

# I Am William of Normandy



I am William, son of Robert I, Duke of Normandy, born in 1027 in the Normandy region of northern France. It is true that my parents were unmarried at the time my mother conceived me, yet I was recognized as Robert's heir and succeeded him as the Duke of Normandy at the young age of seven. Though many challenged my position as I grew because of this fact, I had the support of King Henry of Normandy and managed full control of my own territory by the time I turned nineteen. Besides being a loyal vassal to the French king, I also held the distinction of being the closest living male relative to the King of England, Edward the Confessor. In fact Edward had assured me that I would inherit the English throne upon his death. But then as he lay on his deathbed, he changed his mind and gave the throne to his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson the Earl of Essex, "a real Englishman." Harold, who had once sworn loyalty to me after I saved his life in battle, betrayed me to accept Edward's crown! This infuriated me!

When Harold took the throne, I assembled the largest, most talented army I could by promising Norman knights land and titles in England once it was under my reign. I then invaded England in 1066 and confronted Harold at the Battle of Hastings. The fighting lasted an entire day since we were both so determined to win, but in the end it was my sweet victory. While our forces were equal in number, my troops fought both on foot and on horseback, while Harold had only foot soldiers. Thereafter I waited for two weeks for England's formal surrender and for the English to recognize me as king, but they did not. So, I invaded London and defeated the nobles there, earning me the title "William the Conqueror." I took the throne on Christmas Day, 1066.

Once I became king, I enacted many measures to solidify my power and suppress the nobles who continued to resist my rule. Rather than establishing a large manor in one place, I scattered my holdings all over England. Instead of one large castle, I built many throughout the land, all very well protected. As promised, I rewarded the Normans who had supported me with parcels of land and titles. Of course this angered the English nobility but nonetheless, I required them to swear loyalty to me. I divided the country into shires, or districts, and appointed a sheriff for each to rule as my representative. In 1086 I ordered what was likely the world's first official census count. My advisors assembled the Domesday Book, listing all land holdings, their owners, and the taxes I could expect paid on each.

Through these actions, I have been able to centralize power into my hands. I truly hope my successors will continue my efforts and further increase royal control in England!

*William died at age 59, the first and only person to successfully conquer England!  
And his successors DID indeed go on to increase the power of the English monarchy.*



# The Laws of William the Conqueror

One God will be honored throughout my realm, one faith in Christ to be never violated, and peace and security to be preserved between English and Normans.

I decree that every freeman shall swear to be loyal to me both within and outside of England, preserve my lands, honor me and defend me against my enemies.

All the men I have brought with me, or who have come after me, shall be protected by me and live in peace. If any one of them is killed, the lord of the murderer shall arrest him within five days. If he cannot arrest the murderer, he shall pay me 46 marks of silver.

I forbid the buying and selling of live cattle except within cities, and this shall be done before three faithful witnesses. But if anyone shall do otherwise, let him pay once, and afterwards a second time for a fine.

I order that if a Frenchman shall charge an Englishman with perjury, murder or theft, the Englishman may defend himself, as he shall prefer, either by the ordeal of hot iron or by wager of battle. The one who is defeated shall pay a fine of 40 shillings to me.

If an Englishman shall charge a Frenchman and be unwilling to prove his accusation either by ordeal or by wager of battle, the Frenchman may prove his innocence by a solemn oath.

I command, that all shall hold the law of the king Edward in respect of their lands and all their possessions, with the addition of those decrees I have ordained for the welfare of the English people.

I prohibit the sale of any man by another outside the country by penalty of a fine to be paid in full to me.

I also forbid that anyone shall be slain or hanged for any fault, but let his eyes be put out and let him be (unmanned). And this command shall not be violated under penalty of a fine to be paid in full to me.