

William I King of England, and Duke of Normandy: and how he was defined by his aim for the expansion of his physical and social border strategies. Did his upbringing, personality and heritage affect, initiate or dictate them?

A thesis submitted to the
University of Wales Trinity St David
in fulfilment of the requirement for
the Master's Degree in Medieval Studies

2023

Katharine Anne Ewins
1811277

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Name Katharine Anne Ewins

Date 13 February 2023

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Medieval Studies

Name... Katharine Anne Ewins

Date 16 February 2023

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A bibliography is appended.

Name.....Katharine Anne Ewins.....

Date: 16 February 2023

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter- library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository

Name.....Katharine Anne Ewins

Date.....16 February 2023.....

Supervisor's Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Signed: HR Webster.....

Date: 16 February 2023.....

List of Contents

	page
Abbreviations	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
CHAPTER 1 Review of Literature and Methodology	8
CHAPTER 2 Who was William	13
CHAPTER 3 Family connections	25
CHAPTER 4 Family challenges	37
CHAPTER 5 Pacts, charters and writs	44
CHAPTER 6 Warfare methods	50
Conclusion	59
Bibliography	64

Abbreviations

- ASC The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, ed. and trans. by Swanton, Michael (New York: Routledge, 1996)
- EHD *English Historical Documents Vol. II c1042-1187*, ed. by Douglas, David C. and Greenaway, George, W. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968)
- GND I *The Gesta Normanannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni Vol I*, ed. and trans. by Van Houts, Elizabeth M. C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)
- GND II *The Gesta Normanannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni Vol II*, ed. and trans. by Van Houts, Elizabeth M. C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)
- OV C Orderic Vitalis: *The Ecclesiastical History, Vol II Books III & IV*, ed. and trans. by Chibnall, Marjorie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)
- OV F Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy, Volumes II, III, IV*, ed. and trans. by Forester, T. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854)

Abstract

The aims and objectives of the dissertation will be to re-appraise the strategies used by William I of England, Duke of Normandy, to consider how he applied them to retain the lands he inherited as well as keeping and protecting those he had conquered during the expansion of his dominion.

To understand his complex character, he will be put into the context of his time and place, which should bring some understanding to his relationships and how he used them. He had an overwhelming sense that he was destined for great things. He had many challenges to his position but had the education necessary to succeed against all the odds. He was manipulative and dominating but had a sense of what was right, even if he did not follow it through. He was pious in the sense that he knew that he had to recompense for his wrongs which he did through the endowment of the church. He did not easily forgive those who had wronged him.

An assessment of his actions and methods will show if he was atypical, and quite different from other rulers. It investigates if he was using forms of warfare and control conventions of kin and population in the same or different and innovative ways from others of his time. Finally, it will look at his legacy and the effect he had on the people and lands which were his dominion, and that his attitudes would eventually divide and alienate his sons.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the tutors I have been privileged to learn from over the last few years. For their enthusiasm, which has inspired me to quest for more and deeper knowledge and insight into the Medieval period. My desire to go further and enquire more will continue.

Thank you Professor Janet Burton for the foundation you gave me in research, the Cistercian World and Thomas à Becket and also to Professor Jane Cartwright. Thank you Dr Harriett Webster for your support through to completion, via Normandy and the Historians and to Dr Charlie Rosier for his enthusiasm for my chosen subject. My thanks also go to a fellow student who was always there for a chat and my faithful postman who never complained about the number of books he had to deliver or leave in my safe place.

INTRODUCTION

The area of enquiry for this dissertation will be within the lifetime of William, the Duke of Normandy and King William I of England. Experiences of earlier confrontations in Normandy and England that have been documented in chronicles and texts which were written by, or at the request of, individuals and commentators of the time will be explored for comparison. Drawing upon these texts a word picture will emerge which will enable an assessment to be made of how he interacted with, manoeuvred, manipulated and challenged his relatives and liege families, and others, to his will and desired outcome of holding and expanding his borders. An assessment of the relationship he had with his wife Matilda and his family will contribute to the understanding of William the man and how he functioned.

Before exploring the disputes and uprisings and their outcome, this study will make an assessment and try to answer the question as to whether his personality and leadership had an effect on his success or failure: whether strategy, personality, psychology or the situation in which William and his opponents found themselves in affected the outcome. Historical disputes of earlier Norman dukes, for example Willian Longsword, will be reviewed to help in the understanding of the decisions made by William the Conqueror.

After reviewing the literature and outlining the methodology used, the dissertation will cover five main areas. Chapter 2 will focus on William, his background, including his illegitimacy, his childhood and training and his succession to Normandy. This chapter will also cover his claim to the English throne. Chapter 3 will explore family connections, his need for loyalty from his kin and to build a secure network of support, a network influenced by his Viking heritage. Chapter 4 will investigate family challenges and how they were dealt with. William was presented as heir by his father before his pilgrimage to

Jerusalem. Robert failed to return and William became duke at a young age. Along with his protectors he had to deal with challengers to his title, many lost their lives doing so. The chapter also discusses how his faithful kin and liege men supported him and, in doing so, were endowed with lands and property. Chapter 5 considers whether there is evidence in pacts, charters and writs of the changes he made to the government of England and Normandy, as well as, the legacy of the Domesday Book and any laws made by William. Chapter 6 will look at medieval warfare methods used by the Normans and English to assess William's methods for innovation, as well as, considering if the success at the Battle of Hastings was a product of Harold's lack of resources after having fought two other battles in the preceding few weeks. William's method of warfare and control was crucial to his success in maintaining the gains he had made: along with the management of his kin and the treatment of the people he had conquered. The Conclusion will assess whether he achieved the expansion of his physical and social borders and how that defined his legacy.

CHAPTER 1

Review of Literature and Methodology

There are a number of biographies of William the Conqueror written by eminent historians I have spent time studying, but there is an area that has not been completely researched which this dissertation will focus on: namely the effect of the relationships and interactions William had with those around him and the resulting changes to borders and the political order he wrought in Normandy and England for good and ill. It is possible to get beyond the facts and actions of a well-known historical figure and assess the effect he had not only on the vast number of people around him but also on the lands he dominated.

The biography by David Bates, reflects the latest research and was published in 2018. Simon Sebag Montefiore comments that it is, ‘...the best ever biography of the ruthless Norman ... Masterly and exciting, but always measured and scholarly.’¹ Bates explores the world of William, inspired by the historian David C. Douglas. Using his study of newly discovered documents he brings a deeper understanding to the period.² Bates suggests that although difficult to ‘penetrate his [William’s] hard outer shell’ it is possible to do a thorough and coherent interpretation of the evidence.³ Bates’ desire is to use the genre of biography to understand a remarkable character who was ‘an agent within processes, not a *deus ex machina*.’⁴ This dissertation will go deeper and explore the nature and psychology of William’s actions with the help of another author, Eleanor Searle, and

¹ David Bates, *William the Conqueror* (London: Yale University Press, 2018), quote on front cover. Note: A shorter biography, not referenced here, was published by David Bates in 1989. David Bates, *William the Conqueror* (London: George Philip, 1989).

² Bates, *William*, p. 6.

³ Bates, *William*, p. 10.

⁴ Bates, *William*, p. 14.

approach William from another direction, that of kinship which she has explored in general terms.

David C. Douglas writing about the Norman impact upon England in his *William the Conqueror* was first published in 1964 and revised after his death in 1999. His biography is a valuable source, wide ranging and meticulous in detail, giving a firm foundation for the study of William. But does not directly address the way in which he achieved his success through trusted kinship. William's family and wider kin play an important part in his success and failure and family connections and challenges, and this will be explored along with the military tactics he used against his opposers. Douglas wrote widely on the Normans, their achievements and fate: he edited volume II of *English Historical Documents* and this work is of immense value for researching this period of history. In his biography Douglas explores and draws together all the evidence to show the process by which William the Conqueror irrevocably changed the aristocratical, ecclesiastical and political face of both England and in turn Normandy but does not give weight to the impact of kinship.

Frank Stenton wrote his biography, *William the Conqueror and the rule of the Normans* in 1908 and Stenton's work *Anglo-Saxon England* has been useful in bringing understanding to the political atmosphere in England at the time leading up to the Conquest. Frank Barlow, another eminent historian, who has focused on Edward the Confessor in his research and his biography and work on the *Vita* attributed to a monk of St Bertin has provided useful background information.⁵ Barlow also published a small volume focused on William in 1965 *William I and the Norman Conquest* which will be cited to add to the understanding of William's character. Although Mark Hagger produced a biography of

⁵ *The life of Edward The Confessor*, ed. by Frank Barlow (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962).

William, which goes over the same ground as others, his *Norman Rule in Normandy 911-1144* is rich in detail and clarifies the development of Normandy.⁶

Contemporary literature that will be used in the course of this dissertation and will better establish the character and motives of William includes the work of the Norman chronicler William of Poitiers, who was chaplain in William's household following his military career. Poitiers has been described as unreliable, unrealistic, creative and being artful to please his duke.⁷ William of Jumièges, another contemporary of the time, was a Norman monk and original compiler of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. Eadmer of Canterbury's contribution will be as the biographer of Anselm and an English historian. John of Worcester, a later English chronicler, supplies further information as do the *Anglo Saxon Chronicles*.⁸ Later twelfth century literature by Orderic Vitalis, who had mixed heritage, give us well researched historical works. Wace's poetry, written later, immortalises William and the Norman Conquest, showing how events were being remembered. Other contributors are Henry of Huntingdon, along with Robert of Torigni, who worked on the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, as already mentioned, which was started by William of Jumièges and added to by Orderic Vitalis, and chronicles the period just before 1060 to around 1186.⁹

⁶ M. Hagger, *Norman Rule in Normandy, 911-1144* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017).

⁷ Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550-1307* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 102.

⁸ Guillaume de Poitiers, *Histoire de Guillaum le Conquérant*, ed. and trans. by Raymonde Foreville (Paris: Société D'édition, 1952), *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, trans. by G. Bosanquet, forward by R. W. Southern (London: The Cresset Press, 1964), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. by Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1996), Orderic Vitalis: *The Ecclesiastical History, Vol II Books III & IV*, ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Selected passages from [John] 'Florence of Worcester', EHD II, pp. 204-214.

⁹ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy, Volumes II, III, IV*, ed. and trans. by T. Forester (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), *Wace's Roman de Rou, The History of the Norman People*, ed. and trans. by Glyn N. Burgess with additional notes by E. Van Houts (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, ed. and trans. by T. Forester (London: Henry G Bohn, 1853), *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni Vol I and II*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. C. Van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) (Vol I - 1992).

Marjorie Chibnall's eminent work on *Orderic Vitalis's Ecclesiastical History, The Normans* and *The life of Orderic Vitalis*, provide much more understanding of the period through her translations and editorial scholarship of many of the relevant primary sources and expositions of the period.¹⁰

To help substantiate what is inferred by contemporary writers, the wills, writs and charters extant of the period will be accessed either through referencing secondary sources that have been able to access them or those found in the public domain. Unfortunately some in the French language are not easily accessed but may be found referenced in works used and will be referenced as such. William Stubbs' work is useful along with R. Allen Brown's collection of sources and documents, not to mention David C. Douglas's work on the editing of *English Historical Documents Volume II c.1042-1189*, there are numerous secondary sources on subjects reflecting various aspects of the Norman period which will be used to support the topic of this dissertation.¹¹

It would be impossible to look at the life of William without considering his soulmate Matilda. Matilda seems invisible to the historians both contemporary and latter-day writers but her influence and support must not be ignored and Tracy Borman's *Matilda Queen of the Conqueror*, well written and researched, goes a long way to redress this and show how influential she was and has been a great resource. But the seed planted by reading Eleanor Searle in her *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066* of

¹⁰ Orderic Vitalis: *The Ecclesiastical History, Vol II Books III & IV*, ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Marjorie Chibnall, *The Normans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996).

¹¹ R. Allen Brown, *The Norman Conquest of England, Sources and documents* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984), *English Historical Documents Vol. II c1042-1187*, ed. by David C. Douglas and George, W. Greenaway (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968), *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First*, ed. by William Stubbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

looking at William through relationships, and the value and usefulness of those relationships, will hopefully be watered and nurtured in the following chapters focusing on and exploring the motivation and drive of William, Duke of Normandy and King of England.¹²

The dissertation will look at the problems encountered by Duke William in Normandy prior to 1066 and as William the Conqueror in England. Studying the way in which he handled the counties in the North who had a history of raids from the Danes; areas which had a settled but difficult peace established between the Britons and the foreign raiders. These raiders were distant relatives and countrymen of William and would possibly have used similar tactics to the Normans.¹³ Reviewing his approach to subduing the North may reveal whether his methods had changed with different circumstances or whether he continued with the same strategies through out his dominion. Research should be able to show if William's methods were innovative, or that they were just a reshaping of what he had inherited, and that his success was reliant on what already existed. In Britain he took the Anglo-Saxon hierarchal system and the legacy of Alfred the Great and reshaped it into the feudal model he knew in Normandy: there he applied certain aspects of the successful Anglo-Saxon model in Normandy but was that enough to sustain legacy?

¹² Tracy Borman, *Matilda Queen of the Conqueror* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066* (London: University of California Press Ltd., 1988).

¹³ *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, ed. and trans. by T. Forester (London: Henry G Bohn, 1853), p. 210, p. 217. see also p. 219 n.1. For further information about William's Viking roots see: R. Fergusson, *The Vikings* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), P. H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994). The Vikings that invaded the North east of England and settled were from Denmark and established themselves as the Danelaw, see Chibnall, *The Normans*, p. 4.

