

Knowledge Map: How far was the Norman Conquest a 'seismic change'?

Summary:	The Norman Conquest has been described by many historians as hugely important, with some saying it's one of the most important changes in English history. Marc Morris described it as a 'seismic change'. The Norman Conquest happened as a result of the succession crisis in 1066 when the Saxons, Vikings and Normans all had a claim to the English throne. William of Normandy won the Battle of Hastings and became king of England. To secure his rule William and the Normans changed the lives of many in England; using violence such as the Harrying of the North to stop uprisings and introducing new concepts such as the Feudal System, the Domesday Book and new systems of law and order.
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England before 1066

Summary

To understand the impact of the Norman Conquest we must first understand what life in England was like before 1066. England was considered a wealthy country, although the majority were peasants. It was ruled in Earldoms. Both the Vikings and the Normans had connections to the country.

Key knowledge

1.	Earldoms	England was divided into Earldoms, each of which was controlled by the rich and wealthy Earls who helped the King to run the country. The Earls collected taxes and made laws. The most important Earldom was Wessex.
2.	Wealth	England was a very wealthy country as a result of having a lot of natural resources. It had its own currency system and traded with France. The population was about 2 million.
3.	Religion	Religion was very important, and almost everyone would be Catholic. The Church would collect taxes and people were very afraid of disobeying the Pope.
4.	The Witan	The Witan were a group of important people who advised the King on his decision. However the King did not have to follow their advice.
5.	Edward I	Otherwise known as Edward the Confessor was king of England from 1042 – 1066.

William of Normandy becomes King of England

Summary

When Edward the Confessor died in 1066, he died without an heir to the throne. The Saxons, Vikings and Normans all made claims to the throne. By the end of 1066 Harold Godwinson had been killed at the Battle of Hastings and William of Normandy was king of England.

Key knowledge

6.	Harold Godwinson	Was the Earl of Wessex when Edward the Confessor was king. When Edward the Confessor died the Witan made Harold king of England.
7.	Harald Hardrada	The Viking claimant to the throne. The Vikings had ruled England in the early 11 th century and still had close connections to the North.
8.	William of Normandy	The Norman claimant to the throne. He was related to Edward the Confessor and some Norman sources suggest he had been promised the throne by Edward.

9.	Battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge	Fought between Harald Hardrada and the Vikings and Harold Godwinson and the Saxon in the North of England. The Vikings won the Battle of Fulford but Harald Hardrada was killed at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, ending the Viking threat.
10.	The Battle of Hastings	While Harold was fighting in the North William of Normandy was preparing to invade. He had a large army, the support of the Pope (the Papal Banner) and was extremely well prepared. At the start of the battle the Saxons had a strong position and an effective shield wall. However Norman tactics, such as the feigned retreat, meant that Harold Godwinson was killed in battle and William of Normandy became King of England.

The Feudal System

Summary

When William became King of England in 1066 he had to take control of a country that didn't particularly want a 'foreign' king. He had to decide how he was going to govern and control the land, so introduced the Feudal System to distribute land and power.

Key knowledge

11.	King	As King, William was at the top of the Feudal System, in return for loyalty from the barons and nobles, the King gave them land.
12.	Barons/nobles	These were wealthy and powerful men who would be loyal to the King. The majority of them would have been Norman, although some Saxons who had been loyal to William would also have been given land.
13.	Knights	The knights were excellent fighters who agreed to fight when asked, in return for land. The more land a baron was given the more knights they had to provide.
14.	Peasants	They made up about 80% of the population and were the poorest members of society. They were given land to farm by the knights and had to be prepared to fight if needed. They had very few rights. The poorest peasants were called villeins. They did not have any freedom.

Knowledge Map: How far was the Norman Conquest a 'seismic change'? Side 2

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Rebellions

Summary

In the first years after becoming King of England William faced a number of rebellions, firstly from the remaining Godwine family, but also from peasants and Saxon earls, he also faced a rebellion from Norman barons.

Key knowledge

15.	Castles	William and the Normans quickly built large numbers of Motte and Bailey castles across England to gain control of the local land.
16.	Hereward the Wake	Led rebellions across the East against the Normans.
17.	Harrying of the North	As revenge for revolts against him William set fire to large areas of land in the North destroying crops and livestock. Men, women and children were murdered. It was difficult for the land to recover from.
18.	The Revolt of the Earls 1075	Both Norman and Saxon Earls revolted against William. The revolt was unsuccessful and marked the end of rebellions during William's reign. After this the last Saxon earl was dead.

Life in Norman England

Summary

Everyday life in Norman England changed, villages were destroyed to make way for castles; the rules around crime and punishment changed; language was different; new religious buildings were built and life changed for many Saxon noblewomen.

Key knowledge

19.	Villages	Many villages were destroyed to make way for castles. Larger towns began to grow and markets became more important.
20.	Peasants	Most people were peasants. They worked in farming under the control of their Lords. Their day to day lives stayed similar and farming methods stayed the same. Less peasants were freemen than in Saxon England.
21.	Language	Many Norman words were introduced to the English language like pork and beef. There were some problems as the Saxon and Norman nobles didn't speak the same language
22.	Religion	Religion was very important in every day life in Saxon England and William of Normandy was also very religious and had many churches built out of stone and made bigger and grander than before.

Key knowledge

23.	Law and Order	William introduced strict punishments against anyone attacking Normans and made the forests 'royal' so peasants were not allowed to hunt there.
24.	Women	Women were not seen as equal to men. Their lives were very different depending on how much money they had. After the Battle of Hastings widowed Saxon noblewomen were expected to marry Normans.

The Domesday Book

Summary

William wanted to know exactly how much people in England owned so that he knew how much to tax them so he set up the Domesday Book. William needed taxes so he could pay for castles and soldiers.

Key knowledge

25.	The Domesday Book	A survey to found out how much everyone in the country owned. 13,000 towns and villages were visited. It was published in the Domesday Book in 1086.
26.	Reaction	The Saxons weren't very happy about it, but not many refused to give information as they were scared they'd be killed if they didn't.
27.	Norman Barons	The Domesday Book revealed that all the land was owned by 20 Normans. Before the Norman Conquest the land would have been owned by a small number of Anglo - Saxon nobles so the big difference was it was now owned by Normans.
28.	Women and children	No women or children were spoken to on the visits.

Key words

Seismic	Very sudden or very dramatic.
Heir	The person legally entitled to take over the throne.
Conquest	When something (land) is taken over (usually by an army) and controlled by someone else.
Tax	A compulsory payment made to people in charge (the King).