Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Norman England, c1066–c1100

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The Norman Conquest, 1066

- Edward the Confessor died on 5 January 1066 without a child. Harold Godwinson was crowned the next day, but William of Normandy (who claimed Edward and Harold had promised him the throne), Harald Hardrada of Norway and Edgar Atheling also had claims.
- Harald Hardrada and Tostig won at Gate Fulford (20 September 1066), but were defeated and killed by Harold at Stamford Bridge (25 September). William landed at Pevensey on 28 September, and Harold rushed south.
- At the Battle of Hastings (14 October 1066), Harold was killed. William won because of Harold's tired army, his own preparation (cavalry and archers), feigned retreats that broke the English shield wall, the Pope's support, and luck: the wind delayed his crossing until Harold was in the north.
- William was crowned king on Christmas Day 1066, in Westminster Abbey.

Establishing control

- **Motte and bailey castles** were built quickly across the country, and later stone keeps such as the White Tower in London.
- Rebellions were crushed: Edwin and Morcar (1068); the northern rising of 1069, followed by the **Harrying of the North** (1069–70), when William's men destroyed villages, crops and animals, causing famine; Hereward the Wake at Ely (1070–71); and the Revolt of the Earls (1075).
- English earls lost their land to Norman barons, so by 1086 very few English landholders were left.

Life under the Normans

- The **feudal system**: the king granted land to tenants-in-chief (barons and bishops) in return for **knight service**. They granted land to knights, and peasants (**villeins**) worked the land. Everyone swore oaths of loyalty.
- **Forest law** turned large areas, such as the New Forest, into royal hunting land, with harsh punishments for poaching.
- The **Domesday Book** (1086) recorded who held land and what it was worth, for taxation and settling disputes.
- For most peasants daily life changed little, but the ruling class, the language of power (French and Latin) and the landscape of castles changed.

The Norman Church

- Lanfranc became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070. He reformed the Church, replaced English bishops with Normans, strengthened church courts and rebuilt cathedrals in the Romanesque style, such as Durham. New abbeys were founded, such as Battle Abbey.

After William

- William died in 1087. His son Robert Curthose got Normandy, and William Rufus became King of England (1087–1100). Rufus defeated a rebellion in 1088 led by his uncle, Odo of Bayeux, and died in a hunting accident in the New Forest in 1100.

Key terms

Housecarls	The professional soldiers of Anglo-Saxon kings and earls.
Motte and bailey castle	A castle with a wooden tower on a mound and a fenced courtyard.
Harrying of the North	William's destruction of northern England in 1069–70.
Feudal system	The system in which land was granted in return for service and loyalty.
Tenant-in-chief	A baron or bishop who held land directly from the king.
Knight service	Providing trained, armed knights for the king in return for land.
Villein	A peasant who worked the lord's land and couldn't leave without permission.
Domesday Book	The 1086 survey of land and resources in England.
Forest law	Harsh laws protecting the king's hunting land.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

Your notes

1. When did Edward the Confessor die?
2. Who won the Battle of Stamford Bridge?
3. When was the Battle of Hastings?
4. Where did William land in England in 1066?
5. What were motte and bailey castles?
6. What was the Harrying of the North (1069–70)?
7. Who led resistance at Ely in 1070–71?
8. What was the Domesday Book (1086)?

Answers

1. January 1066
2. Harold Godwinson
3. 14 October 1066
4. Pevensey
5. Quickly built castles with a wooden tower on a mound and a fenced courtyard
6. William's destruction of villages, crops and animals in the north
7. Hereward the Wake
8. A survey of land and resources in England

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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