CHAPTER 2

Who was William?

William's early years consisted of combat training along side other aristocratic sons: training which would have a great impact on his future and dominate the way he conducted his affairs. Before considering his succession to the Dukedom of Normandy and throne of England, and assessing his personal strengths and weaknesses, along with the impact of his early life and military prowess, it is important to hear from William.

... For I did not attain that high honour by hereditary right, but I wrested it from the perjured king Harold in a desperate battle, with much effusion blood, and it was by the slaughter and banishment of his adherents, that I subjugated England to my Rule. I have persecuted its native inhabitants beyond all reason. Whether noble or commons, I have cruelly oppressed them; many I unjustly disinherited; innumerable multitudes, especially in the county of York, perished through me or the sword. ...subjecting them to the calamity of a cruel famine; and by so doing, alas me! became the barbarous murderer of many thousands, both young and old, of that fine race of people. Having, therefore made my way to the throne of that kingdom by so many crimes, I dare not leave it to any one but God alone, lest after my death worse should happen by my means....¹⁴

The deathbed speech and confession above can be found in book VII, chapter XV of Orderic Vitalis's *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, written in about 1130. Orderic would not have been privy to hearing William's confession, but it is quite possible William of Poitiers, as his personal chaplain and scribe, had heard a confession or was privy to one, and may well have documented a report of one in the, now lost, final part of his history of William the Conqueror. It is documented that Orderic knew the work of

¹⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy, Volumes II, III, IV*, ed and trans. by T. Forester (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), p. 431.

William of Poitiers and used it as a reference for his work.¹⁵ William the Conqueror was at this point concerned with his soul and legacy. It can be seen by other actions towards the end of his life that he tried to do penance by endowing the Church with vast gifts, so it is plausible that he could have voiced such regrets to his confessor who ever that may have been. Although the speech is more likely Orderic using the traditional form of his day, imagined dialogue, which would be understood by his readers and a legacy of ancient rhetoric studied by Orderic as discussed by Marjorie Chibnall in her book *The World of Orderic Vitalis*.¹⁶ It is worth considering that Orderic's purpose here could be to draw attention to William's moral ambiguity: Orderic was of mixed blood and would have been conflicted in his response to the harsh methods used by William and in this speech aired his own views of the actions taken by the conquering Normans.¹⁷

To understand why William, who had come so far, and had achieved so much, was portrayed in this repentant way, as will be seen, lay in the hands of others. Commentators have played their part in his legacy and add further controversy to William's story by trying to justify and rationalise his belligerent actions. Henry of Huntingdon writing in his chronicle *Historia Anglorum* paints a picture of a tyrant who was a law unto himself. Henry had no good word to say about William and if he did he countered it, 'He was wise, but

¹⁵ William of Poitiers was close to William the Conqueror from an early age as a knight and then when he took holy orders and was appointed to court as a chaplain and scribe to document William's life. His, Poitiers', work is seen as biased towards William. Towards the end on William's life there was a falling out and it may be that Poitiers never documented William's final years. Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, pp. 15-18. Brown introduces extracts from *The History of William the Conqueror* by evaluating the importance of the text. When William died Orderic was twelve and Poitiers was 67 but lived a further thirteen years, Orderic would have been 25 when Poitiers died and they may well have discussed William's demise but lost interest in completing his work as he may have become disillusioned with William and his cause. See also D. Bates, 'The Conqueror's Earliest Historians and the Writing of his Biography', *Writing Medieval Biography*, ed. by D. Bates, J. Crick, and S. Hamilton (Woodbridge: the Boydell Press, 2006), pp.129-141. (note: Lanfranc was in England and Anselm was indisposed at the time of William's death so would not have been the minister to hear the confession.).

¹⁶ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, p. 197.

¹⁷ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, p. 9. Chibnall describes the conflict Orderic experienced with his mixed heritage and feeling out of control of his destiny. Orderic's tutors gave him an understanding and a sympathy for the losses of the English people. p. 11.

crafty; rich, but covetous; glorious, but his ambition was never satisfied. Though humble to the servants of God, he was obdurate to those who withstood him.’¹⁸ There is a wealth of commentary and opinion about the life and deeds of William the Conqueror, much of which are sycophantic or derogatory, but a way should be able to be found to get a glimpse of the man and what drove his actions and expectations. Nature and nurture both play a part, but the question is where is it possible to search and find the truth?

The ASCs are a collection of records which document notable historical events originally for the use of the abbeys where they were written. Originally brief, stating the events, for example, deaths or visitations, began to include descriptions of events.¹⁹ Given-Wilson in his book *Chronicles*, discussing the broader subject of chronicles in general, giving the example of Thomas Burton, a Cistercian abbot and chronicler in the 1390’s, who states that ‘...nothing has been included ...except what I have found in works of others and in various kinds of document, or, more frequently, what I have heard related by trustworthy persons or witnessed in person.’²⁰ A promising start but another monk from Dieulacres Abbey also quoted by Given-Wilson observed that on taking over the responsibility of continuing the chronicling saw in previous writings ... ‘ the influence of the dealings of the powerful, gossip, sycophancy and envy obscuring the truth of events at which he had been present’.²¹ It was usual for unnamed scribes to profusely state their qualifications for telling the truth of an event: as an eye witness, of being well educated and well read, and stating that they were only reporting the facts they had been given or evidence they had

¹⁸ *Henry of Huntingdon*, p. 217.

¹⁹ ASC, p. 197. Swanston notes a change of emphasis in the Worcester Manuscript (D) 1066 when Harold is referred to as ‘our king’ introducing a personal involvement of the writer. Gransden points out that information in the ASC can be seen as, ‘Usually ...factual ...it must be used with caution. ...For example, its estimate of the number of ships in several Viking fleets is probably not reliable.’ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 32.

²⁰ Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 6.

²¹ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 6-7.

found. But even the most well connected chronicler has times when his sources failed him: then they left the reader to weigh up the evidence and make a judgement.²²

We only learn a little about the individuals preparing the chronicles in the eleventh and twelfth centuries from small references in their own work and those of others who have used previous works. The main ASCs we have today have drawn together a combination of the texts and give an overall narrative of the time. The details from different areas of the country record the everyday life and events of the various abbeys. A change occurred at the Conquest when more details are included: for the historian, this makes interesting reading, but care does have to be taken to assess the truth, and trustworthiness and bias in the information. Given-Wilson's chapter on 'Telling the Truth' expands on the issues involved showing that although the chronicler, be it included in the ASC or another chronicle, intends the document to tell the truth, but that is not always straight forward: the record is written from their locality will be affected by their environment.²³ The introduction of Norman bishops replacing Anglo-Saxon incumbents began almost immediately but although over the several decades it took to complete the change would affect the work of the chronicler.²⁴ William arrived with a programme to implement reform in the church in return for support by the pope when he blessed William's campaign against Harold.²⁵ Also, William had his own agenda to control the church for his own advantage knowing it to be a source of great power and wealth.

²² Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. 10.

²³ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 1-20.

²⁴ Douglas, *William*, p. 324.

²⁵ Orderic Vitalis: *The Ecclesiastical History, Vol II Books III & IV*, ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 143. William sent Gilbert archdeacon of Lisieux to Rome to obtain the pennant from the pope, Alexander II, to carry at the Battle of Hastings.

Taking all that into account, it is possible to gain some understanding of the past by keeping those filters and biases in view. Looking to the records to discover who William was, where he came from and why he behaved in the way he did, there are many sources, but they appear to point towards his birth and the death of his father as the major drivers. He was a bastard, that is, he was born outside of a Christian marriage; but it was not unusual for concubinage in Norman society amongst the aristocracy in the tenth century to be accepted alongside marriage from the time of the Viking settlements.²⁶ William's mother may well have married his father if he, Duke Robert, had returned from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem: Bates gives examples of William's predecessors being from unions with concubines.²⁷

For William, however, it was a defining matter and, as well as for some commentators, although illegitimacy was unfortunate, it did not disqualify William. In fact, we are told that before Robert embarked on his pilgrimage he made a declaration that William would succeed him and appointed guardians to guide and protect him.²⁸ Commentators of the day had different ways of dealing with the issue of illegitimacy: William of Jumièges, a monk, referred to the 'Danish custom' to excuse the discord he felt with the teaching of the church.²⁹ William's succession to his father's dukedom was seen by Jumièges as legitimate.³⁰ William of Poitiers did not overtly comment on William's birth, focusing on his political legitimacy, of which he was certain. The ASC had nothing to comment about the birth, just to say as a child he succeeded his father upon his death in 1031 (1027).³¹

²⁶ Bates, *William*, p.18.

²⁷ Bates, *William*, p.19.

²⁸ GND II, p. 81. n. 6.

²⁹ *The Gesta Normanannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni Vol I* ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. C. Van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 58-9. and pp. 78-9. for examples of previous relationships in the Danish custom producing heirs.

³⁰ Bates, *William*, p. 18.

³¹ ASC, p.159.

Barlow in his *William I and the Norman Conquest* is decisive in his view that William was profoundly affected by his illegitimacy.³² The extent and depth of torment that this caused William is manifest in the extreme reactions he has both to the harsh treatment of those that mocked him but also in forgiveness and the second chances: for example his cousin Guy discussed later, he gives to those that did go against him. The extreme behaviour maybe in defending the honour of his mother and, or of the work of his grandfather in respect of Normandy and its defences. Those he forgave may well have become more useful and compliant towards him.

To be presented as successor with a call for nobles to give homage was not unique in the case of William and Robert. William Longsword was presented as successor by his father Rollo in 925, five years before he died.³³ Rollo's speech is documented in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* by William of Jumièges who, after recording the loss of his health, Rollo is reported to have said, ' . . . It is my duty to withdraw in favour of my son; it is yours to follow him faithfully.'³⁴ Being given the mantle of succession in a minority brought problems of a profound nature to the young duke as well as the guardians in a society where the church and adherence to Christian ways and laws were becoming the norm: this will be explored later.

From a very early age, combat training was where the young sons of the aristocracy spent their time, and this had an impact on William's endeavours. Learning to ride and fight battles had to become second nature to them. William was left in the care of earl Gilbert and the oversight and protection of Henry the French king, whom his father, Robert, had

³² Frank Barlow, *William I and the Norman Conquest* (Bucks: The English Universities Press Ltd., 1965), p. 2. and p. 12.

³³ Wace's *Roman de Rou, The History of the Norman People*, ed. and trans. by Glyn G. Burgess, with additional notes by E. Van Houts, E. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), p. 35.

³⁴ GND I ii. 15(22), p. 73.

supported in the past.³⁵ William's minority was spent in an atmosphere of competition and violence, and at a time when William had little control.³⁶ The French court and its methods which were being adopted by the Norman elite would have made a great impression on a young duke and given him a model of leadership. He learnt their military skills, developed from centuries of refining the art against their enemies, although his Viking heritage formed his attitude and future military stance. Poitiers describes him in these terms that when he was 'Armed and mounted he had no equal in Gaul ...his shield gleaming, his helmet and lance alike menacing'.³⁷ Poitiers was well informed about the affairs of battle. He himself was a trained knight and fought alongside the young William before he became his cleric and used his writings to eulogise his patron and master.

As already mentioned, aristocratic boys were taught the art of horsemanship and battle from an early age and Poitiers describes William as extremely competent before he had reached his age of majority.³⁸ The age he was living in was one of lawlessness and self-preservation was of prime importance. William had his cousins around him from his youth and he trusted them and they in turn had the ability and loyalty to support him.³⁹ It was also necessary for him to build up a network of trusted 'societal kin' to defend all that he possessed. Although he was ruthless in pruning away those, related or not, who were not one hundred percent behind his cause, and this subject is covered in the next chapter.

³⁵ GND II, p. 92. n. 5. Gilbert de Brionne - Count of Eu died 5 February 1041. also OV F, iv p. 83.

³⁶ Bates, *William*, p. 33., William of Malmesbury's *Chronicles of the Kings of England*, trans. by J. Sharpe, and ed. J. A. Giles, (London: Bohn, 1848), p. 259. Wace also mentions Henry, King of France, as a protector of William p. 124. l. 2935.

³⁷ Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, p. 18.

³⁸ Guillaume de Poitiers, *Histoire de Guillaum le Conquérant*, ed. and trans. by Foreville, Raymonde (Paris: Société D'édition, 1952), p. 13. Notre duc déjà adulte par l'intelligence du bien et la force corporelle plus que par l'âge fut arme chevalier; cette nouvelle sema la crainte dans toute la France.

³⁹ Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, p. 194.

Another description of William the Conqueror can be found in a later source, the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury (1094-1148) who was considered reliable by writers and historians, so writes Antonia Gransden in her critique of him; 'He like Bede was a polymath, ...'.⁴⁰ Malmesbury was of mixed Norman and Anglo-Saxon heritage and an oblate from an early age. 'He, absorbed both the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman traditions of historiography, adding his own individual genius.' He was '...on the whole, conscientious. He had weighed carefully the historian's duty: as he saw it to record the truth...'.⁴¹ William of Malmesbury was also writing at a time when there were texts for him to evaluate, some of which are now lost to the present day historians. Also, possible eye witnesses were available to him, but far enough from the events that he was able to write without politics influencing his work. Malmesbury's description may have been influenced by Poitiers but, keeps to the positive attributes unlike Huntingdon, Malmesbury, describes William in his later years as:

He was of just stature, ordinary corpulence, fierce countenance; his forehead was bare of hair; of such great strength of arm that it was often a matter of surprise, that no one was able to draw his bow, which he himself could bend when his horse was on full gallop: he was majestic, whether sitting or standing, although the protuberance of his belly deformed his royal person: ...⁴²

Bates writes that evidence of William's physicality, as he puts it, was found '...by the discovery of the left thigh-bone examined when the tomb in the abbey of Saint-Etienne of Caen was opened in 1983, Bates calculations give a height of 5ft 10ins, tall for the middle ages.'⁴³

Completing my search for descriptions of William the Conqueror's personality traits

⁴⁰ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 166-8.

