

Before 1066: Anglo-Saxon England

1066 is one of the most famous dates in English history. It is a year when two vast armies, one from Norway and another from France, invaded the country and fought great, bloody battles with the English king. But before we go on to study what exactly happened in that very famous year, it is important that we explore what England was like at this time. How was it ruled? How did the people live?

Was England a rich prize for an invader?

Objectives

- Identify how England was governed in the years up to 1066.
- Examine the impact and achievements of the Anglo-Saxons in the years up to 1066.

Who ruled?

England contained quite a mixture of different groups whose ancestors came from all sorts of different places. Historians call it Anglo-Saxon England because many of the people who lived there were descendants of tribes of Angles and Saxons who had settled there from the fifth century onwards.

In 1042, Anglo-Saxon England was peacefully united under one king – Edward the Confessor (see A). He was helped in his role by a group of advisers, called the **Witan**. Most of these advisers were from rich, important families who looked after an area of England on behalf of the king. The heads of these families were known as **earls** – and the area of land they looked after was known as an **earldom** (see B). The king might also invite **thegns** (local landowners; pronounced 'thane'), bishops and other religious leaders to the Witan. But King Edward also took advice from some friends he had in an area of northern France called Normandy. Edward's mother was from Normandy and Edward had spent lots of time there after Vikings had invaded England when he was young.

Fact

Some women had different roles from men in Anglo-Saxon society. A woman married to a king, earl or thegn stayed at home, weaving thread, sewing and looking after the children. However, poorer women not only cooked, cared for children and made clothes, they also worked just as hard on the farms with the men.



► **INTERPRETATION A** Edward the Confessor, King of England from 1042 to 1066. This image is from the thirteenth century, after the **Pope** had made Edward a saint in 1161 as a result of his holy work.

How many people lived in Anglo-Saxon England?

The population of the whole of England was about 1.5 million people. Nearly everybody worked on the land and lived in small villages where they spent most of their lives. There were few towns – only about 15 – with more than 1000 people living there. And only eight towns had a population of more than 3000 (see B).

The ordinary villagers were known as **ceorls** (pronounced 'churl') and they owned enough land to grow their own food and keep some animals. Some ceorls were skilled craftsmen, such as cloth-weavers, pottery-makers or metal-workers. There were also slaves, known as **thralls**. Thralls were either prisoners captured during wars, lawbreakers or people who were unable to pay off debts.

▼ **MAP B** A map showing the eight largest towns in England in 1066. The key shows the names of King Edward's earls and the areas they helped him run.



Key Words

ceorl earl earldom
Pope thegn thrall Witan

Meanwhile...

c1000 AD

An Icelandic explorer named Leif Ericson landed in Newfoundland (North America) around 1000 AD

▼ **INTERPRETATION C** An image from a thirteenth-century medieval manuscript showing Anglo-Saxons preparing a field for crops.



Over to You

- 1 a What was the Witan?
b Explain why you think the king invited the most powerful men in the country to help him rule.
- 2 Explain the role played by each of the following:
 - king
 - earl
 - thegn
 - ceorl
 - thrall
- 3 Look at the two men in Interpretation C. Which social group (earls, thegns, ceorls or thralls) do you think each of these people come from? Explain your answer.

1.2B Before 1066: Anglo-Saxon England

What were the achievements of the Anglo-Saxons?

Anglo-Saxon society and culture had become very advanced by the eleventh century. Look carefully at the spider diagram below and Map H.

Coins

When the Anglo-Saxons first came to Britain, they didn't use coins. Most people exchanged their goods for other goods – this was called bartering. During the 700s, coins were being used widely in Europe. Soon, Anglo-Saxons began to produce their own coins to make trading easier. Coins also allowed Anglo-Saxon **monarchs** to show their importance and wealth.

► **SOURCE D** An Anglo-Saxon coin from the time of Coenwulf, an Anglo-Saxon king (ruled 796–821). When this was sold in 2006 it was the most expensive coin ever purchased.



Poetry and storytelling

The Anglo-Saxons loved to create poems, songs and stories. They would gather together to sing songs and hear poems such as *Beowulf*, the story of a heroic warrior who fights to save his people.

