

# Depth Study: William takes power

- **How did William crush English resistance?**
- **How did the English fight back?**

**Source A** An account of William's generosity. Written by William of Poitiers in about 1071.

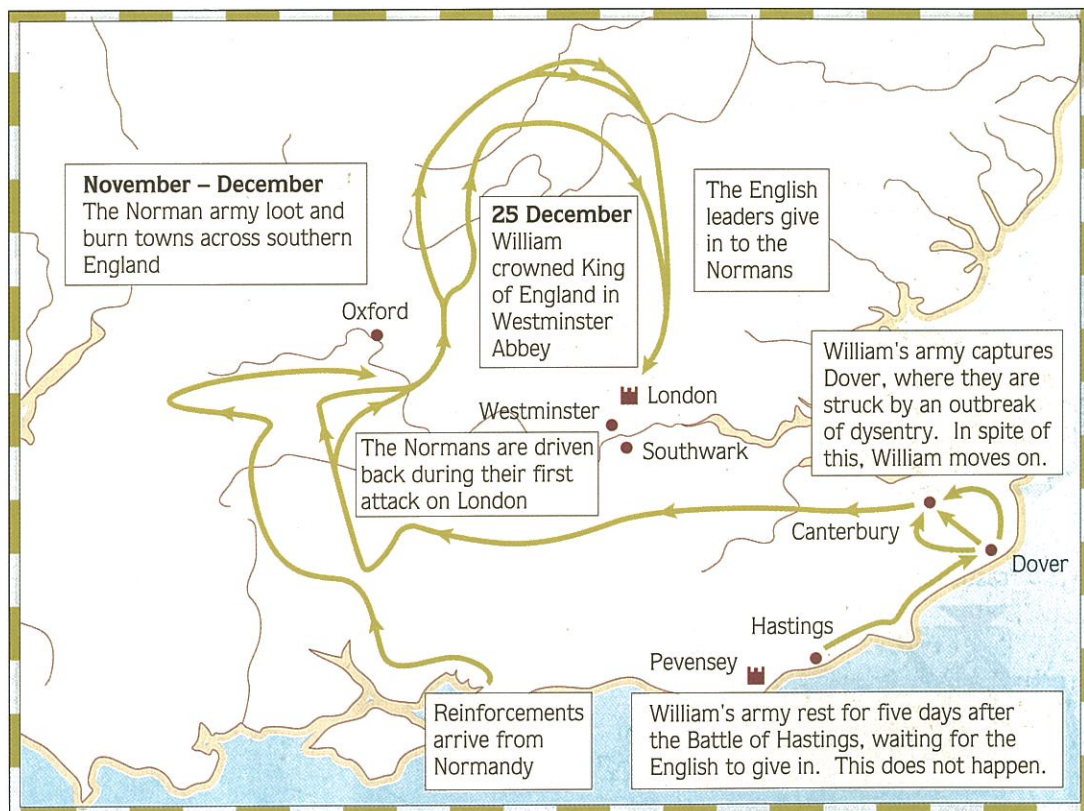
## Taking the throne

The day after the Battle of Hastings the Norman invaders were still in a dangerous situation. William knew that if he gave the English time to recover they might gather another army or choose another king. William acted quickly and ruthlessly, while the English argued about what to do next.

William marched to Dover where the English, stricken with fear, prepared to surrender. But our men, greedy for loot, set fire to the castle. The Duke, unwilling that those who had offered to give up should suffer loss gave them money for the damage. Having captured the castle the Duke spent eight days making it stronger.

**Source B** William strikes hard. Written by Florence of Worcester in about 1115.

Archbishop of York, the people of London and Earls Edwin and Morcar planned to put Prince Edgar [a cousin of Edward the Confessor] on the throne. But while many were preparing to fight, the Earls went home with their army. Meanwhile Duke William was **laying waste** Sussex, Kent, Hampshire, Middlesex and Hertfordshire, burning villages and slaughtering the inhabitants. He was then met by Edwin and Morcar and the leading men of London who **submitted** to him.



**Source C** William's march on London

- 1 Copy the outline of southern England in Source C. Read Source B and shade in the counties William attacked. Use Source E on page 7 to help you.
- 2 Compare Sources A and B. Why do you think William was kind to the English in Dover but so cruel as he marched towards London?
- 3 How did Edwin and Morcar behave in Source B? Why do you think they did this?