⁴¹ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, pp. 166-8.

⁴² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, 2 vols, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998-9), p. 308.

⁴³ Bates, *William*, p. 514. William died in Rouen and then entombed at Saint-Etienne in Caen, 1087.

I am going to look at Lanfranc via Eadmer, who collected his letters and was at Canterbury during Lanfranc and Anslem's archbishoprics. William used Lanfranc to secure credibility for his marriage to Matilda whilst he was still Duke of Normandy and Lanfranc was at Bec. It was with great reluctance Lanfranc submitted to William's further request to take on the archbishopric of Canterbury: he pleaded with pope Alexander to be allowed to remain in Normandy but was instructed to go. After conceding to the pressure to take up the archbishopric, Lanfranc was close and faithful to William the Conqueror, doing his bidding but also being obedient to the pope.⁴⁴

Eadmer was offered to Christ Church Canterbury as a child oblate and, as Southern puts it in the forward of Bosanquet's translation of Eadmer's *Historia Novorum in Anglia* '...his adolescence and manhood were passed in the transformed community created by Lanfranc after 1070'.⁴⁵ Although no mention can be found of Eadmer writing for Lanfranc he did make a collection of his letters. He became the close friend, companion and biographer of Anslem, when Anslem eventually replaced Lanfranc at Canterbury in 1093. We do not get direct comments, but reactions in and from Lanfranc's correspondents about William's actions, can be found. Possibly linked to the connection with Lanfranc's views, or those around him whilst at Canterbury, are evident in the entries in the ASC for Peterborough. A tentative link maybe, but one to consider: after the fire of 1116 when all Peterborough's books were lost, copies were made to replace them using chronicles from a Kentish library, probably Saint Augustine's Canterbury.⁴⁶ The link I wish to make is that for the period that when Lanfranc was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1070, entries were

⁴⁴ A. J. Macdonald, *Lanfranc A study of his life, work and writing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 208-219.

⁴⁵ *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, trans. by G. Bosanquet, forward by R. W. Southern, (London: The Cresset Press, 1964), p. viii.

⁴⁶ ASC, p. xxvi.

made, possibly by Eadmer, which give a candid description of William the Conqueror.⁴⁷

Eadmer, writing in his *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, does comment on the relationship between Lanfranc and Anselm and their influence on William, which supports the general view found elsewhere:

These two men, Anselm and Lanfranc, both equipped with wisdom divine and human alike, were ever held by the King in high esteem and in all decisions which he had to make, so far as the matter related to their province, the King listened to them more readily than to all his counsellors. Advised by them, he often and to a very great extent abandoned the natural harshness which he shewed towards some people and exerted himself zealously to see that in his dominion monasteries should be established for the observance of the religious life.⁴⁸

The effect on William of these two men of the church changed a fierce and formidable character into a gracious and affable one. Was the change in temperament because they had the ability to control what he could not, or did he genuinely like them?⁴⁹

The reform of the Church, a major part of his extended demesne, was something William had promised the pope in return for support for the invasion of England. Lanfranc would be William's instrument for achieving the promised reforms, as he was earlier, when he petitioned for the validation of his marriage to Matilda, as noted above: was this dependance William had on his archbishops what improved his behaviour? William did use the Church to his advantage, replacing all but one Anglo-Saxon bishop with Norman ones and enriching the churches with estates and land.⁵⁰ One case where William did not get his way with appointments in the English church is that of Guitmund, who was a monk at La Croix St Leufroy who stood up to William. Guitmund was a pupil of Lanfranc and William wanted him to take up a position in the English Church when one became

⁴⁷ ASC, 1086, pp. 219-221.

⁴⁸ *Eadmer*, Bosanquet, pp. 24-5.

⁴⁹ *Eadmer*, Bosanquet, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Barlow, *William I*. pp. 136-157. Evidence in Domesday, he did achieve Norman dominance in the church over a period of time but always had that goal in mind.

available, but Guitmund would have none of it and his objections were eloquently documented by Orderic.⁵¹ The speech which Orderic constructs for Guitmund denounces the actions of William in his Conquest of England and refuses William's advances in order to save his own soul.⁵² William appears not to have objected, so it may not have been his idea originally.

Turning to William's view of his inheritance from his father and that of his grandfather, Normandy, he had to continue to defend the territory and repel those who saw any weakness in him and who challenged him. These adversaries would come for example, in the form of his one-time mentor, Henry I the Frankish king, who can be seen as an opportunist, along with some from within his own group, as well as other border tribes, like the Bretons to the south-west. William also had to keep his followers loyal and this would be done by reward. The Vikings' strategy was raiding other lands and returning with 'loyalty-for-rewards', as Ferguson puts it, and was key to the way they lived.⁵³ This continued to be so for the Normans, even after the settlement with Charles the Simple in 911. The treaty of *Saint Claire sur Epte* gave a buffer zone, or enfeoffed land, for the French king between him and the continuing raids of other Viking settlers with the promise from Rollo that he would defend the French king from attack, in particular from the

⁵¹ OV C, pp. 272-8.

⁵² The speech is the usual form used by Orderic in his writing and may have contained views held by Orderic himself which he wished to express. Lanfranc may well have wanted Guitmund with him in England because of his support against the teachings of Berengar, see A. J. Macdonald, *Lanfranc A study of his life, work and writing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 55.

⁵³ R. Ferguson, *The Vikings* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 45. The definition of Viking is a complex one, in the context of Normandy the main ancestral component is from the Danes although Norwegians as well as Swedes were part of Viking history. Chambers definition of Viking: pirate, raider, explorers, traders and colonisers from Scandinavia. Definition of Scandinavian: those from Denmark, Sweden and Norway, each dominion had different geographical areas on which it focused attention. For further reading see Chibnall, *The Normans*, pp. 3-8.

Bretons.⁵⁴ This was successful but the Normans themselves continued to claim land in the West in order to reward kinsmen and increase the province. With expansion on mainland Europe becoming more challenging for William and his expectation of receiving the English crown, he turned his thoughts towards England, not only for the crown but for its land and treasures. The stumbling block for William was Harold Godwinson.

The final facet of William's character is his fervent belief that he had 'the God given right' not only to Normandy but also the English crown. Wace writes that at the conception of William, his mother Arlette [Herleve] relates her dream of a tree emerging from her body overshadowing Normandy, to Robert, the baron whose bed she was sharing. At the birth an old woman predicted that William would ' . . . conquer so much, and have so much. . . '⁵⁵ His biographers call on his genealogical closeness to Edward giving the Confessor the right to claim the throne. Edward and his brother Alfred were kept safe in Normandy whilst Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut, their half-brothers, were occupying the throne of England. Emma, Edward and Alfred's mother, a Norman by birth, also took shelter in Normandy for a period of time, she was William's great-aunt.⁵⁶ There was also a promise, for which no documentary evidence has survived and remains unsubstantiated, made by Edward that William would be his successor, in addition to an oath William claims to have had from Harold Godwinson, with a dubious depiction in the Bayeux Tapestry.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Although it may be understood that Rollo was himself Norwegian the main contingent of the 'Northmen' were Danes, Rollo emerged as a leader that showed his outstanding ability to lead. Those that chose him were formidable, well-disciplined and followed the law of the army. See Chibnall, *The Normans*, p.11. See also following chapter on warfare methods. Enfeoffed - give land in return for military help. Barlow, *William I*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Wace's *Roman de Rou*, p.123. ll, 2867-2922. The authenticity of the old woman's prophecy is considered by some historians as misplaced, p. 123. n. 198.

⁵⁶ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ *English Historical Documents Vol. II c1042-1187*, ed. by George W. Greenaway, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968), p. 252.

Some of contemporary writing is sycophantic, like Poitiers, others are critical depending upon their allegiances either by birth or situation, but it can be seen that he was a domineering and powerful figure. William was a product of his ancestry and the time in which he lived and driven by the desire for his own self-aggrandisement and a great desire to extend his borders.

CHAPTER 3

Family connections - blessing and curse

The culture William was brought up in emphasised the safety of family connections and the need to preserve and add to them by marriages with influential, strong and endowed women.

‘No man is an island . . . any man’s death diminishes me [the poet] . . . never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.’ John Donne wrote this in his meditation XVII in the sixteenth century whilst experiencing severe illness and the need to be connected to those around him for survival.⁵⁸ This quote can be seen as an exposition of a universal truth: Robert, William’s father was not self-sufficient and needed to be surrounded with loyal followers, but as Donne reflects, all those living are not far from hearing the bell toll to signal their own death and the need to repent.⁵⁹ Right from his childhood, William was aware that many were seeking his demise and many lost their lives protecting him. The Normans were a community that worked on the basis of the ‘law of the army’, that of loyalty and reward, and of chosen leadership, which called William to be proactive and always on the alert in case his followers turned against him.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (New York: CreativeSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), p. 69.

NUNC LENTO SONITU DICUNT, MORIERIS. Now this bell tolling softly for another, says to me, Thou must die. Meditation XVII.

⁵⁹ *Donne Poetical Works*, ed. by Sir Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. xiv. In his introduction to *Donne Poetical Works* Grierson suggests that to understand his work it is necessary to keep in mind ‘. . . the conflicts of his tormented soul.’ A state not dissimilar to that of William’s although for Donne it was religion that conflicted his consciousness and loyalties.

⁶⁰ Chibnall, *The Normans*, p. 11.

Searle documents the background from which William emerges.⁶¹ That of men William could trust and who gave fealty, sworn loyalty, to him and can be traced ancestrally back to his great, great grandmother Gunnor. She was a concubine, then wife of Richard I duke of Normandy, and 'of the noble line of the Danes'.⁶² This marriage of Gunnor to Richard I, cemented the foundation of the Norman people, who considered they were answerable to no-one, a line reaching back to Rollo, whose vision of settling and founding a great dynasty was recorded by Dudo of St Quentin. Rollo's tribe became the dominant one in Normandy: although the French king was their overlord.⁶³

Duke Robert, William's father, was instrumental in preparing the way for William by settling the matter of his succession. Declaring him heir apparent before embarking on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Robert spent a year preparing the duchy for the decision. Initially, whilst Robert was on pilgrimage, William would serve as regent although he was a minor. Then if Robert did not return, William would succeed as duke. Bishops, cousins and uncles publicly accepted and swore support to him. William had been living with his mother but in close proximity to his father: and now having been publicly declared as heir apparent, was surrounded by guardians appointed for his protection and guidance, with tutors to educate him.⁶⁴ Evidence can be found that his education was in the hands of a monk, Ralph Moine in a charter from Prèaux Abbey.⁶⁵ For his guardians, Robert selected

⁶¹ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, pp. 93-107.

⁶² Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 63.

⁶³ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 61 - 67. For a full explanation of the significance of the marriage, see also Dudo of St Quentin <https://the-orb.arlima.net/orb_done/dudo/dudindexe.html> [accessed: 15 Dec 2022].

⁶⁴ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 153.

⁶⁵ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 153. Prèaux Abbey is where Roger of Beaumont (1015-1094) is buried, he stayed in Normandy to maintain order along with Roger of Montgomery who returned to Normandy after the Battle of Hastings.

Count Alan III of Brittany,⁶⁶ Gilbert de Brionne,⁶⁷ Osbern the Steward,⁶⁸ all cousins; and from the older generation, Archbishop Robert of Rouen, William's great-uncle.⁶⁹ Robert may have also included Baldwin IV, Count of Flanders, who was at the presentation of William.⁷⁰ He brought together a group whose interest would be to protect William and unite the dukedom and not try to usurp him. Walter, William's maternal uncle, is said to have watched over him during his childhood.⁷¹

William remained in the Norman court surrounded by sons of Robert's close friends, being educated with William Fitz Osbern,⁷² Roger II of Montgomery⁷³ and Roger Beaumont.⁷⁴ Tutors, according to the *Deeds of the Norman Dukes* also included Turolde, and Osbern, whose father was brother to Countess Gunnor and the father of William Fitz Osbern already mentioned.⁷⁵ During Robert's long preparation for his pilgrimage, he appeared to put in place a team, all with roots in the founders of the duchy, Richard I and Gunnor, in order to bring stability to the Duchy, something he had not been able to do. His hope may well have been that upon his return, cleansed from his sins, he would be better able to rule. This was not to be. He did not return. So 1035, with news of his death, was the start

⁶⁶ GND II, p. 92. n. 5. and p. 78. n. 3. Count Alan III of Brittany died 5 October 1040. Also OV F iii, p. 86.

⁶⁷ GND II, p. 92. n. 5. Gilbert de Brionne - Count of Eu died 5 February 1041. also OV F, iv p. 83.

⁶⁸ GND I, vii. OV F, iv. p. 82. also p. 93. n. 6.

⁶⁹ GND II, p. 81. Archbishop Robert of Rouen was Duke Robert's uncle.

⁷⁰ GND II, vi 11(12), p. 80 n. 2. Baldwin iv Count of Flanders, died 30 May 1035.