Crafts

The Anglo-Saxons were highly skilled craft workers. **Archaeologists** have found dice and board games made from bone, pottery, glass and stone. They have also found a musical instrument called a lyre (like a small harp). Metalworkers made iron tools, pots and swords. Woodworkers made wooden bowls, furniture, farming equipment and wheels. Jewellers made beautiful belt buckles, brooches, necklaces, purses and ornaments. These were made from gold, silver, glass and precious stones that were traded when Anglo-Saxon traders visited other countries.

► **SOURCE E**

This Anglo-Saxon artefact is called the Alfred Jewel and is made of gold and crystal. Around the edge it reads 'Alfred had me made'. A long stick fitted into the bottom. The artefact then became a pointer for following words in a book.



Anglo-Saxon achievements

Writing

Some educated Anglo-Saxons communicated with people in other European countries. For example, letters survive that were sent between important Anglo-Saxon King Offa and people who ruled over parts of France, Italy and Germany. Books were written about the history of Britain that included beautifully and expertly decorated pages.

► **SOURCE F** A page from an Anglo-Saxon book, written by the Bishop of Lindisfarne around 710.

In monasteries (large buildings where **monks** lived) monks kept huge official diaries called **chronicles**. They wrote about religion, politics, history, towns, kings, gossip and even the weather.



Buildings

At first the Anglo-Saxons avoided the old, abandoned Roman stone-built towns and built their own villages instead, using wood. Over time, the Anglo-Saxons began to re-use the stone from Roman towns, villas and roads. **G** shows an Anglo-Saxon church from the 700s. Several villages became important trading centres and began to grow. On the south and east coasts of England, several ports were founded. These quickly grew into busy centres of trade as local people and merchants bought and sold goods from all over Europe.

▼ **SOURCE G** The Anglo-Saxon church of St Laurence in Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire. The stone walls made the building strong and it may have been used as a fortress in times of trouble. Anglo-Saxon England was a Christian country.



▼ **MAP H** This map shows the goods produced in medieval Britain and where they came from.

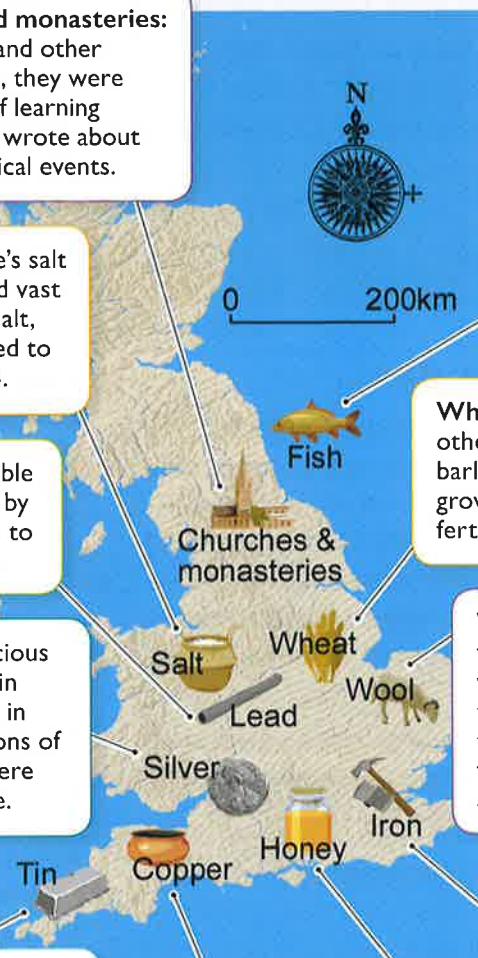
Churches and monasteries:

Full of jewels and other valuable items, they were also centres of learning where monks wrote about famous historical events.

Salt: Cheshire's salt mines supplied vast quantities of salt, which was used to preserve food.

Lead: Valuable metal, used by the Romans to make pipes.

Silver: A precious metal, mined in several places in England. Millions of silver coins were used for trade.



Fish: Lots of fish stocked the seas around England.

Wheat: Wheat and other crops such as barley and oats were grown on England's fertile land.

Wool: Large flocks of sheep were kept and their wool and the cloth made from it were sold all over Europe.

Iron: Used to make tools and weapons.

Honey: Produced all over the country, it was used as a medicine, an ingredient in beer and as a sweetener.

Over to You

- 1 Use pages 14–17 to write your own fact file about England in the years before 1066. You should use ten sentences to write ten different facts.
- 2 a Look at Sources D to G. What do these sources tell us about Anglo-Saxon society? Make a list of everything you can think of.
b Share your list with a partner – then make a class list of everything the sources tell you.