### Key words

- Dysentery** A disease causing severe diarrhoea.
- Lay waste** Rob and destroy.
- Submitted** Agreed to accept him as king.

### Investigations

### William's coronation – a bad omen

On Christmas Day 1066 William was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey. The English and Normans swore to serve the new king and cheered him so loudly that Norman troops on guard thought there was a riot and burned down nearby houses. This was a grim beginning for William. It showed the deep distrust that remained between the conquerors and the conquered. For the next five years the Normans had to crush repeated rebellions and invasions.

### William I – a hard ruler

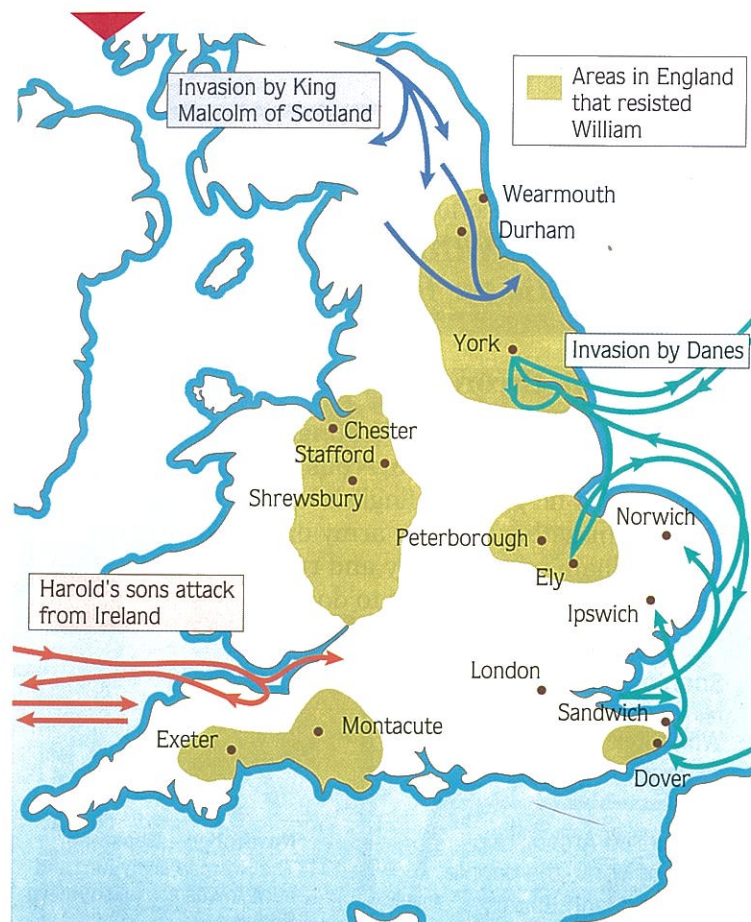
William set about ruling England with a firm hand. Castles were built in important cities. The Norman barons who had helped him win at Hastings were rewarded with lands taken from English thegns. As Sources B and C show, William's early actions made the English unhappy with their new king.

William promised to rule his people as well as the best kings before him. All the same he laid on heavy taxes and then went to Normandy leaving Bishop Odo [his half brother] and William Fitz Osborn in charge. They built castles far and wide throughout the land, oppressing the people and things went from bad to worse.

**Source F** The Bayeux Tapestry, showing the first Norman castle built in England. Many others soon followed.



**Source D** Threats to William 1067–1070



**Source E** From the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

### Investigations

- 1 Look at Source D. Some areas of the country were more likely to rebel than others. Why do you think this was? (Clue: Where are they? Who might help?) Fill in the following chart.

#### English rebellions against William

Area that rebelled	Reasons
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

- 2 Draw an outline map of England. You have to build 25 castles for William. Where will you put them? Write a caption explaining your reasons. Compare your plans with what really happened by looking at Source K on page 22.
- 3 Look at the text and Sources E and F. What might a Norman have thought about what William was doing? What might an English person have said?

