

History

How did a Norman become King of England?

Lesson 4 of an enquiry of 4

4. The Battles of 1066

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Preparations for the Battle of Hastings

Harold Godwinson had only just fought a hard battle against the Vikings in the North. He had raced down to face William of Normandy, who was on the South Coast. Harold was hoping to surprise William by getting there quickly. Harold had picked up **reinforcements** along the way in London but not all the soldiers who fought with him in the Battle of Stamford Bridge were in his army to face William. Some of the reinforcements Harold had were less well trained soldiers than those who fought at Stamford Bridge. Harold did have the support of his loyal **huscarls** who had fought against Harald Hardrada but they may have been tired from the long march south and the battle.

William was ready to fight. He had spent the past 2 weeks in the South of England. His army had **raided** the local area and scared the local English people. He had also built a wooden castle at Hastings to protect his army.



The Battle

The day was 14th October 1066. Harold's 8000-strong army positioned themselves at the top of a hill. Their tactic was to form a long defensive **shield wall** of tightly packed soldiers. Their position was good because it was hard for the Normans to fight uphill.

William's army had archers firing first. Because Harold's army was on a hill, the Norman cavalry struggled to charge at them. The soldiers fought hard for hours on end. At one point, a rumour is said to have spread across the battlefield that William had been killed. However, William is said to have taken off his helmet and called out that he was still alive. This is said to have inspired his troops.

The Normans still struggled to break the English shield wall. William pretended to **retreat** his men. The lesser trained English soldiers thought that the Normans were fleeing and broke their shield wall, leaving big gaps in it, to chase after the Normans. However, the Normans regrouped and took advantage of the unorganised English army. The battle continued but now the shield wall was broken, the Normans **slaughtered** the English.



Harold's Death

It is not known exactly how Harold died. Some stories say that he was killed by knights and one part of the Bayeux Tapestry says he was killed by an arrow to the eye. The words above it say 'King Harold is killed'.

Harold Godwinson's time as King of England was short, lasting less than a year.



Aftermath of the Battle of Hastings

The Battle of Hastings was a hard battle but the Normans were **victorious**. Now Harald Hardrada and Harold Godwinson were dead, William of Normandy was the last man standing. However, he still had much to do.

Winning the Battle of Hastings was one thing but now he had to take control of the whole of England. Remember, William had just killed England's King so he was probably not the most popular person in the country! William thought the English nobles would accept him as King but they did not.

William set about putting down small rebellions around Kent and London. Eventually, the English nobles surrendered to him. On Christmas Day 1066, he was finally crowned King of England at Westminster Abbey in London. It was a great achievement for William and Matilda but ruling England was not an easy job, as he would find out during his time as King.



Glossary

Tactic - an action or strategy that has been planned

Reinforcements - extra soldiers.

Huscarls - professional soldiers and bodyguards to the King.

Raided - Quick attack, often to get resources such as food or money.

Shield Wall - A defensive tactic used by the English. It tightly packed soldiers together so there were no gaps for the enemy to get through.

Retreat - Moving back or withdrawing

Slaughtered - Killed in a bloodthirsty way

Victorious - Winning a victory



Comprehension Questions

1. Why might Harold Godwinson and his army be tired before the Battle of Hastings?

Sentence Starter: Harold's army might be tired before the Battle of Hastings because...

2. What tactic did the English use in the battle?
3. What tactic did the Normans use in the battle?
4. How did Harold Godwinson die?
5. When was William crowned King of England and where?

Challenge Question: Was William's victory in the Battle of Hastings because of William's good leadership or Harold Godwinson's mistakes?