Cause and Consequence

- 1 With a partner or in a small group, discuss why people might want to invade England.
- 2 Explain why Anglo-Saxon England might be attractive to invaders. You may use the following in your answer:
 - England's natural resources
 - England's highly-skilled craftsmen.

Who will be the next King of England?

1066 is one of the most famous years in British history – it was the last time England was invaded and taken over by a foreign power. The English king and many of his key followers were killed and the country was divided up between the new invaders. England's language, rulers and way of life changed forever!

Objectives

- Investigate the three different men who wanted to be King of England in 1066.
- Assess the claims of the three contenders and judge who you think had the best claim.

The old king dies...

In January 1066, Edward the Confessor, King of England, died. He was 62 years old and left no children behind. At this time, there were no strict rules as to who should become the new ruler after a monarch's death. Instead, there were a few traditions that most people accepted as the best way to decide:

- The monarch's son always had the strongest claim (reason to be king) – but Edward had no children.
- Another male relative might have a good claim.
- The dying king could say who he wanted.
- The king's close advisors (the Witan) could nominate someone.

Fact



Most people in medieval times believed that a monarch should be male.

When King Edward died, he had very few close male relatives. His great-nephew, Edgar, was only a teenager and lacked the experience or military skill to become king. Instead, three other men each believed that they had the best claim to be the next king – and they were ready to use their armies. Read the fact files on each contender.

The Norman

Name: William of Normandy

Position: Duke of Normandy – the most powerful part of France, with a strong army.



Family history: William came from a fighting family. He had been in control of Normandy since he was a young boy and was used to having to fight to keep his lands.

Links to King Edward: Edward had lived in Normandy from 1016 to 1041. When Edward returned to England to be king, William sent soldiers to help him. As a result, William claimed that Edward had promised him the throne in 1051.

Was he tough enough? His nickname was 'William the Bastard' because his father wasn't married to his mother. In 1047, people from the town of Alençon made fun of his mother's family. William captured the town and ordered that 30 of the townsmen be skinned alive.

Support for his claim: According to William of Poitiers, a Norman writer, 'Edward, king of the English, loved William like a brother or son... so he decided that William should be the next king.' Harold Godwinson had visited William in 1064, and may have promised to support William's claim to the English crown.

The Englishman



Name: Harold Godwinson

Position: Earl of Wessex, one of the most powerful men in England.

Family history: His father, Godwin, argued a lot with King Edward. At one time Harold and his father were banished from England, but they returned a year later.

Links to King Edward: Harold's sister was married to King Edward.

Was he tough enough? Harold was a brave, respected and tough soldier. In 1063, King Edward sent Harold to crush a Welsh uprising. The Welsh leader was beheaded on Harold's orders.

Support for his claim: He was the only Englishman claiming the throne. The Witan wanted Harold as king. English monks wrote: 'Harold and his brothers were the king's favourites... on his deathbed that wise king promised the kingdom to Harold.'

The Viking

Name: Harald Hardrada

Position: King of Norway

Family history: He had fought alongside several Norwegian and foreign kings and had taken part in raids on the English coast. When he became King of Norway, he began to plan a full-scale invasion of England.

Links to King Edward: None – but a Viking called Canute had ruled Norway and England from 1016 to 1035.

Was he tough enough? He was the most feared warrior in Europe – tough, bloodthirsty and he enjoyed watching his enemies suffer. 'Hardrada' means 'hard ruler' and his nickname was 'the Ruthless'.