### The English fight back

In 1067 the first rebellion against the Normans was led by Edric the Wild in Herefordshire. This sparked off other revolts in Kent. The following year the city of Exeter rebelled. William dealt with these with a mixture of firmness and mercy. But his patience was wearing thin when the worst crisis broke in 1068–9.

The north was the most independent part of England. When William tried to raise taxes and send in Norman lords this led to a widespread uprising in the north to put Prince Edgar on the throne. William crushed this in 1068 and left troops stationed in two new castles at York. To his fury the rebels rose again in 1069, this time with Danish support.

William came to York only to learn that the Danes had fled. The king ordered his men to repair the castles. He set out to search the forests and remote mountains, stopping at nothing to hunt down the rebels hidden there. He cut down many, destroyed the lairs of others and burned homes. Nowhere else had William shown such cruelty. His fury was blind and he punished the innocent with the guilty. He ordered that all crops, herds and food be burned, so that the whole region north of the Humber had nothing to live on.

**Source G** The rebellion in the north. From the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

William gave Northumberland to Earl Robert but the people of Durham massacred the earl and 900 soldiers. Prince Edgar and the rebels came to York and the people of the city joined them. William came from the south and surprised them, ravaging York and killing hundreds. Then the Danes came with 240 ships into the Humber and joined the English leaders. With a huge and joyful army they stormed York, killed hundreds of Normans, burned the castle and captured a vast treasure.



**Source H** William's revenge. By Orderic Vitalis, written in about 1130.

**Source I** The Bayeux Tapestry, showing Normans burning a house

There was so great a famine that men ate human flesh and horses, dogs and cats. Some sold themselves into slavery while others died on the roads. Corpses rotted in the streets because there was no one to bury them.

**Source J** Famine in the north. By Symeon of Durham, a monk, writing in the early 1100s.

## William crushes English resistance

Throughout the winter of 1069–70 William led his army across the north of England burning houses and killing people. When he had finished, the area was a blackened waste. Although Hereward the Wake fought on around Ely, the last real threat to the Norman conquest had been wiped out. The effects of the damage William caused lasted for many years (Source K). He may have believed he was dealing with rebels and disloyal traitors (Source L), but there is some evidence that his merciless actions troubled him on his death bed. (Source J).

### Source K

Twenty years after William's punishment of the north, many villages were still wasteland

**Source L** William deals with the English. By William of Malmesbury, writing in about 1135.

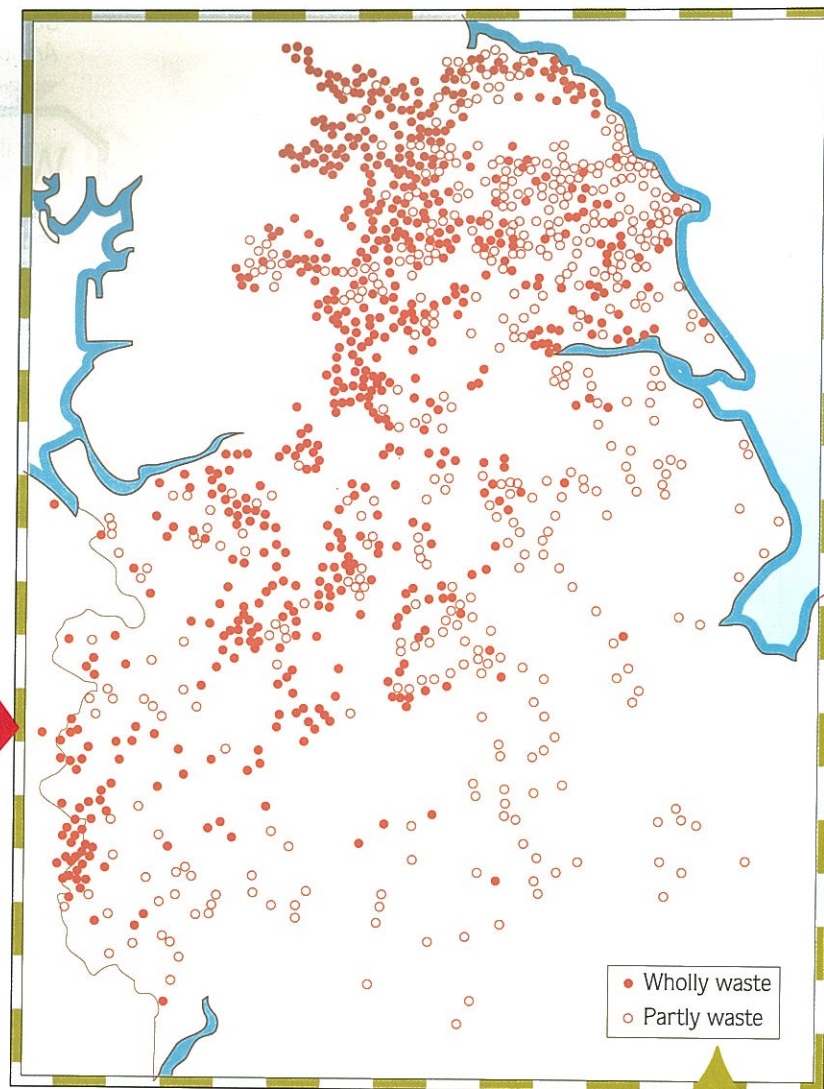
At times the king was quite severe with the English, for he found hardly any of them loyal. This angered him and he took from the greater of them first their wealth, then their land and finally, in some cases, their lives.