⁷¹ OV F, p. 229, and p. 403, David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 381., Bates, *William*, p. 63. and p. 138.

⁷² GND II, p. 92. n. 6.

⁷³ GND II, p. 114. n. 1.

⁷⁴ GND II, p. 96. n. 4.

⁷⁵ GND II, p. 93. n. 6.

of a volatile period called ‘the years of anarchy’ which continued to shape William and was the setting for his future actions.⁷⁶

With Robert’s death, all the tensions between the aristocratic families of the region were released and challenges to William’s position began to manifest. Even if Robert had made some bad decisions in his life, he did his best for his son. Searle gives a description of William’s formative years, listing cousins and half-siblings, describing the family’s enduring relationships, some of which are documented by William of Poitiers and Orderic Vitalis, which have already been mentioned.⁷⁷ She dismisses as impossible the mention of William at the ‘court of the king of the Franks’.⁷⁸ Robert had an alliance with Henry I of France and up until his death there had been some modicum of protection from the French court and the guardians. Whatever is the case, life became dangerous for William and those around him. Still in his minority, and mostly in the company of men, he relied on those appointed to protect him, train him for battle as well as in horsemanship and castle building.⁷⁹ He was about to put these skills to the test. What was also instilled in him was an air of divine right and self-entitlement.

By the time William reached sixteen, the age of majority, in about 1044, he had lost most of his original guardians to death or murder and many of his peer group had challenged his position. Some, like Roger de Montgomery, having rebelled, realised William was the stronger, and by being with William much could be gained, and returned to support him. Those that did survive and supported William had the task to reclaim land from the inheritance of Duke Richard I, which was lost under his sons Duke Richard II and Duke

⁷⁶ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, pp.179-189.

⁷⁷ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, pp. 197-8.

⁷⁸ *Henry of Huntingdon*, p. 200.

⁷⁹ see Chapter 6 below.

Robert.⁸⁰ William experienced the same challenges as Duke Richard I who in 942, at the age of ten, saw his father, William Longsword murdered. Similarly, and as an illustration, William's mother Gunnor, like Sprota, Richard I's mother, was a wife in the Viking fashion, but from the Bayeux region.⁸¹ William Longsword had pledged loyalty to King Louis IV of France, who confirmed that the lands given, by his predecessor, to Rollo, his father, and were his heritage.⁸² Similarly, Richard was declared William Longsword's heir as a child and upon his father's death his guardians were chosen at that time from amongst his mother's relations, although Louis IV, considering he had some responsibility for the boy, initially took charge, but soon the maternal family achieved guardianship.⁸³ It is important to note that the succession of a leader for the Viking settlers was traditionally done by choosing from the fittest from the suitable lineage, but William Longsword changed this by following the Frankish Christian way of succession by inheritance and embracing the Christian faith.⁸⁴ The power struggle for traditional Viking succession by the Norman barons failed, and inheritance by succession, won the day; setting a precedent and, having gained the support of the Frankish king and aristocracy, their ways were accepted and the families intermarried. Challenges for William were inevitable: the GND is the major source of reference and later works such as Wace's *Roman de Rou*, highlight the position Duke William found himself in was not new, challenges were to come as they did for his predecessors.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Bates, *William*, pp. 86-90. Bates covers the time after the death of Richard I and his successful reign of 54 years. He kept control and expanded the demesne he inherited from William Longsword. Upon his death two of his sons fought over the inheritance and after the death of Richard II, Robert took the title but this led to the destabilisation and challenges from the disaffected of the region.

⁸¹ *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 919-966*, ed. and trans. by S. Fanning and B. S. Bachrach (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2011), (25A) p. 37.

⁸² Flodoard (22A), p. 32. The king of the Franks continued to have an alliance and some jurisdiction over Normandy during William's dukedom.

⁸³ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 11.

⁸⁴ Hagger, *Norman Rule*, p. 60.

⁸⁵ Wace's *Roman de Rou*, Part 2, pp.13-88. Wace writes at a later date but does comment in an imaginative and poetical way on the events he finds in the sources available to him.

Having gained the loyalty of his kin and to further secure his position, marriage was the next step for William. He had been with one of his closest circle and cousin, Roger Montgomery, in his pursuit of a match with Mabel de Bellême in a neighbouring district, an area which gave fealty to the Normans. There had been some disturbances and disagreements challenging the peace, so William and his elite fighters went to protect their inheritance; Roger had fallen for Mabel and she for him.⁸⁶ Mabel is referred to by Orderic as 'Talvas', 'the Shield', a name given to her father: once wedded she took to military leadership and was seen to be quick-witted and tireless, certainly someone William came to admire and an example of the match he was pursuing, and good matches amongst his closest allies was also to his advantage.⁸⁷

William was also looking to increase and strengthen his boundaries and allegiances and there was no one better suited as a marriage partner than his third cousin once removed, Matilda. It is not surprising that little is written about her; it was a man's world and William's behaviour always stole the limelight. She was to be his greatest ally and brought with her wealth, influence and family connections from across Europe, but they also shared the same fiery temperament. She was intended for a higher status match, but her unruly behaviour and independent spirit was troublesome for her parents. Matilda's grandfather, Baldwin IV of Flanders, was married to William's aunt Eleanor. This close connection was an issue for the church as it was within the banned marriage relationships outlined by canon law. The idea of an alliance involving the marriage was discussed as early as 1048. It had its difficulties, but William hoped these would be sorted in his favour.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, pp. 208-210.

⁸⁷ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 210.

⁸⁸ Bates, *William*, p. 94.

As discussed earlier, William appealed to Pope Leo IX, through Lanfranc, then prior of Bec Abbey, for a concession for the marriage, which was eventually granted by Nicholas II, the incumbent, in 1059.⁸⁹ Lanfranc, before he took his vows, was a lawyer from Pavia in Italy and, due to the canonical restriction, was opposed to the marriage. William continued to persist and punished him for not agreeing to help. William banished him and attacked the abbey at Bec where Lanfranc resided, but as he left met William and they were reconciled. The abbey was restored and Lanfranc went to Rome and to put forward William's cause.⁹⁰ As penance for their marriage, William and Matilda were required to found abbeys in Caen. Matilda can be found briefly in the ASC, noting when she was consecrated as queen of England in 1067, and when she died in 1083.⁹¹ Myths and legends about her abound. Matilda's initial rejection of William's advances and the treatment of her by William are found in a much questioned *Chronicle of Tours*, although the description does add to the image of a domineering and masterly duke and future king.⁹² Matilda saw a future with William for herself and her children.

Matilda brought to the marriage family wealth and status, she is prominent in charters granting land in England: and in Normandy, where it shows her increasing role as William's consort.⁹³ Her signature is illustrated in Tracy Borman's book and shows her strong character in a distinguished fine hand.⁹⁴ The Domesday Book names her as a

⁸⁹ Douglas, *William*, pp. 391-5. Edward A. Freeman, *The History of The Norman Conquest of England, Vol. III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), pp. 105-6.

⁹⁰ Freeman, *The History of The Norman Conquest, Vol. III*, pp. 102-4.

⁹¹ ASC, p. 202. and p. 215.

⁹² *Chronicon Turonense, Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France, Vol. XI*, ed. by M Bouquet (Paris: 1876), p. 348. Cited by Tracy Borman, *Matilda Queen of the Conqueror* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p. 32.

⁹³ Borman, *Matilda*, p. 65.

⁹⁴ Borman, *Matilda*, p. xix. and illustration between pp. 138-9.

major landholder, Borman's research shows William's trust in her with gifts of land upon becoming king, although mainly still under his control, '... perhaps as much as a quarter of the total at his disposal. These included rich estates in Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.'⁹⁵ These estates gave her great wealth and status and she became a patron of the arts as well as the church.⁹⁶ She was assisted in her administration by her vice-regal council and her English household was structured in the same manner as the king's: the Domesday Book suggests that her court could be compared with that of Queen Emma and Queen Edith.⁹⁷

After the Conquest, Matilda would spend her time as the Regent of Normandy with their son Robert, who was to inherit the Duchy, looking after William's affairs whilst he was subduing the English, and so, it would be necessary for her court in England to be well run by her trusted ministers.⁹⁸ An illustration of where Matilda used her wealth can be seen in the abbey she founded. Le Trinité, received taxes from land she held in England, as does the Abbey of St Mary of Bec. A reference can be found of '(Brixton) Deverill [in Wiltshire, shows that she] gives the £15 to the church'.⁹⁹ Matilda can also be found receiving tolls and rents from the market at Tewksbury although, it is listed under the land of the King.¹⁰⁰ There are numerous references to the queen be found either holding a manor or giving various amounts of land which are listed under the king's holdings. Although she is greatly trusted by William he retains the ownership of the land, she is rarely listed as a landowner.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Borman, *Matilda*, p. 106.

⁹⁶ Borman, *Matilda*, p.159.

⁹⁷ Borman, *Matilda*, p.154. n. 10.

⁹⁸ Borman, *Matilda*, p. 155.

⁹⁹ *Domesday Book Wiltshire* ed.by John Morris (Chichester: Phillimore, 1979) section. 17:1.

¹⁰⁰ *Domesday Book, Gloucestershire*, ed. by John Morris (Chichester: Phillimore, 1982) section 1:24.

¹⁰¹ *Domesday Book, Gloucestershire*, sections, 1: 37, 42, 44, 47, 50, 51.

Gifts are reciprocated, 'The Ships list of William the Conqueror' dated 1067-72 documents Matilda's gift of the boat in which William sailed to England in 1066, referred to as the *magno navigo* in panel XLII of the Bayeux Tapestry and well equipped with ten horses. The list describes the ship having 'On the brow Matilda had fitted [a statue of] a child who with his right hand pointed to England and with his left held an ivory horn against his mouth'.¹⁰² Matilda was the signatory of numerous charters alongside William, but the charter for the founding of La Trinité attributes the whole of the construction and dedication to Matilda, framing her as a person in her own right as 'the daughter of the most noble Duke Baldwin of Flanders'.¹⁰³ Many charters would have been signed at the 'crown-wearings', which was an opportunity that brought together the great and the good of the land. Matilda used her status *regina Anglorum et comitissa Normannorum et Cenomannorum*, adding validation to William's position.¹⁰⁴

Matilda was buried in La Trinité Cathedral in Caen with great pomp and ceremony. William was devastated by her death, as Freeman puts it quoting from William of Malmesbury, 'The grief of William was deep and lasting. He was a mourner till the day of his death.'¹⁰⁵ In Normandy her loss was also felt: Mass was celebrated for her all over the duchy. Borman quotes possibly, Fulcoius, Archdeacon of Beauvais, 'Her death represents tragedy for both the clergy and the common folk.' She would be 'wept for by the English and Normans for many years.'¹⁰⁶ Matilda was a trusted and great asset to William and, as

¹⁰² EHD II, p. 259. Elizabeth Van Houts, ed. and trans., *The Normans in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 130.

¹⁰³ Bates, *William*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁴ Borman, *Matilda*, pp. 153-4.

¹⁰⁵ Freeman, *The History of The Norman Conquest*, vol IV, p. 445.

¹⁰⁶ Borman, *Matilda*, p. 208. *Receuil de Travaux D'Erudition dédiés à la memoire de Julien Haver, 1853-1893*, ed. M. L. Delisle (Geneva,1972), pp. 224-5.

can be seen after his death, cracks did appear in their relationship due to the infighting between their sons. She was, however, the glue that held together both the family and the demesne.

The final family connection is inheritance and succession. For Robert, William's father, it was an easy matter. William was his only, all be it illegitimate, son for whom there was one purpose in life, and for which, he was moulded and shaped from an early age. William had three surviving sons. Richard, his second born, lost his life at the age of sixteen in a hunting accident.¹⁰⁷ Robert, the first born and Matilda's favourite, was destined to inherit Normandy and had been appointed heir as William embarked for battle in 1066 leaving him in the care of Matilda, as regent.¹⁰⁸ Robert's nature and his frustration as he came to his majority, and of not receiving full authority in Normandy or Maine, drove him to gain support from his half-uncle Odo of Bayeux and assistance from Philip of France, in his actions against his father.¹⁰⁹ He caused a rift between William and Matilda with his rebellious ways.¹¹⁰ Robert also continued to feel he had a claim to the English throne after his father died and made an unsuccessful invasion attempt in 1088. He was supported by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, and a number of notable supporters of his father, which Bates concluded showed that they were not happy with William's decision about the allocation of the kingdoms.¹¹¹ Matilda tried to bring him back into the family circle after he courted favour with Philip of France. Her actions affected her relationship with William for a period but, they did reconcile before her death.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Douglas, *William*, p. 371.

¹⁰⁸ GND II, p. 179.

¹⁰⁹ GND II, p. 195.

¹¹⁰ Barlow, *William I*, p.164.

¹¹¹ Bates, *William*, p. 488.

¹¹² Borman, *Matilda*, pp. 201-2. After a period of mistrust and a visit accompanying William to England Matilda returned to Normandy to continue her work there.