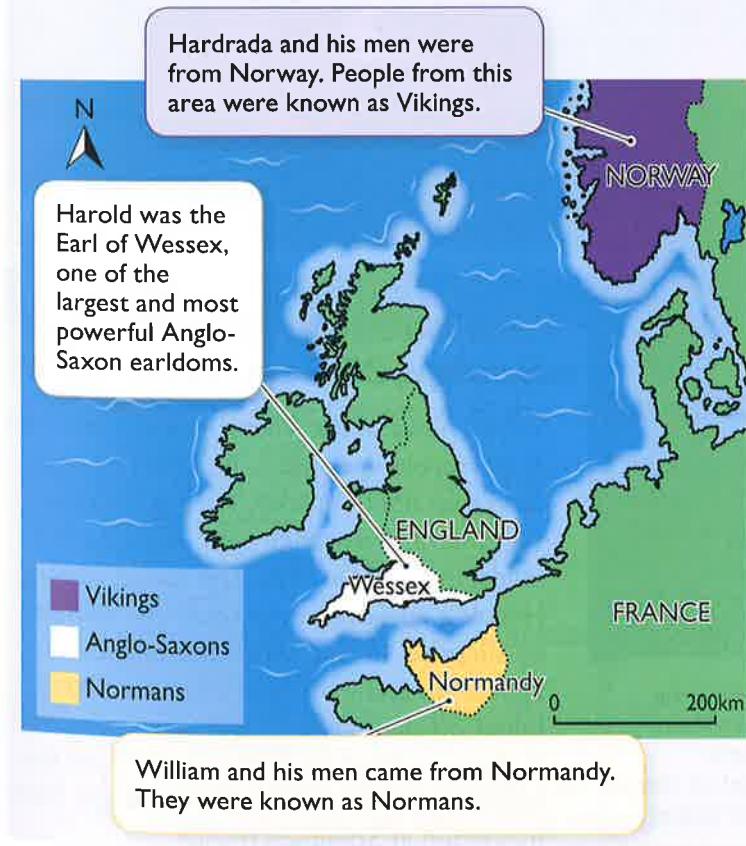
Support for his claim: Harald's claim was supported by Tostig, Harold Godwinson's brother. The two brothers had fallen out and Tostig wanted revenge.



The Englishman's advantage

When King Edward died on 5 January 1066, Harold had one big advantage over his two rivals. William and Hardrada were miles away across the sea while Harold was already in England. He wasted no time and was crowned king the very next day. But he knew the other two would soon hear the news and come looking for him... and they'd both want him dead.

▼ **MAP A** The locations of the contenders for the throne.



Over to You

Now you have read about the three contenders for the throne, you must decide who you think had the best claim.

- 1 Copy and complete the following table. Try to include as many reasons as possible.

Contender	Reasons why he should be king	Reasons why he shouldn't be king
Harold Godwinson		
Harald Hardrada		
William of Normandy		

- 2 a List the three contenders in order of who you think had the strongest claim. Label your first choice 'strongest' and your last choice 'weakest'.
b Explain why you placed the three contenders in the order you have chosen.
- 3 Divide into groups. Each group should choose a contender (perhaps pull a name out of a hat) for the English crown. Design a poster that will convince people that your contender should be king... and that the other two shouldn't!

Cause and Consequence

Historians often have to weigh up different evidence and opinions about the past. In your further studies you could be asked to respond to statements such as:

- 1 'Harald Hardrada had the strongest claim to the English throne.' How far do you agree with this statement?

There are many ways to answer this kind of question, but you will need to be able to identify the reasons why the three men believed they could be king, and decide who had the strongest claim. This is exactly what you've done in the Over to You questions.

