duke of Normandy, but it was still officially part of the Kingdom of France, ruled by the King of France.

What was William like as a King?



- William ruled with an iron fist, crushing any opposition, e.g. the Harrying of the North (1069-70).
- He introduced feudalism and ordered the Domesday Book, showing his administration skills.
- He built castles across England, including the Tower of London, to secure Norman control.
- William supported the Church and replaced English bishops with Normans.

How did William die?



- In July 1087, William led an attack on the French town of Mantes as part of a conflict with King Philip I.
- During the battle, he fell from his horse, causing severe internal injuries, possibly rupturing his intestines or abdomen.
- He was taken to Rouen, where he spent several weeks in pain before dying on September 9th, 1087.

Times in His Life

Early Life



- He was born around 1028 in Falaise, Normandy. He was the illegitimate son of Duke Robert I of Normandy and Herleva, a woman of lower noble birth.
- When William was about 7 or 8 years old (1035), his father died suddenly while returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Despite being illegitimate, William became Duke of Normandy.

Duke of Normandy

- His rule was unstable because many Norman nobles refused to accept him as their leader.
- With the help of Henry I of France, William fought back against rebels and secured his rule by winning the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes (1047).



Claim to the Throne and Norman Invasion

- William claimed that King Edward the Confessor (English ruler from 1042-1066) had promised him the throne. He also insisted that Harold Godwinson had sworn an oath to support William's claim.
- When Edward died in January 1066, the English nobles chose Harold Godwinson as king, ignoring William's claim. William gathered an army of around 7,000 men from Normandy and other parts of France.
- William's fleet landed at Pevensey on the south coast of England in late September. They met Harold's troops, (weary from fighting the Vikings) at Hastings. Harold was killed in battles and the nobles surrendered to William.



King of England

- As king of England (1066-1087), William transformed the country through military strength, strict rule, and administrative reforms.
- He reorganised England using feudalism, granting land to Norman nobles in exchange for military service. He also commissioned the Domesday Book (1086).



Death and Legacy

- In 1087, William invaded France and attacked the town of Mantes, but during the battle, he suffered a fatal injury after being thrown from his horse.
- He died on September 9th, 1087 and was buried at St. Stephen's Abbey in Caen.



Top 10 Facts!

1. Normandy was founded by Vikings in the 10th century & William was a descendant of them.
2. Due to his illegitimate birth, William was often called 'William the Bastard.'
3. William was crowned King of England on Christmas Day, 1066, at Westminster Abbey.
4. the Domesday Book, a detailed survey of England's land, resources, and population.
5. William commissioned the building of many monasteries and churches throughout his reign.
6. He used clever military strategies, such as feigned retreats during the Battle of Hastings to deceive his enemies.
7. William's descendants struggled to maintain control of both England and Normandy.
8. William married Matilda of Flanders.
9. Together they had four sons: Robert Curthose, William II (Rufus), Henry I, and Richard.
10. His tomb was disturbed during later conflicts, and only a thigh bone remains now.

William the Conqueror Timeline

1028: Born in Falaise, Normandy.

1035: Becomes the Duke of Normandy, aged 7 or 8.

1047: Victory at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes.

1051-1052 - Visit to England. Claims he is promised the throne.

1064 - William claims that Harold Godwinson swore an oath to support his claim.

886: Recaptures London from Vikings.

1066: Norman Conquest. William claims the throne.

1069-70: William suppresses rebellions in the North.

1085-86: William commissions the Domesday Book.

1087: Injured in a campaign in Rouen and dies.