

The Battle of Hastings

One of the most legendary battles in English history was fought between the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans and is called the Battle of Hastings. It took place in Hastings on the south-east of England over 950 years ago and changed the course of English history and culture forever.

In January 1066, Edward the Confessor (the English king) was dying. Three men now laid claim to the throne of England: William of Normandy from France; Harold Godwinson from England and Harald Hardrada from Norway.

On 6th January, one day after Edward's death, Harold Godwinson was crowned King of England. As news spread of Harold's coronation, William and prepared to invade England. They both planned to kill King Harold and claim the throne for themselves.

Harald Hardrada invaded first from the north of England on 25th September. However, his army were easily defeated by the Saxons and he himself was killed in battle. King Harold was then informed that William of Normandy had landed in the south of England and was attacking the surrounding countryside. King Harold was furious and marched his exhausted troops 300 kilometres back towards the south to meet him.

Eight days later, Harold and his men reached London where they were finally allowed to rest. William sent an envoy to King Harold with a message asking him to hand over the throne and accept William as the true King of England. Harold refused and was angered by William's treacherous demand.



Harold was advised to wait before attacking the Normans. His troops were weary and unprepared for a battle. They had suffered some losses fighting Hardrada's troops and needed time to rebuild. However, Harold ignored this advice and on 13th October, his troops arrived in Hastings ready to fight. They captured a hill, now known as Battle Hill, and set up a fortress by forming a shield wall that was surrounded by sharp stakes stuck in a deep ditch. Harold ordered his forces not to leave their fortified positions, no matter what.

The Battle

On 14th October, the battle commenced. Norman infantry raced up the hill on foot to attack Harold's army. However, they were at a disadvantage as it was tiring running up hill. Despite their efforts, they could not break the Saxon shield wall. The battle lasted for approximately thirty minutes. William's forces were cut down and suffered heavy losses.



Next, William ordered his cavalry to charge up the hill. They too were unsuccessful and, even though the Saxons lost many men, they did not manage to break Harold's wall.

Many hours later, the Normans attacked once again and eventually managed to break through the Saxon shield wall and the two sides fought hand to hand. William ordered Eustace of Boulogne and some of his best knights to find Harold and kill him. Once they did so, the battle was over and William was victorious.

After the battle, William (now known as William the Conqueror) was crowned as the new King of England.



Did You Know...?

The story of the Battle of Hastings was sewn onto a piece of tapestry called the Bayeux Tapestry.



The Battle of Hastings – Questions

1. Who fought in the Battle of Hastings?

2. Who was Edward the Confessor?

3. Where was Harald Hardrada from? Tick **one**.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ☐ Sweden | ☐ France |
| ☐ Norway | ☐ England |

4. How do you think King Harold felt when he heard that William of Normandy had attacked England in the south? Explain your answer fully.

5. How far did the Saxons march back to the south? Tick **one**.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ 300 miles | ☐ 500 kilometres |
| ☐ 300 metres | ☐ 300 kilometres |

6. **Find** and **copy** a word that means **disloyal**.

7. Explain how the Saxons protected themselves in the Battle of Hastings.
Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. Explain what you think 'fought hand to hand' means.