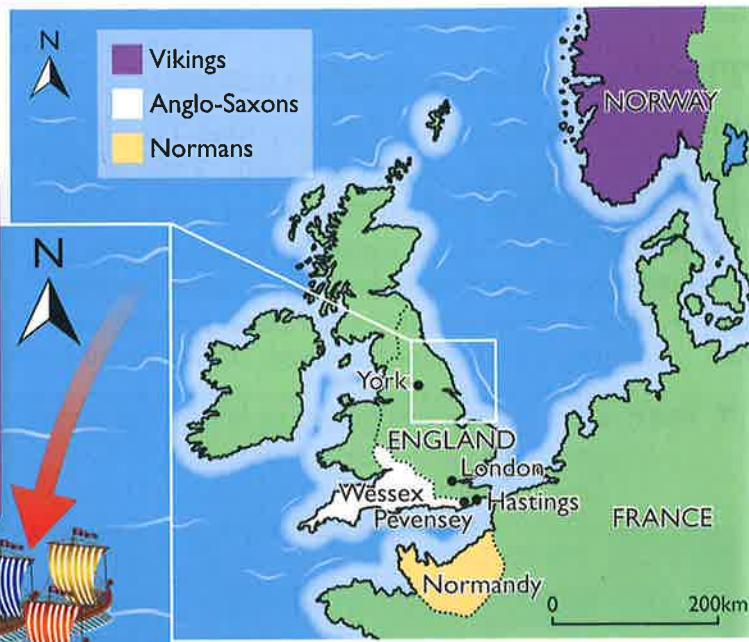
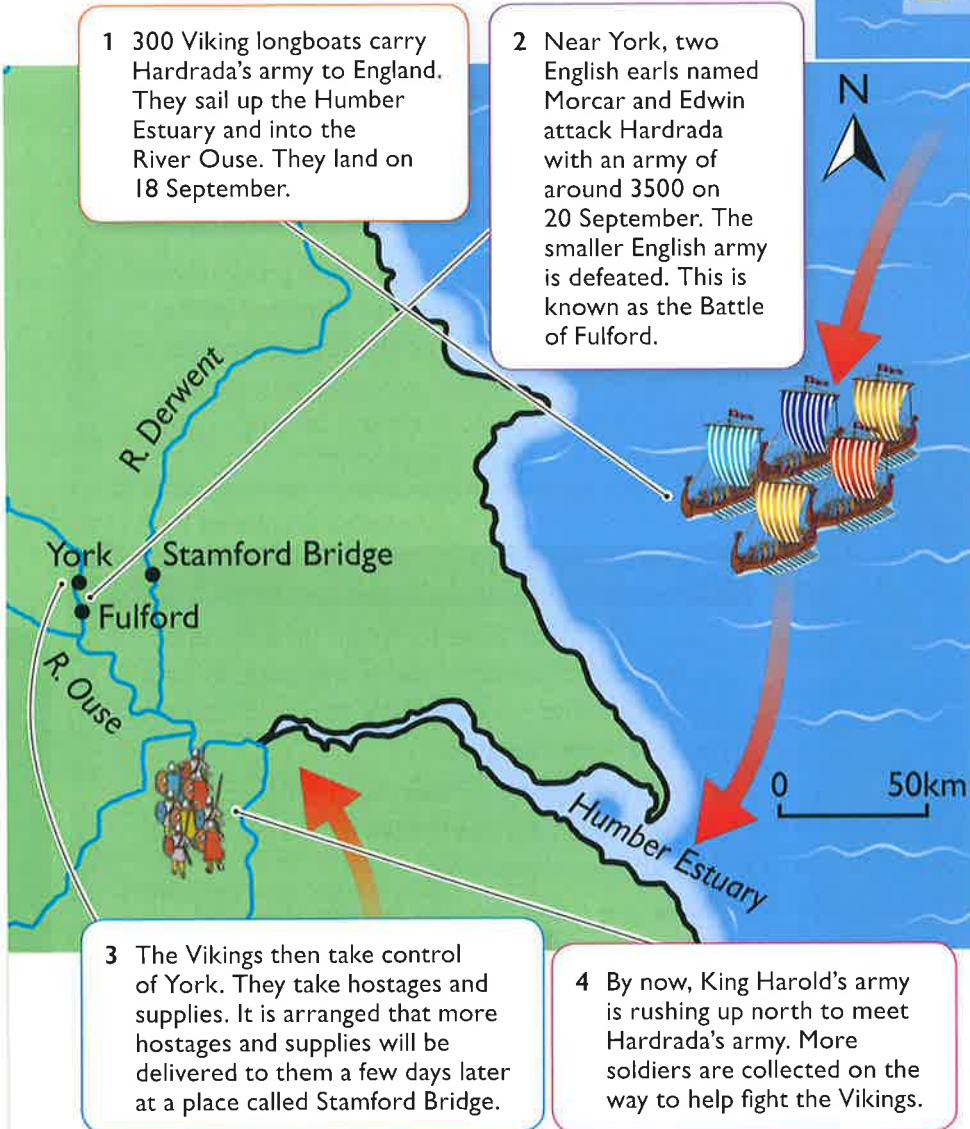
Round 1: the Battle of Stamford Bridge

After becoming king, Harold of England sat nervously on his throne, waiting for his rivals to attack. For months Harold waited... and waited... but nothing happened. Then, finally, at the end of summer 1066, Harold's wait finally came to an end. In mid-September, Hardrada, King of Norway, landed near York in the north of England – and he wasn't leaving until the crown was his!

Objectives

- Identify the contenders for the English throne who fought at the Battle of Stamford Bridge.
- Evaluate the physical and mental condition of the winning side at the end of the battle.