**Source M** William's deathbed confession. By Orderic Vitalis, in about 1130. Orderic was not there and is giving his own opinion on what William said.

I fell on the northern shires like a hungry lion. I ordered their houses and corn with all their tools and goods to be burnt and great herds of cattle to be butchered. I took my revenge by giving them famine. Alas, I kept the throne by so many crimes.

### Remember...

- William was faced with threats from all sides after 1066.
- The rebellion in the north was the most serious and William smashed it ruthlessly.



### Investigations

- 1 Copy and complete the following table. You will find the information in the sources given.

#### The crushing of the north 1068–70

Causes of the rebellion (text and Source G) \_\_\_\_\_

English actions (Source G) \_\_\_\_\_

William's actions (Sources G, H and I) \_\_\_\_\_

Results (Sources J and K) \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 Historians have said that William punished the people in the north to teach the whole country a lesson. Explain what this means.
- 3 Look at Sources J and M. How did William use famine as a weapon? What were the advantages and disadvantages of this?
- 4 How do the writers of Sources L and M agree and disagree in their views of William's actions?

## Keeping a kingdom

### How did William keep control of England?

#### The feudal system

By 1071 William was master of England. But how was he to stay in charge? His answer was in what he did with the land. William claimed that because he had conquered England, all the country now belonged to him. He used some of this to buy the loyalty and support of the great Norman barons who had helped him in his invasion. William **granted** them huge estates. In return, they agreed to help him rule England by controlling the local people, collecting taxes and fighting for him.

This is known as the feudal system. It affected the lives of everyone in the country (Source A).

#### Source A

The feudal system



#### Source B

A knight swears loyalty to his lord

### Key words

**Grant** Not a gift. A strong king like William could take the land away again.

- The feudal system was an exchange of land for services.

### Remember...

**The king**  
Promises to rule well  
Grants land to barons and bishops



**Barons and bishops** (about 300)  
Services: Loyalty to the king  
Supply knights for the army for about 40 days a year  
Control local people  
Collect taxes  
Barons grant land to their knights and promise them protection and justice



**Knights** (about 4000)  
Services: Loyalty to their lord  
Fight on his orders for 40 days a year  
Knights grant land to their peasants and promise them protection and justice



**Peasants** (about 1.5 million)  
Services: Obey their lord  
Work on his land  
Pay taxes



### Investigations

- 1 Copy the following statements and match each statement to the right person.

King    Baron    Knight    Peasant

- I must work on my lord's land.
- I own all the land.
- I grant land to my knights.
- I must fight for 40 days a year when my lord orders.

Make up one comment of your own for each person.

- 2 'The feudal system made sure everyone had a master'. Use Source A to explain this statement.
- 3 How does Source B show that swearing loyalty was an important ceremony? How important was loyalty to the feudal system?
- 4 Look back to Source D on page 6. Do you think England had something like the feudal system before 1066? Why?