The arrangements William made for his other two sons, William, called William Rufus, and Henry did not sit well with them either. It was to be all or nothing as far as the boys were concerned. William's lack of real decision making about giving over control and making it clear about the allocation of the kingdoms only inflamed and frustrated them. William Rufus had a reputation to match his red hair: he was hot-headed and rebellious, and King William used him in England to increase his borders into Wales and Scotland. William Rufus was sent north to prove himself and try to solve the issues of the 'North', and the 'Scottish problem'.¹¹³ Henry was twelve years younger and had a more worldly disposition: he was cultivated and had had a literary education. He married and had two legitimate children with Matilda of Scotland, as well as numerous illegitimate children. He inherited his father's cruel and manipulative ways but lacked his father's piety, rejecting a pure life for a licentious one.¹¹⁴ The self-serving actions of Rufus and Henry showed that neither were interested in extending or preserving the hard won lands gained by their father. Henry indulged his passions and Rufus had no time for the church and the reforms planned by his father and Lanfranc for England and Normandy were left undone.¹¹⁵

A common tradition of passing on an inheritance to an heir done on the death bed and William's speech shows his uncertainty about his actions. He appears unable to 'give' England to William Rufus, but sent him off, even before he had died, to England. To be in a position to claim the throne and be crowned king of England, as soon as he heard of his father's death.¹¹⁶ He could then deal with any challenge from his brothers or anyone else who felt they had a claim. Robert was not at the bedside because of his disagreements with his father, but was the designated heir of Normandy, although Robert did had the

¹¹³ Kepelle, *The Norman Conquest*, pp. 153-7.

¹¹⁴ C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 41.

¹¹⁵ Barlow, *William I*, p. 192.

¹¹⁶ Barlow, *William I*, p. 187.

expectation of inheriting England as well.¹¹⁷ Henry was at the bedside and asked what portion of land was his, but was given 5,000 lbs of silver as his inheritance.¹¹⁸ As soon as he heard this, he made haste to claim the money from the treasury. He later purchased the County of Cotentin from Robert and became a thorn in the side of both his brothers.¹¹⁹ Both Robert and Henry went on to make claims on the English crown: Henry had to wait until William Rufus died in 1100 before he achieved his goal.

The problem of providing inheritance had always been an issue for William as well as his closest supporters. The continued need for expansion to provide for the sons of the elite was one of the drivers for William and his retinue in 1066.

Seale writes:

...It was the old problem of expand or be poorer, and it is unimaginable that the sons of the great would put up with relative poverty. Could the fathers foresee what a nuisance their sons would soon be, flinging off, as they were to do, leaving Normandy without permission, furious that they were not already in possession...¹²⁰

Duke Robert as well as Rollo, as noted above, saw the wisdom of putting their chosen heir in place and testing their abilities before the issue became a matter for others to decide and kept a continued sense of unity amongst the kin for the good of the cause. William, as we have seen, did not learn that lesson from his forebears and caused those that came after him considerable problems.

¹¹⁷ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 248. also Bates *William*, p. 486.

¹¹⁸ Barlow, *William I*, p. 188.

¹¹⁹ Hollister, *Henry I*, pp.52-3.

¹²⁰ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 232.

CHAPTER 4

Family challenges - who to trust

Although kinship was developed to give safety, loyalty could not always be taken for granted. Some close to him considered they were more entitled to the Dukedom and challenged William's legality. Fundamentally William needed to keep his kin loyal to his cause, and to do that he needed first to show his strength, and then to reward those loyal to him by acquiring more land and wealth for that purpose. Methods or strategies used to maintaining his position and increase his authority and power considered here will be: cruelty, marriage alliances for him and his faithful kin, the church and how he used its power to his advantage, castle building, reward, imprisonment, *ullac* - banishment, hostage taking and making pacts and alliances with buffer states and agents of other leaders. All these strategies had been used before by the Vikings and others, William employed them to further his quest to be a great leader.

First to challenge William, just as he entered his majority, came in 1046-47 from someone with whom he had spent his childhood, Guy of Burgundy, cousin and younger son of his Aunt Alice and who had been raised with him in the Norman court.¹²¹ After inheriting the lordship of Brionne following the murder of Gilbert in 1040, Guy felt more entitled to be Duke of Normandy and wanted to gain lower Normandy: a group of magnates rallied behind him to oust William, but Guy's challenge was put down with the help of King Henry I of France.¹²² The battle that culminated in a win for William, assisted by Henry, gives us insight into the spirit of a young duke and the methods that he would continue to employ.

¹²¹ M. Hagger, *Norman Rule*, p. 326.

¹²² Guillaume de Poitiers, *Histoire de Guillaume le Conquérant*, ed. and trans. by Raymonde Foreville, (Paris: Société D'édition, 1952), p. 16. GND II, p. 121.

Poitiers and Jumièges both describe the battle using only cavalry.¹²³ Guy's rebellion demonstrates the fractured nature of the Normandy left by Richard II and Robert, who were over generous to their relations in return for their support by conferring titles upon them and inflating their expectations: William needed to bring order into his inheritance.¹²⁴

It took a further three years to finally subdue and defeat Guy, and William punished him by confiscating his castles and land and confining him to the court. Many lost their lives at the battle at Val-ès-Dubes in 1047 including Rannulf I Vicomte of Bession, Grimoald of Plessis and Hamo Dentatus, who rose up against Duke William.¹²⁵ Ralph Taison, Lord of Thury, initially joined Guy, but before the battle defected to William. Many of them felt entitled to a share in the land. After the battle, Henry I invited William to join him in his battle against the *castrum* of *Mouliherne* in Anjou and proved himself by excelling and even being a little reckless in overcoming the enemy. He showed the ability to command with authority, excel in horsemanship, warfare, taking the prize and returning from battle with captives and his men intact.¹²⁶ This example of Duke William's prowess and horsemanship on the battlefield shows he was well trained in his minority and had learned Frankish ways of doing battle, methods he continued to put to good use. Keeping Guy alive was one of William's strategies. Guy may have been persuaded to give allegiance to William and bring his supporters along with him. If he had been killed, then Guy's followers may well have elected another leader and the problem would have continued. There is no evidence put forward for this, but it is an interesting strategy that could have been deployed as part of William's long game.

¹²³ Poitiers, *Histoire de Guillaum* pp. 12-18. GND II, p. 123.

¹²⁴ Hagger, *Norman Rule*, p. 258.

¹²⁵ GND II, p. 121.

¹²⁶ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 203. Poitiers. pp. 22-26.

An earlier example of using pacts and alliances as tactics is by King Ralph in his grant of 933 to William Longsword to take over the lordship of Bayeux, giving Ralph the buffer zone he needed against the Bretons. Ralph did not consider William Longsword to be a threat, as Crouch puts it in his chapter on the *Counts of Rouen*: the 'Vikings of Rouen were seen as domesticated Vikings and safe to be used against their wilder brethren.'¹²⁷ Being endorsed by the Frankish king was also advantageous for William Longsword, but to be transformed from, a Viking war-leader, into a Frankish magnate, this is a very broad statement by Crouch and is not so easily verified.¹²⁸ Any challenge to William Longsword's new authority was put down; Riulf, a pagan chieftain, along with others, made a claim to some land in a bid to be free from the overlordship of William Longsword, whom they did consider was becoming a vassal of the Christian Frankish king. Riulf was offered rewards and a place at court if he served William Longsword, but he and his allies wished to free themselves from William's control. As a result of not accepting the conditions offered, they had to flee for their lives.¹²⁹

Duke William needed to defend and strengthen his borders in the south of Normandy, in Hiémois, for example, the challenge to his authority was unsuccessful and demonstrated his was not to be underestimated due to his age.¹³⁰ William's success, and that of his men, added to his reputation for cruelty and decisiveness. This challenge to William's authority had been supported by King Henry and this led to the eventual breakdown of their relationship.¹³¹ William further positioned his most loyal followers in vulnerable areas, with gifts of land and castles or by marriage settlements to secure the Norman borders,

¹²⁷ D. Crouch, *The Normans* (London: Hambledon & London, 2002), p. 10.

¹²⁸ Crouch, *The Normans*, p. 10.

¹²⁹ Crouch, *The Normans*, p. 11. Hagger, *Norman Rule*, p. 69. & p. 632. Dudo 190. 65. Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, pp. 74-5. GND I, p. 79.

¹³⁰ Hagger, *Norman Rule*, pp. 105-6.

¹³¹ Hagger, *Norman Rule*, pp. 105-6.

and with the prospect of England in his sights he then focused turned northward. Now William tested his followers and their allegiance not only by their kinship but by their actions in going with him after the crown of England. There are a number of records of lists of 'companions of William', as well as the lists comprising those that fought at Hastings in Battle Abbey. The Roll of Falaise can be seen on a plaque in the chapel of the castle of Falaise and the roll of Dives-sur-Mer, the basis of their information is from Wace and from the Domesday Book.¹³² It was not possible to be assured of their loyalty to William, as the premise for joining forces with him. For some it was that of gain J. R. Planché published in 1874 two volumes entitled '*The Conqueror and His Companions*', he has worked through Wace's *Roman de Rou* to obtain his list and cites other sources he has referred to.¹³³ The evidence that does stand up to scrutiny is the endurance of those relationships, and what was invested in them. The Domesday Book shows the trust William had for his closest companions by the amount of land he give them to manage and the titles he bestowed upon them.

The 'Ships list' referred to earlier shows those closest to him providing ships and men. Many were at the Council of Lillebonne in early 1066.¹³⁴ Many were given land and titles in England, evidence of which can be found in the Domesday Book. Normandy was not abandoned: William left in charge Matilda and cousin Roger de Beaumont, along with the elderly Richard, Count of Evreux.¹³⁵ Richard's son William did fight and supplied eighty ships. William FitzOsbern, one of the two sons of Osbern the Steward the nephew of

¹³² <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Companions_of_William_the_Conqueror> [assessed: 19 February 2023]. Lists references not sighted but of standing. Falaise is mentioned in Van Houts, *The Normans in Europe*, p. 130.

¹³³ J. R. Planché, *The Conqueror and His Companions 2 Vols.* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1874)

¹³⁴ Wace's *Roman de Rou*, p. 158. ll. 6033-84. and Freeman, *The History of The Norman Conquest*, vol. III, pp. 293-300. EHD II, pp. 218-9.

¹³⁵ GND II, p. 97. Roger de Beaumont married Adeline, daughter of Waleran, count of Meulan (in évreux) GND II, p. 99. Richard, Count of Evreux married Godehildis (Adelaide) widow of Roger I of Tosny

Gunnor who was a guardian in Duke William's minority, supplied sixty ships, fought in the battle and was given major land holdings. William FitzOsbern was trusted by the duke, who stationed him in the North of England to subdue uprisings there as well as to gain advances into Wales.¹³⁶ William FitzOsbern was the epitome of what William required in an ally and principle adviser, someone who was fighting for the same cause and objectives but always in a supportive capacity. FitzOsbern's father Osbern lost his life protecting Duke William, they spent a lot of their formative years together, sharing kinship and as part of a loyal, tight-knit group William trusted implicitly. FitzOsbern had proved his abilities in Normandy and now was sent north where FitzOsbern succeeded in initially subduing the rebellion at York.¹³⁷ He is seen along side William at Exeter in 1068.¹³⁸ He was well rewarded for his part in William's drive to expand and secure his borders and subdue the conquered nation.

On the occasions when King William returned to Normandy, William FitzOsbern, along with another trusted cousin, Roger de Montgomery, had control of a major part of the south of England.¹³⁹ Two further cousins played an important part in William's conquest of England. William de Warenne proved his loyalty during the rebellions of 1052-4 in Normandy, and was rewarded as Domesday shows, with land from Sussex up to Yorkshire. Walter Giffard is another cousin of note, who had also proved his worth in the Normandy rebellions. Walter supplied thirty ships, and for his loyalty and support in battle he received land in Buckinghamshire. King William kept his faithful cousins close and rewarded them. William had a half-sister, Adelaide, along with two half-brothers, Odo and Robert. Both brothers played a major part in William's strategy. Odo, although ordained,

¹³⁶ GND II, p. 133. William FitzOsbern married Adeliza of Tosny, daughter of Adelaide widow of Roger I above)

¹³⁷ Kerpelle, p.113. and note 77 p. 262. ASC (D), 1066.

¹³⁸ Barlow, *William I*, p.92.

¹³⁹ GND II, p. 267.

took part in the Battle of Hastings, rallying the troops from the rear using a staff. He also supplied one hundred ships for the crossing and, as a result, gained major land holdings in England.¹⁴⁰ He was also regent for William whilst he was in Normandy dealing with rebellions.

Robert, Count of Mortain, was William's other half-brother and provided even more ships than Odo; recorded at one hundred and twenty.¹⁴¹ Cornwall and Somerset were the main areas allocated to Robert, but he was also responsible for Pevensey and the safety of the south coast of England. Adelaide's husband, Odo, Count of Champagne, is also found on the battle field, along with Eustace II, Count of Boulogne, who had married Godgifu, sister of Edward the Confessor, but the marriage had been annulled. Eustace is the one William of Poitiers describes as giving the signal to retreat and can be identified on the Bayeux Tapestry.¹⁴² A final mention will go to Hugh de Grandmesnil. He fought at the battle after spending time out of favour in Normandy, but William recognised Hugh's value as a breeder and trainer of war horses and, once in England saw his talents and, along with William FitzObsbern and Bishop Odo of Bayeux became part of the government of England.¹⁴³ All of William's generosity illustrated above was for one key aim, and a necessity as his demesne expanded: that the land were overseen by loyal trusted, mostly kin. He was able to confiscate holdings if the trust was broken, therefore, possessing and controlling the lands he had conquered.

Going forward, with the possibility of failure following the conquest of England, William needed to rely on family connections more than ever to maintain and grow his territories.

¹⁴⁰ Barlow, *William I*, p. 188.

¹⁴¹ GND II, p. 127. Robert Count of Mortain, married Matilda daughter of Roger of Montgomery.