▼ **MAP A** This map shows what happened in the week after Hardrada's invasion. He was joined by King Harold's younger brother, Tostig, and about 10,000 bloodthirsty Vikings!



The Battle of Stamford Bridge, 25 September 1066

When news of the Viking invasion reached King Harold in London, he knew he had to get up north quickly. He got his army together and marched over 300km (190 miles) in just four days. The speed of King Harold's advance north took the Vikings by surprise. In fact, when the English appeared, many of Hardrada's men had taken off their armour and were relaxing in the sun. Read through the story on the following page to find out what might have happened at Stamford Bridge.

1 It is early morning...

Wake up, wake up!
King Harold is here!



2 The battle starts badly for Hardrada's men. Some have left their armour several miles away.

Where did you leave your chain mail?



3 However, Hardrada's men soon gain control. One brave Viking blocks the bridge so the English can't reach the Vikings.

I've killed 40 Englishmen with my mighty axe.



5 After an hour, King Harold's men try to stop the warrior on the bridge.

Float under the bridge and stab him from below.



6 The Viking is killed and the English can get across the bridge.

Quick! Let's attack the Vikings while we have the chance!



7 By midday King Harold's army is in control. Hardrada is killed, but the Vikings fight on.

Our great King of Norway is dead!



8 Later on, Tostig is found and cut into pieces.

Kill him!

Cut him up!

Over to You



1 Put the following events in chronological order:

- The Vikings leave England in 24 ships and sail back to Norway.
- King Harold and Hardrada begin fighting at Stamford Bridge.
- Edwin and Morcar are defeated at the Battle of Fulford.
- King Harold hears that William of Normandy has landed near Hastings.
- The Vikings sail up the Humber Estuary and into the River Ouse.
- The Vikings leave Norway in over 300 ships.
- Hardrada and Tostig are killed. King Harold wins.

9 King Harold is the winner.

They only need 24 ships to take their battered army home to Norway.

You'll have to fight again soon, my Lord. William of Normandy has landed near Hastings.



10 Harold buries his dead brother in York. But bad news arrives...



Knowledge and Understanding



An 'account' is a story about the past, written in chronological order and full of factual details and dates. It should be written in the third person and in the past tense.

- 1 Make a list of ten key words, terms or phrases that you think should be included in an account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge. For example: 'Hardrada', 'Vikings', 'Harold', 'armour'...
- 2 Write an account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge – and make sure you include all the ten words, terms or phrases.

Match of the day: weapons and battle tactics

King Harold of England defeated Hardrada and the Vikings on 25 September 1066. Three days later, William of Normandy landed on the south coast of England at Pevensey, near Hastings. This must have been devastating news for Harold – after fighting (and winning) a fierce battle in the north, he knew that he now had to travel back down south and fight another huge invading army. What weapons and tactics would King Harold use? How would William try to defeat the English? What were the strengths and weaknesses of each army?

Objectives

- Compare the weapons and tactics that were used by William's and Harold's men at the Battle of Hastings.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of each army.

William lands

William's **invasion** force was huge. It had taken over 300 ships to transport around 10,000 men and 2000 horses from France. William fully expected to have to fight Harold as soon as he landed, but the English king was still in the north of England. So, William quickly moved his army along the coast to Hastings, burning villages along the way. The soldiers arrived in Hastings

and spent several days resting. William brought plenty of supplies for his men and horses so that they could refuel before the battle.

How did the two armies compare?

Harold's army consisted of two groups of fighters – the **housecarls** and the **fyrd** (pronounced 'fird').

William's army was very different from Harold's. For a start, it was made up of three units – foot soldiers, archers and knights.

HOUSECARLS

KILLING POWER: 9/10

DEFENCE: 9/10

SPEED: 1/10

RANGE OF ATTACK: 1/10

The housecarls were the backbone of King Harold's army. There were usually around 2500 of them, but up to half had been killed at Stamford Bridge. They were well paid, fully trained and armed with the finest weapons. Their favourite weapon was a huge battleaxe.

The handle of the axe was over a metre long and its heavy blade was made of razor-sharp iron – a very precious material in 1066. A housecarl with a battleaxe could cut a man in half with a single blow.

Their helmets, chain mail, large round shields and discipline made them excellent in defence too. The housecarls would stand together when attacked and lock their shields together to form a shield wall.