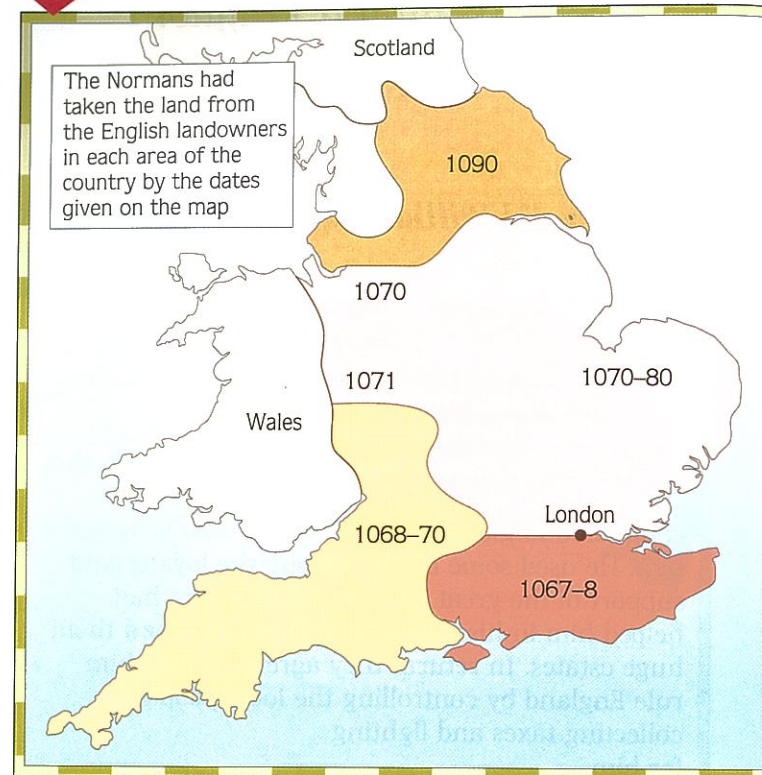
## The English lose their lands

At first, William was content to allow English eárls to keep their lands – if they were loyal to him. He gave Norman knights the lands of English thegns who had been killed in the battles of 1066. Later, William took the land and property of English eárls who were not loyal to him. Innocent people were driven off their lands by force. By 1086 nearly all farmlands and villages had been taken by the Normans.

## The Domesday Book

In 1085 William had to raise an army to stop an invasion from Norway. He paid for this by raising taxes from the English. In 1086 William sent out officials to visit 13 000 villages in England. They collected details of what land and property everybody owned. Only the counties in the far north and a few large towns such as London were missed out. Their findings were gathered together in two great volumes known as the Domesday Book. William used these to decide how much tax people should pay.

Source C The English thegns lose their land to the Normans



Source D What William's officials wanted to find out about each village



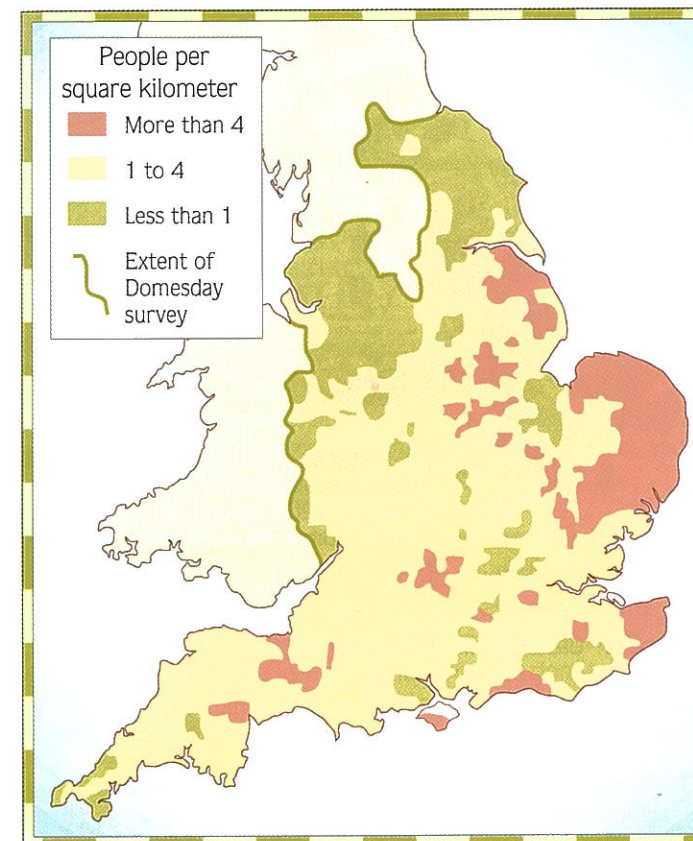
## The Book of Judgement

The Domesday Book was given its name by the English. To them, the work of William's officials seemed like the Day of Judgement (or 'Doom's Day') when God was to make an account of people's actions during their lives.