¹⁴² EHD II, p. 228 and p. 275.

¹⁴³ Ann Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1994), pp. 82-88.

The England that William had conquered was, Barlow writes, ‘... was about the maximum size that an eleventh-century king could govern through noble and ecclesiastical servants and remain in supreme and direct command.’¹⁴⁴ William’s ability to maintain control was being stretched. Whilst Normandy still had an overlord, the king of France, who was not causing trouble whilst William kept his borders strong, England was hostile towards him. William had a huge challenge: the legacy left by Edward the Confessor was of a weak crown controlled by powerful earls whose own legacy goes back to Canute. Canute, like William, had used marriage to secure his power.¹⁴⁵ What William had taken on in England was completely different from that in Normandy. Normandy was much smaller and for now he had overcome the opposition and maintained relative control with the support of other faithful kin. There was in the background the threat from the young Philip I, the French king, who for the moment was pre-occupied with his own issues of authority.

William may now have thought he was in a good position, having placed his trusted kin in strategic areas and had now achieved his lifelong ambition. He had more land and riches to trade for loyalty, but he was beginning to recognise it was not going to be easy to maintain his borders. He had the continuing problem of rebellion in England and his absence from Normandy was causing a little unrest and the possibility of a change of French king would be of concern to him.

¹⁴⁴ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 157.

¹⁴⁵ GND II, p. 108 n. 1.

CHAPTER 5

Pacts, Charters, Writs and the Law

William's demesne become larger than he could personally manage, so matters had to be made more secure. Documentation to show proof of gifts and allocations of land were necessary. The system of Common Law in England diluted the power of the king, whereas in Normandy the feudal system was still evident and showed the Duke owned all the land. William had conquered England, and as conqueror, had complete control: he was wise enough to re-established some old laws as well as instigate new ways to control the population within his borders.

William came from a mainly oral culture in Normandy and had adopted the Frankish feudal structure of Europe.¹⁴⁶ Whereas, in Edward's kingdom of England there was a well-established judicial system built on a tiered arrangement with ownership of land, authority and responsibility at each level. In England, prior to the Conquest, the Witan, made up of earls and barons along with the leading nobles and churchmen, had the power to elect a successor to the king and give advise. They had the responsibility for geld tax collection through the manorial courts where they metered out justice and collected taxes.¹⁴⁷ Land could be owed by earls in their own right. The king of the English was there by the agreement of the people and had limited powers, but that limited power did include law making and the keeping of the peace.¹⁴⁸ The English church was a powerful estate. At a coronation the king gained the allegiance of the earls and, on his part, he promised to protect his people. Whereas in the feudal system in Normandy, and later introduced in England after the conquest, the duke, now king, took control of his demesne and required

¹⁴⁶ Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making 843-1118* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 42.

¹⁴⁷ F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 298.

¹⁴⁸ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 162.

fealty from the people, provision of knights to serve in case of war, as well as, direct payment of taxes.

William intended to introduce the feudal system of government into England, a system familiar to him giving the greatest control. Evidence of the feudal system in Normandy, now sadly much is either lost or was oral, but can be found in extant charters of the abbeys and monasteries endowed by the dukes. Some were discovered and translated by Mme Fauroux who 'published [number] 234. These charters were granted or ratified by the dukes of Normandy between 965 and 1066'.¹⁴⁹ They detail the ducal right to knight service, knights the Duke called upon to defend his demesne. The duke's power, authority, and his right to call out a levy to pay for defence against invasion, is evident.¹⁵⁰ The charters show a slow, haphazard and inconsistent development of feudalism in Normandy. Jurisdiction was carried out, for the duke, through the barons and abbey courts. Robert of Bellême and the monks of Saint Évrout, are a good example, they held their own courts to administer justice.¹⁵¹ An early example of the feudal system can be seen in the formation of Normandy and can be traced through charters of Charles the Simple and his grant of land in the treaty of 911 to the Viking Rollo.¹⁵²

The ASCs tell us that once William had the agreement and submission from 'Archbishop Aldred, Prince Edgar, Earl Edwin, Earl Morcar and all the best men from London ... from necessity..' at Berkhamsted he went on to be crowned in London.¹⁵³ He began the

¹⁴⁹ Joseph R. Strayer, *Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of History* (New Jersey: Princetown University Press, 1971), p. 39.

¹⁵⁰C. H Haskins, *Norman Institutions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1918), p. 22.

¹⁵¹ Haskins, p. 24. In chapter 1 he explores the evidence available of the Institutions functioning under Duke William. pp. 3-61.

¹⁵² GND I. p. 31.

¹⁵³ ASC , p. 200 (1066). OV C II, p. 139. Edwin and Morcar were the sons of Earl AElfgar and sister to Edith, Harold's wife.

process of change in England, to a centralised, i.e., introduce the feudal system with him in complete control. He used his power, as conqueror, to replace English barons, who owned the land and had hereditary rights, with Norman tenants-in-chief: he forfeited land from the English and promoted favoured ministers as their reward for the success at Hastings.¹⁵⁴ This reward however came with obligations to the new king. Although he had won the battle, William had not gained the peace. He required the provision of continued military support, and the tenancy arrangement, or feudal system, had that obligation for the provision of knights. In Edward's, and then in Harold's reign, a private army of housecarls provided their protection and left any call to arms under the control of the earls and their thegns, who had to provide soldiers, fyrds, based on their land holdings for a set number of days in the year.¹⁵⁵ For Harold in times of prolonged or multiple battle fronts this would cause a serious problem which will be discussed later.

William used force but also the new arrangement of the legal system to control the population. He was mindful of going too far and referred back to the Laws in Edward's day, as a respectful reference that may also have been used to settle the issue of his claim to the crown, as well as a reference to his relational connection to Edward.¹⁵⁶ Searching for the Laws of Edward the Confessor frequently referenced by William is fruitless: Edward was not a legislator, and as Barlow writes, 'According to the *Vita Edwardi Regis*, Edward abolished bad laws and, with the help of his wise counsellors, enacted good ones.' The *Vita* states that he does leave 'the cause of God to the bishops and to men skilled in

¹⁵⁴ F. M. Stenton, *English Feudalism 1066-1166* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), p. 9.

¹⁵⁵ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁶ Crouch, *The Normans*, pp. 77-85. William was always aware of the nature of his kingship of England, keeping the connection with Edward as his kin in his mind validated his position. V. H. Galbraith, *The Making of the Domesday Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 36.

canon law.¹⁵⁷ Not a very helpful statement as it does not clarify what laws were good or bad. We do have extant the *Leges Edwardi* which is a twelfth-century compilation of Old English Laws, not as it purports to be, laws made by Edward, but that is a possible statement in hindsight of what was seen to be the law in Edward's day.¹⁵⁸ His reign did produce a number of writs and charters mostly regarding the transfer of land, given to produce revenue, and their existence, per chance, were carefully recorded in the Domesday Book.¹⁵⁹

With the continued unrest in England and the threat of invasion still a real problem William was running out of money. He commissioned the Domesday survey in 1085 at Gloucester after 'much thought and very deep discussion with his council ... [as to] how it [England] was occupied or with what sort of people.'¹⁶⁰ William was at a crisis point in his reign, he had just lost his queen and the country was under external threat again. The outcome of the survey would show his financial position, that of the king's geld and the resources he could count on to raise an army.¹⁶¹ Domesday put in writing and settled the ownership and possession of land that had been the subject of many disputes and trials.¹⁶² Evidence of William can be found in charters and writs and although he changed the system of government to the feudal system he was not a law maker. He generally referred back to the laws of Edward's day, but a twelfth-century document, *Textus Roffensis*, does list 'The

¹⁵⁷ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 178. *The life of Edward The Confessor*, ed. by Frank Barlow (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962), pp. 12-13. See also F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *History of the English Law before the time of Edward I*, 2nd ed. 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1898).

¹⁵⁸ *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First*, ed. by William Stubbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 126.

¹⁵⁹ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 156. and p. 146.

¹⁶⁰ ASC, p. 216.

¹⁶¹ EHD II, pp. 848-9.

¹⁶² EHD II, pp. 453-5. Example of the proceedings of a trial.

Ten laws of William the Conqueror'.¹⁶³ The laws are of interest, as they call for an oath of loyalty to the king (no. 2), relate to the protection of Frenchmen who came with him (no. 3) and also the penalty for a crime against a Frenchman which was far greater than that committed by a Frenchman towards an Englishman (no. 6), known as the Murdrum Law.

A recent study by Stephen Baxter explores the theory that the Domesday Book in all its forms was a way of securing and consolidating the authority William had over his barons, and a call for their support.¹⁶⁴ Baxter's study showed that William was able to use the Anglo-Saxon system of manorial, shire and hundred's courts for collecting information and he used a second wave of enquiry by his own men to verify the data. Any disputes over land were referred to the king for judgement. He had secured ultimate possession and control over the land.¹⁶⁵ Over a relatively short period time, William was able to bring under his control the administration of England: he knew who his tenants-in-chief were, largely Norman or of Norman descent, where the church land was and how, and from where, he could raise an army. The Survey also shows, by default, the devastation his demand for submission wrought. The lands in the North, for example where in 1066 the villages were thriving, but by 1086 they were laid to waste by the 'Harrying' of 1069-70. Just one example given by Kepelle is Handsworth in Yorkshire.¹⁶⁶ Handsworth's tenant-in-chief in 1086 was Count Robert of Mortain.¹⁶⁷ He had rented the land to Richard of Sourdeval who was with him at the Conquest after it had been confiscated from the

¹⁶³ END II, p. 399. *Textus Roffensis* is the register of cathedral priory of Rochester of which the articles of laws are part. Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, p. 153.

¹⁶⁴ Stephen Baxter, How and Why Was Domesday Made?, *The English Historical Review*, Volume 135, Issue 576, October 2020, pp. 1085–1131. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceaa310>> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

¹⁶⁵ Baxter, *How and Why Was Domesday Made?* p. 1124. Further information about Domesday Book see Galbraith, *The Making of Domesday Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 36.

¹⁶⁶ William E. Kepelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 166. further details can be found at: <<https://opendomesday.org/place/SK4186/handsworth/>> [accessed: 12 December 2022]

¹⁶⁷ Hagger, *Norman Rule*, p. 115. William's half-brother.

Anglo-Saxon Lord Thorkil in 1066.¹⁶⁸ The value of the land had lost 75% of its value since the Conquest.¹⁶⁹ Many more examples can be found in the pages of the Domesday book.¹⁷⁰ The process of the devastation and the issue of the Danelaw concerning the North will be discussed later.

As soon as the Survey was commissioned, William summoned all his tenants-in-chief to Salisbury to give an oath of allegiance.¹⁷¹ The survey and the making of the Domesday Book settled matters of possession and inheritance: the Norman earls who had, through their allegiance to William and had gained possession of lands, also wanted security of tenure, so attended the oath giving in Salisbury. The Domesday Book shows the major change to the way England was organised, bringing together in a document the land available for taxation and clarified ownership. William adjusted the Anglo-Saxon hierarchy to the Feudal system, which for him was a more advantageous arrangement giving him complete control over his lands and borders.

¹⁶⁸ Neil Price, *The Children of Ash and Elm*, (UK: Penguin, 2020), pp .470-473. An old Norse name, could have been related to Thorkell the Tall, a Viking Raider in Cunte's time.

¹⁶⁹ Details can be found at: <<https://opendomesday.org/place/SK4186/handsworth/>> , Loss of land and status for Thorkil can be found at: <https://domesday.pase.ac.uk/Domesday?op=5&nameinfo_id=2524#list> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

¹⁷⁰ Kepelle questions the way the returns from the Domesday Survey have be analysed in the past. He argues in his chapter 'The Structure of Northern Society' in *the Norman Conquest of the North*, pp. 50-87 that the Danish part of Northumberland, where the Danelaw had put in place a different societal structure from that of the Anglo-Saxon south. It made it impossible to collect and assess an equitable difference in worth and ownership of the land between 1066 and 1086. But it is apparent that the destruction and depopulation that occurred in that period had irreparably changed the way the North was governed and the lives of the families who were either disenfranchised or had fled were not truly represented. The returns that were made for some, not all the areas were not a true representation of what had happened to the area. Areas in the north of Yorkshire were not surveyed. Exploring the bias in the Domesday Book is beyond this dissertation. The simple fact of change is what is concerning here.

¹⁷¹ Bates, *William*, p. 463. also ASC, p. 217.

CHAPTER 6

Warfare methods and practicalities

William won the Battle of Hastings, now, by assessing his methods and strategies can they be seen good enough and innovative enough to win and maintain the peace, which is what he requires to truly become lord of his newly expanded territory?