THE FYRD

KILLING POWER: 3/10

DEFENCE: 5/10

SPEED: 3/10

RANGE OF ATTACK: 3/10

The housecarls were supported by the fyrd. This mobile army wasn't as experienced or well equipped as the housecarls but it was still a fierce fighting force. The leaders of the fyrd were armed with swords and javelins but most of their men used farming tools such as pitchforks and scythes. They may not have been pretty, but they numbered over 6000 and they were fighting on their home turf.



NORMAN FOOT SOLDIERS

KILLING POWER: 7/10

DEFENCE: 8/10

SPEED: 2/10

RANGE OF ATTACK: 2/10

These formed the main part of William's army and were armed with metre-long swords and kite-shaped shields. They attacked after the enemy's strength had been weakened by the archers' arrows and charges by the knights.



THE ARCHERS

KILLING POWER: 4/10

DEFENCE: 1/10

SPEED: 4/10

RANGE OF ATTACK: 9/10

William's 1500 archers were armed with small wooden bows that could fire six or seven arrows a minute. A skilled archer could kill a man from about 180 metres away. Archers had very little, if any, armour and were not much use when the fighting got up close and personal.



Key Words

fyrd housecarls invasion mace

THE KNIGHTS

KILLING POWER: 8/10

DEFENCE: 8/10

SPEED: 10/10

RANGE OF ATTACK: 8/10

William's best warriors were his 2000 knights: highly trained and fiercely loyal professional soldiers. They rode into battle on big, strong warhorses and were protected by a suit of small metal rings sewn together (called a chain mail suit or hauberk) and kite-shaped shields. Knights carried spears (which could be thrown or used to stab the enemy), a sword or a **mace** (a heavy metal club covered in spikes). Knights charged at full speed towards their opponents, hacking and slashing at the much slower soldiers fighting on foot beneath them.



Similarity and Difference



1 Explain two ways in which Harold's army and William's army were different.

Over to You

1 Match the words on the left with the correct description on the right:

• housecarl	• rides a horse into battle
• fyrd	• a suit of small metal rings sewn together
• archer	• carries a battleaxe
• knight	• a housecarl's main weapon
• chain mail	• there are 6000 of them in Harold's army
• mace	• can fire six to seven arrows per minute
• battleaxe	• a spiked club used by knights

2 a Describe two ways that you think William's army was better than Harold's.

b Describe two ways that you think Harold's army was better than William's.

3 Which army do you think is more likely to win the battle? Give reasons and answer in full sentences.

Round 2: the Battle of Hastings

The showdown between King Harold of England and William of Normandy took place on Saturday 14 October 1066. Harold had already defeated Hardrada and his Viking army, and now, just a few weeks later, he and his army were going to have to fight all over again. Unfortunately for Harold and his men, there had been no time to rest after winning the Battle of Stamford Bridge – they had to march 400km (250 miles) to meet William's men. Where did the two armies finally face each other? What tactics were used by each side? And who won?

