

The Battle of Hastings B1





A reconstruction of the Battle of Hastings for the 950th anniversary in 2016.

1066 was an important year in English history: two kings died, William the Conqueror led the last successful invasion of England, the world's most famous comic strip was created and French became the legal language of England for the next 400 years!

In 1066, England, contrary to many European countries, was a unified kingdom, under King Edward the Confessor. Edward had no children, so when he died in January, his brother-in-law Harold Godwinson became king. But William, Duke of Normandy (and Edward's distant cousin), said that Edward had promised him the English crown. He started constructing ships and organising an army to invade England.

William wasn't the only person who wanted the English crown. Harald Hardrada of Norway decided to invade the north, near York, in September. So, King Harold marched the English army north and defeated the Norwegians. Then, William arrived in the south, and was surprised to find no army to oppose him. When he heard King Harold was on the way, William made camp at Hastings to prepare for the battle, which was on 14 October.

William had about 15,000 men, and 2000 of them were cavalry. The English hadn't faced cavalry before, and they had only about 5000 tired men who had just marched 400 km. It was a difficult battle but finally, Harold died and William won. He was crowned king in London on Christmas Day.

French Replaces English

William paid the nobles in his army for their help in winning the Battle of Hastings by giving them large pieces of land in England. Because most of the aristocracy were suddenly French-speaking, French became the language of the court, the legal system and the religion for the next 300 years. English was just an oral language, spoken by the common people. However, gradually, the two peoples and the two languages mixed. Modern English has about 10,000 words which come from French. They include *enemy, peace, religion, service, miracle, beauty, romance...* and *battle*, which is also now the name of the village where the Battle of Hastings was fought!



DR



The First Comic Strip

William's brother, Odo, was bishop of Bayeux in Normandy. He ordered the Bayeux tapestry to show poor illiterate people William's version of the Norman invasion. (In fact, to the illiterate aristocracy too – William couldn't read or write.) It clearly shows Harold swearing allegiance to William before Edward died. It was the first comic strip and today most British people's image of the Battle of Hastings comes from the Bayeux tapestry.

The tapestry survived wars, changes of government, the French Revolution and the effects of time. In 1803, Napoleon took it to Paris to inspire him in his plan to invade England. But, Napoleon didn't succeed in invading, and he returned the tapestry to Bayeux.



Help

bishop (n) for Catholics, the *bishop* is the leader of the priests
brother-in-law (exp) here, his wife's brother. It can also mean your sister's husband

crown (n) what a king/queen wears on his/her head
most (of) (quant) the majority
on the way (exp) on the road, about to arrive
swear allegiance to (exp) promise to obey