

In 1066, William of Normandy (later called William "the Conqueror") defeated the last Anglo-Saxon King of England at the Battle of Hastings and declared himself to be the country's new sovereign. But just because King Harold Godwinson was dead didn't mean that England's people and the aristocracy were willing to accept the foreigner William as their king; in fact, to put it mildly, a lot of them were rather peeved off.

So then how did William remain on the throne for the rest of his life in spite of the fact that **he was opposed by most of his own people?** Why couldn't the Anglo-Saxons retake control of their country? And ultimately, after the spectacle that was Hastings, how did the Normans truly conquer, and keep, England?

Well, the one-sentence answer to those questions is that after being crowned king, William the Conqueror employed a combination of sound strategy, and brute force to limit the power of his rivals.

At his coronation the most powerful Anglo-Saxon nobles, including the teenage Prince Edgar (who was briefly chosen to succeed Harold before the Norman army arrived in London), as well as the influential earls of Northumbria and Mercia, and the Archbishop of York, were all made to publicly swear fealty to William.

To control local populations, the Normans swiftly implemented continental European feudalism in England. Several hundred of William's knights who had landed at Hastings alongside him were granted land confiscated from Anglo-Saxon nobles all across the country. In exchange for governing their fiefs in the King's name and providing him with soldiers, they were allowed to exploit the wealth of their assigned territories, and they quickly became England's new aristocratic class.

William's Norman nobles did have their work cut out for them though because the King was going to need their soldiers, and soon. So, funnily enough, the first major revolt against William actually was led by one of his own knights though.

Why would a Norman rise up against a Norman King? **Well, while the William's Conquest would go on to have enormous cultural ramifications (for example, the English language would be unrecognizable today if Norman French had never been mixed with Anglo-Saxon English), it wasn't actually carried out for cultural reasons.**

The Norman Conquest was, first and foremost, about rights to land: William believed he was entitled to England, and his knights believed they were entitled to rewards for helping him get it. So, the rebelling lord, Eustace of Boulogne revolted because he wasn't quite happy with the size of the fief that the Conqueror had seen fit to grant him in Kent.

William had returned to Normandy in early 1067, but his garrison at Dover Castle put down the rebellion before it could do much damage. That all being said, the Anglo-Saxon nobility didn't just sit back and allow the Normans to take everything from them without a fight. The prince, Edgar, also called Edgar Ætheling, as the last living member of the old Anglo-Saxon royal family, became a figure for the Anglo-Saxons to rally around. In 1068 Edgar arrived in Scotland where he gained King Malcolm III's support for his claim to England. Scotland was conveniently

located right next to the north of England which the Normans had yet to fully establish control over (the south was more easily pacified given its proximity to Normandy). Mercia and Northumbria in the north had also retained their Anglo-Saxon lords, instead of them being replaced by Normans, after the brother-Earls Edwin and Morcar had pledged their loyalty to William.

Unfortunately for him, as soon as they saw the opportunity to revolt, they took it. Unfortunately for the brothers though, just as William's mixed army of spearman, archers, and critically, cavalry, had beaten Harold at Hastings, it also put down Mercia and Northumbria.

Edwin was killed in battle in 1070 or 1071, and Morcar spent almost the rest of his life imprisoned in Normandy. Edgar the Aetheling having lost his two most powerful supporters, fled back north to Scotland.

His hopes of retaking England were extinguished once and for all when William invaded in 1072, and forced Malcolm III to swear fealty to him.

So, in taking control of the south of England, William and his knights had employed a simple, but effective strategy: the Normans would clear out a particular area of any remaining men loyal to the Anglo-Saxon cause, a castle (usually a motte-and-bailey) would be constructed in the area, a garrison and a lord loyal to William would be left to defend it, and the army would move on and repeat the whole thing over again.

In taking over more rebellious northern England though, William was undeniably brutal. His campaign of 1069-1070, often called the Harrying of the North, saw farmland torched and villages flattened indiscriminately; rebel and innocent bystander were equally liable to be put to the sword.

Exactly how many people died in the Harrying of the North is a matter of debate, but given William's army consisted of only a few thousand men, compared to hundreds of thousands of Anglo-Saxons, it's unlikely that enormous numbers of peasants were killed at his direct orders, if only because that would've been unfeasible.

However, indirectly, the Norman's campaign of terror certainly resulted in many thousands starving to death as William's army wreaked havoc across the countryside.

The economy of northern England wouldn't recover for at least a generation.

According to the Anglo-Norman scholar Orderic Vitalis, who wrote about fifty years after the conquest, the Harrying of the North saw some 100,000 people killed by starvation.

If that number is anywhere close to true, it means that William's savage suppression of the Anglo-Saxons in the north wiped out about 5% of England's entire population at the time.

And Vitalis was a self-professed fan of the Conqueror, meaning he wasn't really incentivized to be making up lies about him. That said, he wasn't even born until after the campaign, so his 100,000 number is certainly up for debate.

The castle-building that the Normans had begun in the south spread to the north as well after the Harrying, and it was those castles, technologically leaps and bounds ahead of those built by the Anglo-Saxons that served as both physical impositions

of Norman authority, and symbols of their might. Several of them including the castles at Windsor, Dover, and Warwick as well as the Tower of London still stand to this day.

William the Conqueror ultimately retained power then, because in addition to conquering he could also govern.

Even if sometimes he deemed it necessary to govern harshly. **Emblematic of that, two years before his death, in 1085, he commissioned the Domesday Book, a comprehensive survey of all the property in England.** It served as a record of the general state of William's kingdom two decades on from the conquest.

Notably it showed that 60% of the areas hardest hit by his army during the Harrying of the North remained wasteland.

No other land survey on the scale of the Domesday Book would be conducted in England for another 800 years, and the records from it still prove useful to those trying to understand the Norman period today.

Commissioning the Domesday Book would be his last great act though: William the Conqueror died in Normandy aged 59 in 1087, having set the stage for his descendants to reign in England until the present day.