

The Domesday Book

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

Ms Dawson



William wanted to know exactly what he owned so that he could collect the right amount of tax from his Anglo-Saxon **subjects**. There were several reasons that William wanted to do this. Firstly, he wanted to make sure that he was able to collect enough money to fund building castles and pay his soldiers. There was some remaining risk of **invasion** from Denmark. So William needed his army ready to defend England. William also wanted to know how much tax people had paid under their previous King, Edward the Confessor. This was so that he could make sure his taxes weren't too much higher. In this way, William could show his Anglo-Saxon subjects that he was continuing to respect **customs** from Edward's time. This was important, as although he wanted to gather as much as he could from the Saxons, he didn't want to upset them too much. William knew high taxes could cause the people of England to rebel.



William decided to get his Normans to complete a **survey** of all of the land and goods in the country. The information collected was taken to the city of Winchester. At Winchester it was put together to form the **Domesday Book**. It later became known as the Domesday Book because it was supposed to be a complete record of judgement that would last forever. In order to do this, William sent **Royal Commissioners** all over the country to collect information. They took over a year to visit 13,000 villages and towns. The commissioners asked a huge number of questions to get an accurate picture of what was on each estate. They asked who managed the land, how much land there was, how many peasants worked on the land, and they counted all of the **livestock**. A writer from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle commented that they were so thorough, that not a single cow or pig was left out of the book!



Lots of the Saxons weren't very happy about answering the questions or paying the taxes. But they often obeyed because anyone caught lying would be killed. There may still have been some inaccuracies as the Normans spoke French or Latin, but the Saxons did not. This would have made it difficult to communicate and gather accurate information. In addition, although the Normans surveyed almost everywhere, there were some areas in the country that were missed. The Normans also didn't speak to women or children when they visited different places.



The book revealed that all the land in England was owned by around 200 Norman **Barons**. In some ways this wasn't different from the situation in Edward the Confessor's reign. Under the Anglo-Saxon kings the majority of the land was owned by a small number of nobles. The big difference was that by 1086 they were all Normans! The book was completed by 1086 and was a huge achievement, no later medieval king or queen has achieved anything like it. However, William died the year after it was completed. So William might not have been able to make good use of all the information that he collected.



Glossary

Subjects: The people who William ruled over.

Invasion: Entering a country with an army to try and take over.

Customs: Traditional ways of doing things.

Survey: A detailed record.

Domesday Book: William's record of English land and property.

Royal Commissioners: Normans who William sent to ask questions and complete the Domesday survey.

Livestock: Farm animals.

Barons: Important Nobles who controlled a lot of land.



Comprehension Questions

1. What did William want to gather?
2. Why did William need to know exactly the right amount to gather?
3. What information was contained in the Domesday Book?
4. How was this information gathered?
5. What problems were there with the way that the information was gathered?
6. What did the Domesday Book show about England?
7. Challenge: Why was the Domesday Book so useful to William?

Sentence starter:

The Domesday Book was useful because it helped William to...

For example...



Extension Question

According to the findings of the Domesday Book, how much had England changed under William the Conqueror?

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

Sentence starters:	Key words
<i>In some ways, England had changed a lot under William because...</i>	Barons
<i>The Domesday book showed that...</i>	Owned
<i>This meant that...</i>	Taxes
<i>In some ways, England hadn't changed because...</i>	Customs
<i>An example of this is...</i>	Organised
<i>This is important because...</i>	

