

Did the Norman Conquest 'annihilate one kind of England'?

Enquiry: How much did England change during the Norman Conquest?



After the Norman conquest, many things had changed in England. However, not all of the changes affected everyone in the same way. In some ways, the lives of ordinary people didn't change that much. One way in which things definitely did change was how the country looked. The **landscape** was now covered in huge castles and new stone Norman-style churches. As well as this, entire towns and villages had been destroyed in the North of England as a result of rebellions. Land ownership was another big change under the Norman Conquest. Under the feudal system, William **confiscated** and **redistributed** land to his Norman nobles. By 1087, only two of the biggest landowners in England were English. The Norman nobles who were in charge of the land would gather taxes from the peasants who worked on it. This represented a big change for the lives of the Anglo-Saxon nobles who had enjoyed lots of land, wealth, and power under Edward the Confessor. Life for Saxon noblewomen also changed considerably. Many of them lost their husbands at the Battle of Hastings and found themselves forced to marry a Norman lord!



The church had changed a lot under the Norman Conquest. By 1087, there was only one remaining English Bishop in England – all the rest were Norman. There were new positions such as Archdeacons and Deans to help run the church. Even the buildings looked different as they had been rebuilt in stone, and were now much bigger and grander than before. Despite this, the church had been very central and important to Anglo-Saxon everyday life and it continued to be so under the Normans.



There were also changes to the English language after the Norman Conquest. Many English people started giving their children French names like John, Robert, and William and lots of French words were also added to English, like “beef” and “pork”. There was tension between some Anglo-Saxons and the Normans as a result of the fact that they didn’t speak the same language. French was used in **government** and by the Normans so it was the language of the wealthy. The Anglo-Saxons continued to make efforts to speak and remember English as it was part of their identity.



Before the Normans took over, the Anglo-Saxons had used the **local community** to stop people from breaking the law. This system worked, so William kept lots of it the same. However, he did make some changes to the law in order to protect his Normans. As there had been so many rebellions against the Normans, William changed the law to try and prevent this. If a Norman was found dead, then everyone in the area had to pay a huge **fine** even if they couldn't afford it. They also changed the law so that forests in England were considered 'royal' and only Normans could hunt there – they banned peasants from hunting there with harsh punishments.



Despite all these changes, the majority of people in England were still peasants who lived and worked in the countryside. In many ways their everyday life didn't change. Traditional techniques and methods continued. For most peasants the only difference was that instead of paying taxes to an Anglo-Saxon, they now paid their taxes to a Norman Lord. Peasants continued to live in the same type of houses, wear the same clothes, and complete the same type of work. In many ways their lives were the same as before the conquest.



Glossary

Landscape: What a country looks like.

Confiscated: To take things away from who they belong to.

Redistributed: To give things to people who didn't previously have them.

Government: Those who are in charge of the country.

Local Community: The people who live together in a small area.

Fine: Paying money as a punishment.



Comprehension questions:

1. Whose lives did not change that much after the conquest?
 2. How did the landscape of England change?
 3. How big were the changes to land ownership?
 4. Explain one way that the Church stayed the same.
 5. Why did language cause tension between Saxons and Normans?
 6. Why did William make changes to the law?
 7. In what ways were the lives of peasants changed?
- Challenge: Was there more change or continuity in the lives of peasants?

Sentence starter:

Overall there was more change/continuity for peasants...

An example of this was...



Change and continuity

Things that had stayed the same under the Normans	Things that had changed under the Normans



Extension Question

Did the Norman Conquest really ‘annihilate one kind of England?’

Use the sentence starters and key words below to answer this question.

Sentence starters:	Key words
<i>I agree/disagree with this statement because...</i>	Dramatic change
<i>One reason I think this is...</i>	Partial change
<i>An example to support this is...</i>	Continuity
<i>Therefore I believe...</i>	Government
	Language
	Peasants