The book gave details of who held the land in England in 1086. From this we can see how far the Normans had taken over by then.

Only 2 of the 180 biggest landowners were English. From the information in the Domesday Book, we can build up a clear picture of life in England in the early Middle Ages.

Source F Who held the land in England in 1086?



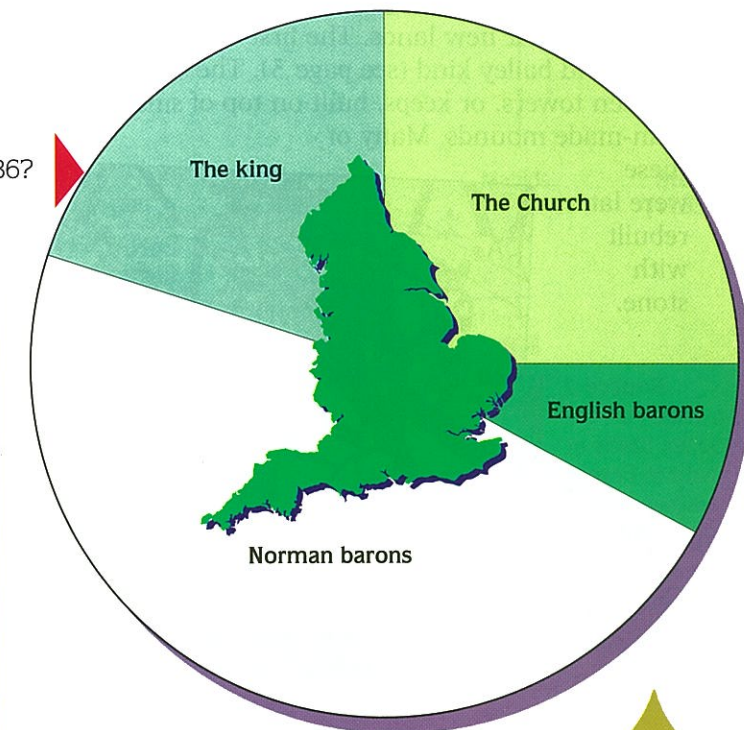
Source G Where people lived in England in 1086, according to the Domesday survey

- The feudal system helped William to reward his barons and keep control of England.
- The Domesday Book gives us a clear picture of England 20 years after the Norman Conquest.

Remember...

Source E The Domesday Book for Dedham in Essex

Roger de Raismes holds Dedham. In 1066 there were 7 villagers, now 5; always 24 smallholders. Then 4 slaves, now 3. Then the lord had 2 ploughs, now 3. Then the men had 10 ploughs, now 5. There is woodland enough for 250 pigs; 40 acres of meadow; then 1 mill, now 2; then 5 cows, now 3; then 40 sheep, now 100; then 25 pigs, now 30. Value always £12.