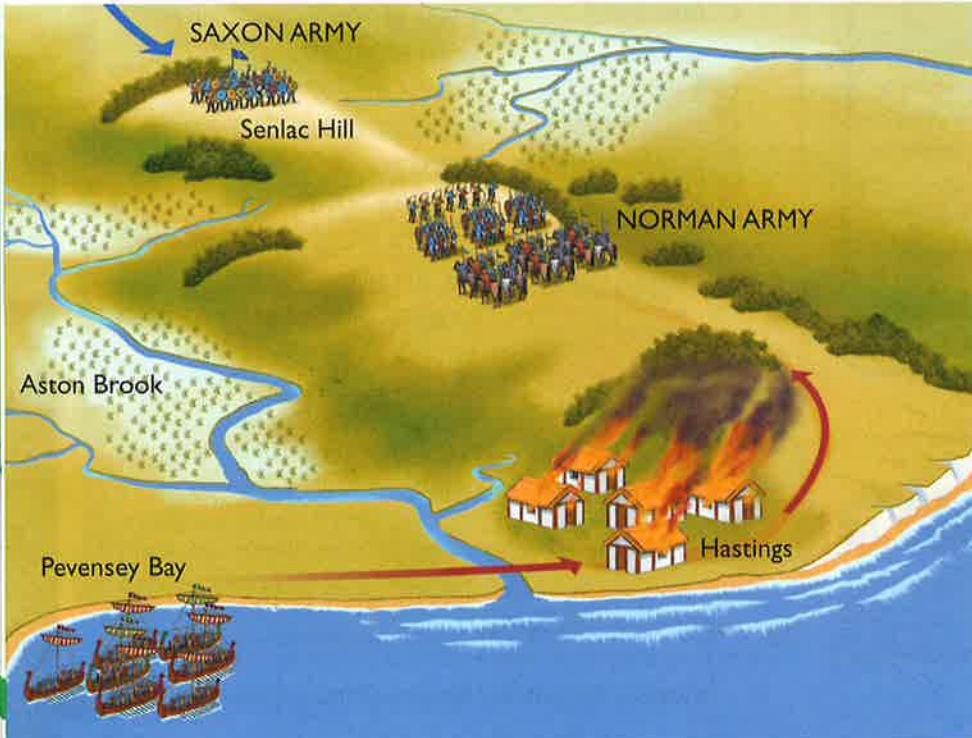
Objectives

- Analyse the tactics used by Harold and William in the Battle of Hastings.
- Evaluate how the battle was won.

The build-up to the battle

Harold reached the area around Hastings on 13 October. He then positioned his army on top of a steep hill (Senlac Hill), hoping that William's army would wear themselves out fighting uphill. There were streams and boggy areas on both sides of the hill, which would make it difficult for William's men to attack from the sides – they would have to face Harold's men by directly charging up the hill. At dawn on 14 October, William and his men set off from their camp. They carried a flag given to them by the Pope – they believed this meant God was on their side. After they had travelled around 8km (5 miles), they saw Harold's soldiers waiting on the high ground in front of them, blocking their path.

▼ MAP A The route William took after landing at Pevensey Bay



The battle begins

The battle began around 9am. At first, William ordered his archers to fire at Harold's men, but the English had formed a solid shield wall and the arrows either bounced off the shields or flew harmlessly over their heads. William then sent his foot soldiers up the hill – but they were unable to break the shield wall. Next, William sent in his knights, but their charges again proved useless against the English line.

At one point, a rumour began among the Normans that William had been killed. To stop his men panicking William quickly galloped among them, lifted his helmet and shouted, 'Look at me! Look at me! I am alive and, with God's help, will be the victor!'

A new tactic

After a short break in the fighting, to allow both sides to recover their dead and wounded, the battle started again in the early afternoon. At around 3pm, William came up with an idea. Read through the cartoons to discover how the battle was finally won.

Cause and Consequence

- 1 'William's archers were the main reason why he won the Battle of Hastings.' How far does your study of the Battle of Hastings show this? Explain your answer, referring to the Battle of Hastings and your own knowledge.

1 William had to get the English off the top of the hill. He ordered some of his soldiers to run away down the hill as if they were retreating. The English, thinking they were winning, charged down the hill after the Normans.



3 William saw this was his chance to win the battle – and the crown. He hoped that if he kept repeating the trick, the English would keep falling for it. And they did! The English shield wall grew weaker and weaker. William then turned to his archers once more and arrows rained down on Harold's men.



2 Without the safety of the shield wall, Harold's men who had run down the hill were quickly cut to pieces by William's knights on horseback.



4 As the sun set, Harold was killed and the battle was lost. Some said he had been shot in the eye by an arrow before being cut to pieces by some of William's men. William had the body buried at a secret location despite Harold's mother offering her son's weight in gold in exchange for the body.



Over to You

1 a Which factors (or reasons) below would help Harold win the battle? Which factors might help William?

- William's army had been blessed by the Pope
- Harold's men had just come from a battle with Hardrada
- The housecarls protected Harold's army with a strong shield wall
- William had a large army of 10,000 men
- There were streams and boggy areas on both sides of Senlac Hill
- Harold had positioned his soldiers on top of a steep hill

b Who do you think had the best chance of winning before the battle began? Explain your decision.

2 It's time to make up your mind about William's victory. Why did William win the battle? Was it because:

- he was a brilliant and skilful leader?
- Harold was a poor soldier who made mistakes?
- the Normans were better equipped and prepared?
- Harold was unlucky?
- of a combination of all or some of these reasons?

3 Work in a group to discuss your answers to question 2. As a group, write a paragraph to explain why you think William won the Battle of Hastings.