William considered that to achieve success and protect and expand his borders came down to keeping his followers loyal, happy and on his side. Although it will be seen that was not enough and shortsighted. He was shrewd and pragmatic with a physical presence, and was single-minded enough as a leader to retain the allegiance of his barons and earls, whom he placed in strategic and vulnerable locations. At the beginning of his rule in England, he gave more power to his most trusted: for example, to Hugh d'Avranches, he gave the earldom of Chester, Shrewsbury to Roger Montgomery and Hereford to William FitzObern. Placing them in strategic positions to respond to insurgencies. On his progress north he installed another, Henry of Beaumont in Warwick to hold the position there and respond to resistance from the Welsh.¹⁷²

Missing from William's strategy was a need to win over the people he had conquered. At first William left in place some of the Anglo-Saxon earls who had submitted to his rule and whom he thought he could trust. He left Morcar, Earl of Northumbria, and Edwin, of Earl Mercia in place and even offered Edwin marriage to his daughter. Morcar and Edwin returned to the North after they had given their fealty to William. They themselves were not liked, as they had been imposed on areas in the North by Harold, and disturbances and

¹⁷² OV C II, p. 219.

challenges to their authority continued.¹⁷³ There was still a strong enclave of Anglo-Danes in York and across the area which was under the Danelaw. The threat of invasion from the Danes had not stopped and there was still the possibility that Edgar would persist with his claim from his position in Scotland. William treated Morcar and Edwin badly and they felt betrayed. He taxed them heavily, took some of their land away and they saw the building of lots of castles posed a threat and resistance to the new order grew.¹⁷⁴

William's way to solve the problem of rebellion in the North was by 'harrying': destroying the land, the nobility and imposing overlords. William thought he could succeed when others had failed. Kepelle, in his concluding chapter, sums it up distinctly:

...they [the northerners] reacted to him [William] not as a new phenomenon that had radically altered the political order but in accordance with the lessons of their past. Every king since 1000 had oppressed either Northumbria or York. Ethelred had controlled the Danes of York with the Northumbrians. Cnut had reversed the relationship, and Edward the Confessor had governed the North through Siward, who had been unpopular in Northumbria and through Tostig, whose rule had provoked the great northern revolt of 1065.¹⁷⁵

William was going to be resisted, and what was beginning to have some success in the South, the substitution of one nobility for another, would fail. The North was culturally a step too far. Kepelle makes a minor, but significant point, that the Norman noble diet required bread made from wheat which did not grow in the North, oats grew well and were used instead. 'Where wheat could not be grown, the Normans did not settle.'¹⁷⁶ The North soon discovered that William was not like the others who had come before and the North suffered greatly with areas left unpopulated for decades.

¹⁷³ OV C II, p. 185.

¹⁷⁴ Kepelle, *The Norman Conquest*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁵ Kepelle, *The Norman Conquest*, p. 232.

¹⁷⁶ Kepelle, *The Norman Conquest*, p. 234.

For those who came with him, and their trustworthiness was not fully proven, William's reward was the distribution of land across England to reduce the possibility of them forming their own military forces.¹⁷⁷ They on their part, were expected to provide military support in the form of cavalry and infantry drawn from their properties and lands. He also employed mercenaries who were paid with booty from looting when he needed additional help but, has less control over their behaviour.¹⁷⁸ William learnt early on in his youth 'that a short blaze of ferocity could achieve as much as years of conventional fighting'.¹⁷⁹ He was even ruthless about getting rid of rebelling kinsmen.¹⁸⁰ Although in England he was to find it quite a different matter and needed a different approach.

William had conquered a land that was very fundamentally different from Normandy, both in the terrain as well as the method and flexibility of engaging in battle. The use of horses for instance varied, as did the battle dress. There is an abiding image from the Bayeux Tapestry depiction of the battle showing the Norman cavalry attacking the shield wall of the Anglo-Saxons, giving the impression that only Normans fought on horses.¹⁸¹ This is not a true picture of Harold, his troops, or the inhabitants of Britain. Horses were key, for travel, hunting and in battle and different breeds of horses were raised and valued. The nature and terrain of England needed a different approach to warfare from that on the continent. Evidence for the value of horses can be traced back to the Vikings. At Sutton Hoo, one of the burial mounds contains a warrior and his horse.¹⁸² Horses engaged in

¹⁷⁷ Douglas, *William*, p. 271.

¹⁷⁸ Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages Vol. 1* (London: Greenhill Books, 1991), pp. 157-8. William not only had his own core Norman warriors but was outnumbered by those he had recruited; Bretons, French, Flemings, Angevins and other mercenaries from regions further afield.

¹⁷⁹ Barlow, *William I*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁰ Barlow, *William I*, p. 23.

¹⁸¹ EHD II, p. 271.

¹⁸² Martin Carver, *The Sutton Hoo Story* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), pp. 125-129. Mound 17 contained the human burial with the saddle and harness for the horse in a grave close by.

battle are depicted on the 'Aberlemno churchyard cross', on the helmet found at Sutton Hoo, the poem Beowulf and the ASC also documents many incidents of the use of horses.¹⁸³ Horses were of such value that they are mentioned in wills and laws. The heriot, or death levy duty for earls, barons and vavassour (a vassal of the baron), was the liability to give horses, saddles, bridles, armour and equipment to the king.¹⁸⁴ Evidence of ownership of horses can also be found in the Domesday Book.¹⁸⁵ Harold's horsemanship can be seen in the Bayeux Tapestry, hunting with his hawk and going into battle with Duke William, illustrating his ease and ability to manage a horse.¹⁸⁶ The focus on William's horsemanship can be over exaggerated: the English were just as agile as the Normans and used their skills in a different way. Harold had his own royal army, housecarls, who were retained to protect him and hunt with him and, like Edward before him, he had 'the army of the English' at his disposal.¹⁸⁷ Whereas William relied on allegiances and pacts for his support, as Searle describes his army as '...disciplined not by dependance but by choice, went as volunteers on a dangerous expedition. But they went as the most disciplined group that had yet thrown itself upon the riches of England.'¹⁸⁸ Poitiers writes of gifts given to William of thoroughbred horses from Gascony, the Auvergne and Spain.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse*, pp. 68-72. Hyland argues that there is no evidence to say that Anglo-Saxons did not use horses in battle and refers to Richard Glover in his article "English Warfare in 1066" in *EHR* 67, 262 (January 1952), pp. 1-18. The article showed that, quote, 'the Anglo-Saxon army was capable of and did fight from horseback prior to the Conquest.' Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse*, p. 72.

¹⁸⁴ Stubbs, p. 87. Law of Canute, Cap. 71. Hyland expands on wills and the heriot payable to the king supporting the evidence of the high value given to the military horse. *The Medieval Warhorse*, pp. 76-79.

¹⁸⁵ *Domesday Book, 34 Suffolk*, ed. by A. Rumble (Chichester: Phillimore, 1986) some examples of horses can be found at 20-1, 3, 6, 10, 11. 25- 7, 3, 5, 7. Between one and eight horses are mentioned. Worth noting is the differentiation between horses, cobs and asses.

¹⁸⁶ EHD II, p. 239 and p. 248.

¹⁸⁷ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 136.

¹⁸⁸ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 234.

¹⁸⁹ Bates, *William*, p. 94.

The lack of horses on Harold's side, as Stephen Morillo describes The Battle of Hastings, makes it '...An Unusual Battle'.¹⁹⁰

William's skills in horsemanship learnt in his youth and the quick and efficient building of motte and bailey castles to protect the troops after winning a battle, were key to William's success in expanding and holding ground. The development of protective clothing, adaptations to shields and weapons along with new tactics of battle learnt in his earlier years in Normandy all added to his ability to win the battle. The knowledge of boat building and their use was never lost and was useful in his initial advance towards the crown of England, although with the expansion of Normandy itself it was not required to the same extent after the settlement of the original group. Progress was not one-sided, the Anglo-Saxons also developed their ship-building skills: Alfred the Great suffered a series of defeats documented in the ASC of AD 897, following which he built his navy to protect his shores. We see Harold's fleet in action in the summer of 1066.¹⁹¹ A list of William's boats for the crossing has been documented and included all his councillors and men he could count on as well as those who were expecting great rewards.¹⁹² The one missing supporter was Count Baldwin, Matilda's father. He was too closely connected to other interested parties. He was related by the marriage of his half-sister to Tostig, another contender at the time for the throne of England.¹⁹³

William's success in Normandy depended on swift raids and skirmishes on horseback and the armour adapted accordingly and very effective protection. The *hauberk* was a chain-

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Morillo, Hastings: An Unusual Battle, *The Battle of Hastings*, ed. Stephen Morillo (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996), pp. 220-227. Morillo puts into context Harold's constraints, lack of cavalry and bowmen, reasons for the length of the battle and strategy used.

¹⁹¹ ASC, AD 1066.

¹⁹² François Neveux, *A Brief History of the Normans: The Conquests that Changed the Face of Europe*, trans. by Howard Curtis (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2008), p. 133.

¹⁹³ Borman, *Matilda*, p. 89.

mail tunic that covered the neck, body, upper arms and thighs.¹⁹⁴ The Bayeux Tapestry shows the design which is somewhat deceptive. Oman differentiates between a byrnie and the *hauberk* and describes the development of the *hauberk* in more detail, noting that the lower part of the chainmail was a divided skirt not trousers and that the byrnie was different and developed from a leather body garment.¹⁹⁵ The helm or helmet developed into its conical form which was very efficient against sword and axe and the iron bar at the front protected the nose and face. A kite-shaped shield was more efficient than the rounded type in protecting a mounted soldier and easier to handle although the round shield was still used by foot soldiers.¹⁹⁶ The cavalrymen had a straight sword and a lance, as well as a dagger.¹⁹⁷ The bowman was also a key member of the army, and, as at Hastings, were in William's frontline using their crossbows. The Anglo-Saxons had all the same accoutrements of battle in addition to the battle-axe used by the foot soldiers.

The strategy employed by Harold at Hastings was to defend his position from a high point and use the infantry and the shield-wall suited to the terrain. Round shields would have been the chosen shape, but the kite shield is shown in the Bayeux Tapestry scene LXV.¹⁹⁸ The battle-axe is also shown being used in the following section, LXVI, by the Anglo-Saxons against the Normans and their horses. Harold also had limited resources at Hastings: he had to recruit and call on more fyrdsmen, as well as, further troops after being on a war footing for most of the year.¹⁹⁹ He had used all his best men and bowmen at Stamford Bridge and now was driven by an urgency to stop the 'harrying' reported

¹⁹⁴ Barlow, *William I*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁵ Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages, Vol. I* (London: Greenhill Books, 1991), p. 128.

¹⁹⁶ Oman, *A History of the Art of War*, p. 129.

¹⁹⁷ Barlow, *Edward*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁸ EHD II, p. 271.

¹⁹⁹ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 583.

against his own people of Kent and Sussex in the South.²⁰⁰ His horses may well have been overworked and in need of re-shoeing before they could be ridden again although the position he took on the hill would not have required mounted cavalry.

The lack of horses and bowmen for Harold at Hastings appears to be the major and decisive difference between them. William relied on his horses for swift movement, attack and retreat, but they were vulnerable. William's army included different allegiances who used slightly varying approaches to battle. The Bretons used the feigned retreat to draw the opponent away from their stronger higher position, which is what happened at Hastings. William observed this tactic and took advantage and was able to break the shield-wall with his cavalry.²⁰¹

Having defeated Harold, William needed to hold and consolidate his position. To do this he built motte and bailey castles, as a garrison for troops to hold and control the area and allowing for their quick deployment: a useful tactic he had learnt in Normandy. The Romans built walls to delineate occupied areas, and the Anglo-Saxons built burghs: open areas consisting of a castle and a wall around a settlement which had been introduced by Alfred the Great as a defensive measure and would keep his people safe. But William had the enemy within his demesne. He needed to continue to control and suppress the unruly conquered population. In the North he was up against tribes who had a similar mindset as his. They were also descended from the Vikings of earlier insurgents who had assimilated into the local population and were established in the Danelaw. The Danelaw was the result

²⁰⁰ Frank McLynn, *1066 the Year of Three Battles* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 213. Oman, *A History of the Art of War*, p. 151.

²⁰¹ Oman, *A History of the Art of War*, p. 162. Further debate on the battle can be found in S. Morillo, 'Hastings: An unusual Battle', *The Battle of Hastings Sources and Interpretations*, ed. by S Morillo (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996), pp. 219-227.

of a treaty between Alfred the Great and Guthrum around 878, similar to that between Charles the Simple and Rollo in 911.²⁰²

Having won the battle in England, William now had to control not only the population, he had the added problem of controlling the borders both in England and in Normandy. His task included the borders of Scotland and Wales along with Maine, Blois, Chartres, Bretagne and d'Anjou in Normandy and with the French King in the East, who was now the young Phillip I (1060-1108).²⁰³ The strategy he employed in both in Normandy and England involved relatives by kinship or marriage he trusted to hold his rule of government reinforcing bonds and loyalty but the cost for William was of land and remuneration. Hence the continual search for more and more taxes, land and booty. He took away land from those he discovered were not so loyal and 'recycled' it. We can see in the Domesday book that he only gifted the tenancy and not ownership of the land and documents how quickly he replaced Anglo-Saxon lords with his own men.²⁰⁴

Searle puts forward the case for family connections and marriage and demonstrates that this strategy was not new and was seen amongst the Northmen at the time of Duke Robert I.²⁰⁵ Having covered most of his borders with trusted kin, the final area of control he needed was the church. In 1079 he had replaced Stigand in Canterbury with Lanfranc, who was subsequently in control over the whole of the English church. William had made a promise to the pope to reform the church and Lanfranc was appointed to carry it out. He endowed the church with land and riches with the expectation of loyalty. Odo, his half-brother, was given the bishopric of Bayeux but his loyalty was challenged over the issue of

²⁰² GND I, p. 31.

²⁰³ Bates, *William*, p. 46.

²⁰⁴ Bates, *William*, p. 462. also p. 463. The Salisbury Oath of 1086.

²⁰⁵ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, p. 101.

his support for Robert, William's son, and the control of Maine. William considered Odo had betrayed him and he was incarcerated, not to be released until after William died.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Barlow, *William I*, p. 164. More information about Robert and the Duchy of Maine see, Douglas, *William* pp. 236-8.