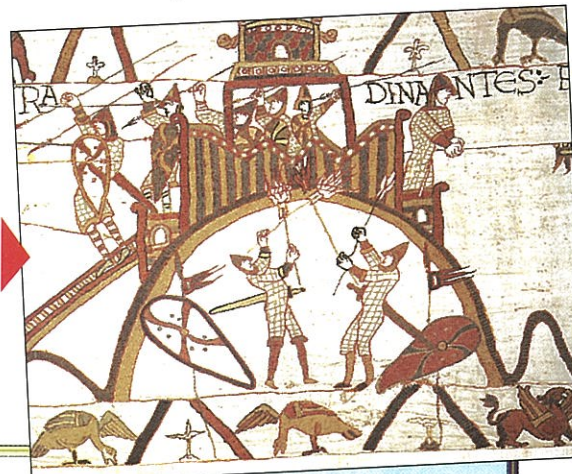
## Investigations

- 1 Look at Source C. Find your home area. When did the Normans take over the land? Compare this source to Source D on page 16. Can you suggest why many English thegns lost their land?
- 2 Write out the questions asked by William's officials in Source D. Answer as many as you can using the information about Dedham in Source E.
- 3 Imagine you are a Norman knight, Hugo de Courcy. William has granted you the village of Southbourne. Sketch and describe your village using Sources D and E to help you. There are other items you might like to add: quarries, iron mines, wild horses, a castle, cartloads of wood.
- 4 Look at Sources D and E. How could the Domesday Book help historians to gather information such as that in Sources F and G?
- 5 Compare Source G with Source E on page 7. Name three counties which had a high population and three which had a low population in 1086.

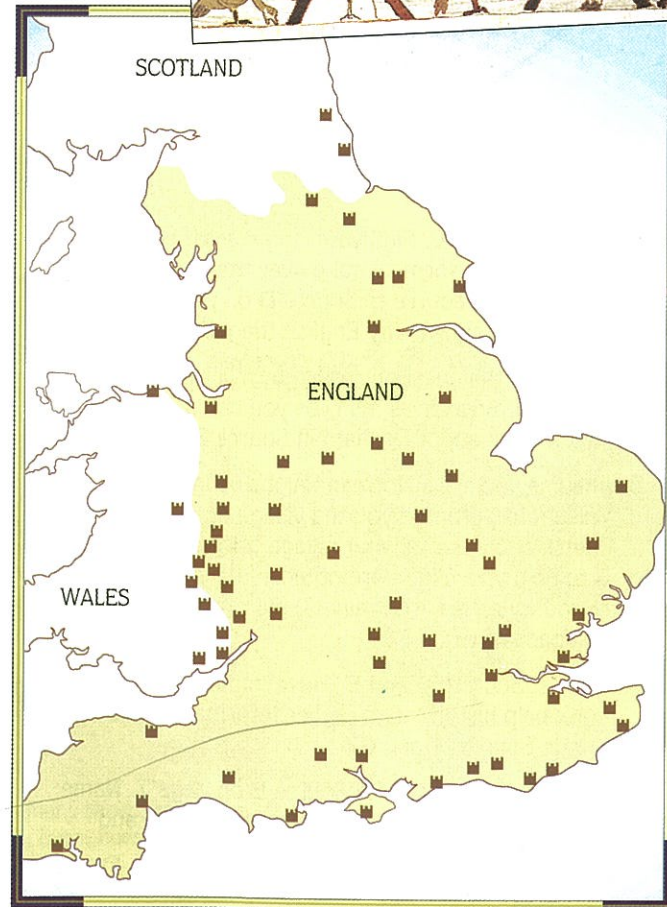
### Castles

Castles were common in Normandy before 1066. They were small, strong forts. They were difficult to attack without special equipment. Castles were ideal as a base for controlling the surrounding countryside. When the Normans invaded England they brought the idea with them (see Source F page 16).

Some castles were built to protect William's troops. Others were built by Norman barons or knights to protect their families and followers as they took over their new lands. The first castles were the motte and bailey kind (see page 5). These were wooden towers, or keeps, built on top of small hills or man-made mounds. Many of these were later rebuilt with stone.



**Source J** An attack on the wooden castle at Dinant in France shown on the Bayeux Tapestry



**T**he strongholds which the French call castles were very few in England and for this reason the English, though warlike and brave, were too weak to resist their enemies.

**Source I** A motte and bailey castle. A castle like this could be built in two weeks.



**The keep** The strong point of the castle. Only used in times of danger from attack.

**Ox-skins** which could be soaked in water during an attack to stop the attackers climbing the tower

**The motte** Built by local people. Twelve metres high.

**Bridge from the motte to the bailey**

**The hall** The baron, his family and servants lived here.

**The bailey or courtyard** Stables, barracks for the soldiers, storehouses and a kitchen. Ditch with a drawbridge.

**Source K** Castles built in England by 1086

### Investigations

- Which of these statements are true and which are false?
  - The first Norman castles in England were built on William's orders.
  - The first castles were built of stone.
  - Motte and bailey castles could be built in 2 weeks.
  - Castles controlled the countryside around them.
  - The baron lived on the motte.
- Look at Sources H and K. How did castles help the Normans to control England?
- If you were an English rebel how would you attack a motte and bailey castle? Sketch Source I and make notes showing your plan.

### Verdict on William

William the Conqueror died in 1087. There is no doubt that he was an able king. However, there are different opinions about his character and achievements, as Sources L–O show.

**Source M** An English view of William, from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This was written shortly after William's death.

**H**e was a very wise man. He was stronger than any king before him and stern to those who resisted him. He built castles, which was hard on poor men. He was greedy and taxed his subjects too heavily. Yet we must not forget that he kept good order in the land, so that an honest man could travel unharmed.

**Source N** A Norman view of William, written by a monk in Normandy in about 1190

**H**e was a strong and tall man who never backed away from a challenge because it was hard or dangerous. He was a clear speaker, good at persuading others to do what he wanted.

**Source O** A modern opinion of William, written in 1981. From *English Historical Documents* by David Douglas and George Greenaway.

**W**illiam was a strong and pitiless king – a man to fear rather than love. But he was not a **tyrant**. The English felt the harshness of his rule, but later came to feel pride in their conqueror. He dominated his age and permanently changed the course of English history.

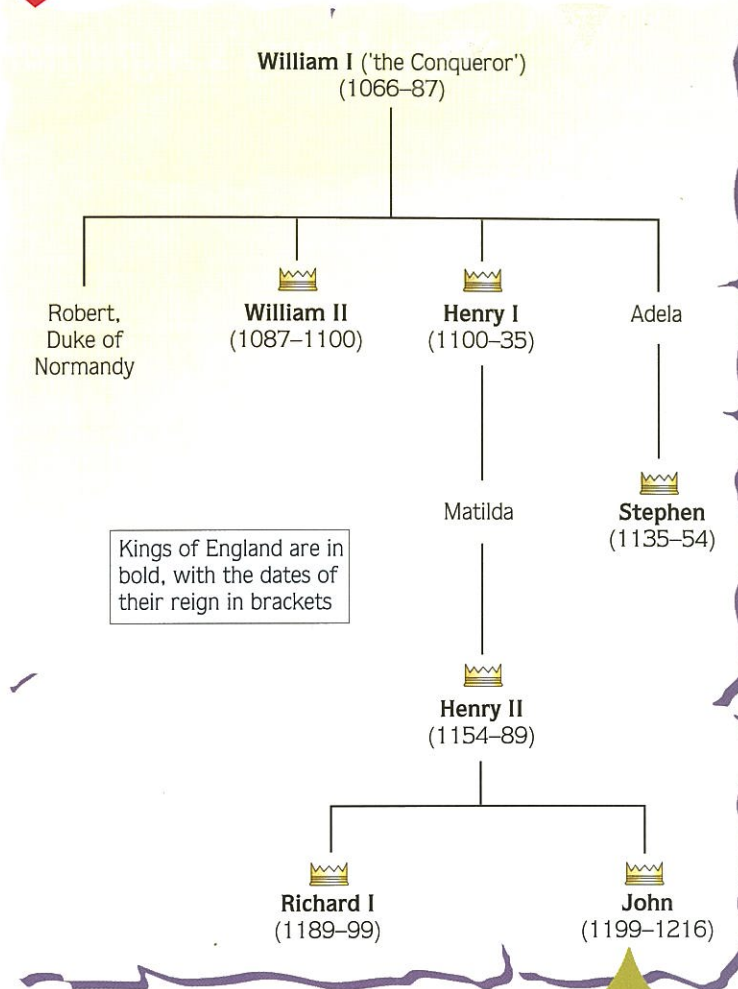
### Remember...

- The Normans used castles to control the English.
- Early castles were built of wood.
- There are differing views about whether William was a good king.

### Key words

**Tyrant** A cruel ruler.

**Source L** William I ('William the Conqueror') and his descendants



Kings of England are in bold, with the dates of their reign in brackets

### Investigations

- How does Source L show that William was a successful king?
- Use Sources M–O to fill in a copy of the following table.

### Verdict on William the Conqueror

Strengths	Weaknesses

- Why might you expect Sources M and N to disagree about William? Do you think the historians in Source O agree more with Source M or Source N?