CONCLUSION

Was William unique and innovative, or was he a product of his circumstances?

Understanding this very complex character and the way in which he achieved the increase and maintained his borders must not be judged by modern standards.

The findings presented above can only scratch the surface of the period William inhabited. The evidence available is minimal, biased and literary, or like the Bayeux Tapestry, pictorial, but could also be seen as propaganda. A tendency to see him at a disadvantage due to his birth can be ignored because there are examples of it being used to an advantage. He lived constantly under threat of death, but so did others around him. His father, like others, used kin to protect and educate their heirs, and he used his kin to his, as well as their advantage. Marriage was used to increase territory and subdue possible rebellions. William did discover that he could not rely completely on kinship for unquestioned loyalty; some took their chance to challenge his rights, but others saw his determination and resolve to achieve superiority and wanted to be on the winning side. He had an inner drive to dominate, to survive: it came at a cost, and he was willing to pay.

What William had learnt, and the way of government he used, in Normandy, he expected to work in England. William intended to make England another one of his provinces: he knew there were Normans already living in England, brought over by Edward the Confessor, who would give him support.²⁰⁷ Edward was a distant relative of William and had spent time in exile in Normandy. Edward, however come late to the throne of England and having a rather weak character, was cowed by the powerful earls and the Anglo-

²⁰⁷ Edward's court was filled with foreigners, see Barlow, *Edward*, pp. 190-2. Examples of the Normans around Edward include Ralph of Mantes, a nephew, Robert fitzWimarc, kinsman and present at Edward's death and Ralph the Staller, both Bretons. Also Robert of Rhuddlan, Robert of Jumièges made bishop of London as well as Leofric and Herman also as bishops.

Saxon system of government. The system limited his power and he found safety and peace of mind in piety and the church, leaving the earls to govern. Edward was described as the biblical figure of Solomon, an image of a wise man, a thoughtful man of peace.²⁰⁸ He did on occasion try to control his advisers with little success, he tended eventually to acquiesce to keep the peace, a peace that was felt in England during Edward's reign. This sense of peace lulled the country into a false security which came into sharp relief upon his death, with the invasion challenges in Harold's reign and then when William took control of the throne.

Poitiers, in his rhetorical language, describes William in terms completely the opposite to Edward: as a Roman leader, a Caesar, and from what has been written by others about him and the effect he has had on history, it is difficult to disagree. He was charismatic, cunning but generous, intelligent and full of energy, driven and power-hungry, ruthless, but he also had respect for the church.²⁰⁹ Duke William fought his battles in a completely different way from the Anglo-Saxons. They experienced many attacks from the Vikings and continually had to repel advances or make accommodation with a treaty of compromise, as with Alfred the Great and Guthrum in the Danelaw. Normandy, on the other hand, was a fairly new entity, struggling with some internal challenges and a vassal of the Frankish king, but through William's mindset of superiority and his physical appearance, he could dominate and achieve his goal in Normandy. The drive for power and challenge for dominance and enrichment was fed by the lure of the crown of England. His methods were based on his education of Frankish tactics and horsemanship, castle building, which he put to great use in the challenges he faced in Normandy as well as in England, and adding to that his Viking raiding heritage.

²⁰⁸ *The Life of Edward*, ed. by Barlow, p. 3. EHD II, p. 112. n. 1. The Annals of St. Mildred compares to the peaceful reign of Edward to that of Solomon's.

²⁰⁹ EHD II, p. 219.

To fund the continual challenges to his authority within the kingdom as well as on the borders, William needed to raise more taxes. The threat of invasion prompted the commission of the Domesday Book. The survey, which was quickly and efficiently completed, reported on the state of the country and highlighted where monies could be raised.

At the threat of losing control of the church by being excommunicated for his marriage to Matilda, he made a promise to the pope to reform the church. He appointed Lanfranc to a position of great authority to try to achieve that goal. In his lifetime, and with his beloved wife Matilda, greatly endowed the church with land and riches in England and Normandy. Later the reforms were put in jeopardy or undone by his heirs. He did not have the wisdom of his predecessors: William Longsword and his father Robert, who realised the need to designate an heir before they died and keep to their decision. For William's son Robert, although the decision for him to inherit Normandy was made, he was not allowed to exercise unfettered authority. William did not trust Robert after his rebellion and held onto power. He also frustrated William Rufus and Henry, his other sons, by failing to designate their inheritance, which caused a series of events that would taint William's legacy. Barlow writes about William's attitude towards giving his sons their own control of any part of his demesne and kept them supervised, in a state of titular authority, holding formal positions without power. Barlow suggests that:

William believed that in his company they would learn the art of war and statecraft, and, no doubt, feared that if he gave them countries they would not only drift away and become immersed in petty business, but also become centres of intrigue. For the same reasons he may have discouraged, even forbade, marriage.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Barlow, *William I*, p. 181.

Can it be considered that William was successful in expanding his territory and borders and could that success be maintained? He achieved his considered birth right of becoming the king of England but it was a costly, unhappy and tyrannical period for both him and the lands he governed and conquered. Could he be sure that what he had gained for the cause of the Norman dynasty would be carried on by his successors? William did succeed in taking the throne of England and positioning some of his faithful kin in positions where they could protect and possibly increase his dominion, but at the cost of spreading them too thinly.²¹¹ He naively had not anticipated the resistance he found in the North or understand the terrain.

While he was alive, he had ultimate control; by force of character as well as by putting fear into those who crossed him, but his legacy did not remain strong through his sons as they did not have the same kinship resolve. He was sadly abandoned at his death, leaving his sons to go into battle for the inheritance, none being happy with the legacy they had been given and they went on to quarrel and undo a lot of what William had achieved. They were more interested in their own kingship than their kinship.

Although what William did in England is felt to this day, it is not the empire he had envisaged: he left us castles and a land registry in the form of the Domesday Book, he introduced the Feudal system and abolished slavery, along with a near complete change of blood in the aristocracy in the land, areas which other eminent historians cited here have explored. Normandy, however, was drained of its best men and was put at risk of being lost: many of his dukes had land and responsibility in Normandy, lands that were also in need of protection from the strengthening French kings and bordering dominions as well as the English lands, lands which did not willingly submit to their new overlords.

²¹¹ Barlow, Edward, p. 157. See above, p. 43.

Some Norman lords had difficulty knowing where they stood with William's sons, who were fighting for the ultimate authority of both England and Normandy and made the decision to go back to their lands in Normandy, but many stayed, making the most of what they had been given in England and endured some very turbulent times under William Rufus and Henry I.

There can be none better to agree with than Frank Barlow, as he concludes in his study of *William I and the Conquest*:

By 1090 many of William's achievements had already disappeared. His empire was divided. Normandy was anarchical and Maine and most of the border fiefs had fallen away or were in revolt. Church reform had not only ceased in all parts but was being deliberately undone. Moreover the kingdom [England] had again become more important than the duchy. Normandy was to pay heavily for the Conquest. Already drained of many of its best men, it was itself to be conquered time after time. Rufus and then Henry, using English resources, took it from Robert. ...In England the male descent from William ended with his sons and thereafter the Norman line was continued only through women.²¹²

History is his judge, and of the legacy of his reign in Normandy and England. He fought hard to increase and maintain his borders whilst alive but failed to regard the experiences of the past and understand that he needed to train a successor to take forward his vision. His upbringing made him into a fighter, his heritage instilled in him a sense of entitlement, and his personality drove him forward whatever the cost to his followers and those he encountered. What he has left is evident not so much in great respect for him as a leader, but the mark he has left on the landscape, on customs, the political order and the bloodline of the English people. In Normandy, the power of the Duchy waned. William is intriguing, was belligerent, hotheaded, an enigma, and he does join the ranks of such notable men in history, but not as a saint.

²¹² Barlow, *William I*, p. 93.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, ed. and trans. by Swanton, Michael (New York: Routledge, 1996)

The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 919-966, ed. and trans. by Fanning, S. and Bachrach B. S. (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2011)

The Annals of Saint-Quentin, *Historia Normannorum*, ed. and trans. by Christiansen, Eric (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1998) English translation can be found at
<https://the-orb.arlima.net/orb_done/dudo/dudindexe.html>

Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First, ed. by Stubbs, William (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951)

The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon, ed. and trans. by Forester, T. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853)

Chronicon Turonense, Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France, Vol. XI, ed. by Bouquet, M. (Paris: 1876)

English Historical Documents c500-1042, ed. by Whitelock, Dorothy (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955)

English Historical Documents Vol. II c1042-1187, ed. by Douglas, David C. and Greenaway, George, W. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968)

Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England, trans. by Bosanquet, G., forward by Southern, R.W. (London: The Cresset Press, 1964)

The life of Edward The Confessor, ed. by Barlow, Frank (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962)

Domesday Book, Gloucestershire, ed. by Morris, J. (Chichester: Phillimore, 1982)

Domesday Book, 34 Suffolk, ed. by Rumble, A. (Chichester: Phillimore, 1986)

Domesday Book Wiltshire, ed. by Morris, J. (Chichester: Phillimore, 1979)

Orderic Vitalis: *The Ecclesiastical History, Vol II Books III & IV*, ed. and trans. by Chibnall, Marjorie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy, Volumes II, III, IV*, ed. and trans. by Forester, T. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854)

Poitiers, Guillaume de, *Histoire de Guillaum le Conquérant*, ed. and trans. by Foreville, Raymonde (Paris: Société D'édition, 1952)

William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, 2 vols, ed. and trans. by Mynors, R.A.B., Thomson, R.M. and Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998-9)

William of Malmesbury's *Chronicles of the Kings of England*, trans. by Sharpe, J. and ed. by Giles, J. A. (London: Bohn, 1848)

The Gesta Normanannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni Vol I, ed. and trans. by Van Houts, Elizabeth M. C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

The Gesta Normanannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni Vol II, ed. and trans. by Van Houts, Elizabeth M. C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

Wace's Roman de Rou, The History of the Norman People, ed. and trans. by Burgess, Glyn N. with additional notes by Van Houts, E. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004)

Secondary Sources

Barlow, Frank, *Edward The Confessor* (London: Methuen, 1970)

Barlow, Frank, *William I and the Norman Conquest* (Bucks: The English Universities Press Ltd., 1965)

Bates, D., *William the Conqueror* (London: Yale University Press, 2018)

Bates, D., The Conqueror's Earliest Historians and the Writing of his Biography, *Writing Medieval Biography*, ed. by Bates, D., Crick, J., and Hamilton (Woodbridge: the Boydell Press, 2006)

Baxter, Stephen, How and Why Was Domesday Made?, *The English Historical Review*, Volume 135, Issue 576, October 2020, Pages 1085–1131, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceaa310>>

Borman, Tracy, *Matilda Queen of the Conqueror* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011)

Brown, R. Allen, *The Norman Conquest of England, Sources and documents* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984)

Carver, Martin, *The Sutton Hoo Story* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017)

Chambers, *The Chambers Dictionary* (London: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 1993)

Chibnall, Marjorie, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996)

Chibnall, Marjorie, *The Normans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006)

Crouch, D., *The Normans* (London: Hambledon & London, 2002)

Donne Poetical Works, ed. by Grierson, Sir Herbert (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)

Donne, John, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (New York: CreativeSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015)

Douglas, David, C., *The Norman Achievement* (Netherlands: Colins/Fontana, 1972)

Douglas, David, C., *William the Conqueror* (London: Yale University Press, 1999)

Dunbabin, Jean, *France in the Making 843-118* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Freeman, Edward, A., *The History of The Norman Conquest of England, Vol. III and IV* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873)

Ferguson, R., *The Vikings* (London: Penguin Books, 2010)

Galbraith, V. H., *The Making of the Domesday Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)

Galbraith, V. H., *Domesday Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974)

Given-Wilson, Chris, *Chronicles: The writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004)

Gransden, A., *Historical Writing in England c550-1307* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974)

Haskins, C. H., *Norman Institutions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1918)

Hagger, M., *Norman Rule in Normandy, 911-1144* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017)

Hollister C. Warren, *Henry I* (London: Yale University Press, 2003)

Houts, Van, Elisabeth, ed. and trans., *The Normans in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Hyland, Ann, *The Medieval Warhorse* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1994)

Kapelle, William, E., *The Norman Conquest of the North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979)

Macdonald, A. J., *Lanfranc A study of his life, work and writing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926)

McLynn, Frank, *1066 the Year of Three Battles* (London: Pimlico, 1999)

Planché, J. R., *The Conqueror and His Companions, 2 Vols.* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1874)

The Battle of Hastings Sources and Interpretations, ed. by S. Morillo (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996)

Neveux, François, *A Brief History of the Normans: The Conquests that Changed the Face of Europe*, trans. by Curtis, Howard (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2008)

Patourel, John le, *The Norman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976)

Price, Neil, *The Children of Ash and Elm*, (UK: Penguin, 2020)

Sawyer, P. H., *Kings and Vikings* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1994)

Searle, Eleanor, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066* (London: University of California Press Ltd., 1988)

Stenton, F. M., *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Stenton, F. M., *English Feudalism 1066-1166* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932)

Strayer, Joseph, R., *Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of History* (New Jersey: Princetown University Press, 1971)

Websites

<<https://opendomesday.org/place/SK4186/handsworth/>>

<https://domesday.pase.ac.uk/Domesday?op=5&nameinfo_id=2524#list>

<<https://earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/reference/essays/writs/>>

<<https://piperollsociety.co.uk/>>

<https://the-orb.arlima.net/orb_done/dudo/dudindexe.html>

<<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>