

The Lasting Legacy of the Norman People: It Does Exist and Examples of It from Across the Globe

When asked about the Normans, a variety of responses would be received from different people. Artists and art enthusiasts might think of the famous American author and painter Norman Rockwell. The more historically inclined will most likely remember the violent Viking men from France who liked to stab people and conquered England. Some people might have no idea who the Normans were, or why they matter at all. It is those stabbing-inclined French men and the lasting legacy they left behind that this essay will focus on. Legacy is defined in the Cambridge English dictionary as ‘something that is a part of your history or that remains from an earlier time’¹ Every person leaves behind a legacy, some are remembered, and some are not. Whether it is acknowledged or not, the Normans as a people left behind a lasting legacy that has permeated Britain, France and other parts of Europe for over a century.

The best example of the Norman legacy is perhaps this paper, and others like it. The very idea that people are still studying the Normans means they have a legacy and that is worth something of note and needs to be studied. Academics are still dedicating thousands of hours of study to the Normans every year and students such as Alexandra Makin at the University of Manchester are using the Normans as a basis for their PhD thesis.² To be studied today over 600 years later, they must have left behind a legacy for scholars to study. Over nine hundred years after the Battle of Antioch during the First Crusade in the year 1098 and the events of the year 1066, people are still writing journals on them and discussing their value in scholarship.³ Physical examples of the Norman legacy are found around Europe and the Mediterranean,

¹ The Editors of the Cambridge Dictionary, ‘Meaning of “legacy” in the English Dictionary’, Cambridge Dictionary [online], available from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/legacy>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

² The University of Manchester, ‘Tapestry is More Than It Seems’, The University of Manchester [online], available from <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/tapestry-is-more-than-its-seams/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

³ Y. Noah Harari, ‘The Concept of “Decisive Battles” in World History’, *Journal of World History* [online], vol. 18, no. 3 (2007), pp. 251-256. Available from https://www.jstor.org/stable/20079432?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=battle&searchText=of&searchText=hastings&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Fsd%3D1990%26amp%3Bed%3D%26amp%3BcurrentPath%3D%252Faction%252FdoBasicSearch%26amp%3BQuery%3Dbattle%2Bof%2Bhastings%26amp%3BsearchType%3DfacetSearch%26amp%3Bpage%3D1&seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents, accessed on [15/11/2018].

although primarily in Britain and in France. In France, the region of Normandy still bears the name of the men that settled the land and made it their kingdom. In Britain, the Normans changed the entire country and its landscape. An easy example is the names of people. The most popular first names today in Britain included names such as Henry, Robert, Richard, and William. Some of these names have been popular for over 1000 years.⁴ What would surprise some people is that those names are not traditional English names, but rather names of powerful and important Normans. Normans such as William the Conqueror who conquered England and Robert, the Count of Flanders, a valiant knight who fought in the first crusade.⁵ Even the future king of England, William the Duke of Cambridge, is named after a Norman.

Names are but the tip of the iceberg when looking at the Norman legacy in England. The Normans changed the style of government that was found in England. It went from the Anglo-Saxon style to the Norman style of central government.⁶ Michael Wood, a professor of public history at the University of Manchester, described the Normans as having ‘internationalised British civilization.’⁷ The Normans started shifting the political ties away from Scandinavia, the way of the Anglo-Saxons, and created stronger ties with the European continent and in particular France.⁸ The language used in England after the Normans is an example of their legacy as well. Before the Normans took England, the wealthy and the clergy used the Anglo-Saxon vernacular of old English. The Normans introduced Latin to England and it became the main language of the church and the government.⁹ As it was then in England, just like it was on the continent. Though it would not be until later that Middle English would take a hold in the country, the Normans started the change in language in England. The Normans also brought in cultural changes from France to England after 1066, cultural changes that have stood the tests of time. A prime example is the drinking of wine. The drinking of wine overcame mead as the drink of

⁴ Megan Lane, ‘1066 and All Those Baby Names’, BBC News Magazine [online], available from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-10776581>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

⁵ August. C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants* (Princeton: Princeton, 1921), 57.

⁶ Alice Mulhearn, ‘The Legacy of the Norman Conquest’, History Learning [online], available at <http://historylearning.com/medieval-england/the-legacy-of-the-norman-conquest/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

⁷ Michael Wood, ‘The Norman Yoke: Symbol or Reality?’, BBC [online], available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/conquest/after_norman/norman_yoke_07.shtml, accessed on [15/11/2018].

⁸ Alice Mulhearn, ‘The Legacy of the Norman Conquest’, History Learning [online], available at <http://historylearning.com/medieval-england/the-legacy-of-the-norman-conquest/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

⁹ Alice Mulhearn, ‘The Legacy of the Norman Conquest’, History Learning [online], available at <http://historylearning.com/medieval-england/the-legacy-of-the-norman-conquest/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

choice for the aristocratic class and became a sign of status in post-Norman English aristocracy.¹⁰ This custom was imported from France with the Normans and remains to this day. A publication released in May 2018 by the English NHS found that when women in England drank in excess, their alcohol of choice was wine.¹¹ Although not specifically about the Normans in England, English Normans did participate in the first crusade. The first crusade was responding to Pope Urban's call to help their Byzantine allies. On the way to Constantinople, a few Normans got involved in other skirmishes and stayed behind to conquer lands or fight other battles. Some Normans got involved in the Islam vs Christianity issues that was found in and around Jerusalem.¹² This involvement is just one example of how the Normans used religion to justify their battles and how that impacted their legacy as warriors. Another example of the Norman's legacy is the unification of England, Wales and Scotland. After the taking of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror, the Normans proceeded to invade Wales and Scotland. Though they never fully conquered the entire British Isles, they did make large inroads into Scotland and Wales and even Ireland. Perhaps one of the longest lasting legacies of the Normans is their art, writing and architecture.

The Bayeux Tapestry is perhaps one of the most famous Norman pieces. It has been generally accepted that the Tapestry was commissioned by the Bishop Odo of Bayeux, the half-brother of William the Conqueror. The date of creation is unknown, but it is generally agreed that it was made sometime between 1060-1100.¹³ The Bayeux Tapestry depicts the events leading up to 1066 and the conquering of England. The tapestry itself is actually a giant embroidery and is over 230 feet long.¹⁴ Why the Bayeux Tapestry is important is that it gives

¹⁰ Alice Mulhearn, 'The Legacy of the Norman Conquest', History Learning [online], available at <http://historylearning.com/medieval-england/the-legacy-of-the-norman-conquest/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

¹¹ Stats Team, Part 4: Drinking behaviours among adults, NHS Digital [online], available from <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-alcohol/2018/part-4>, accessed from [15/11/2018].

¹² D.C. Douglas, *The Norman Fate* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), p. 85.

¹³ J.M. Carter, Doing What Historian Do: Using the Bayeux Tapestry to Discover the Past. *The Clearing House* [online], vol. 70, no. 1 (1996), pp. 24. Available from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/docview/196835742/fulltextPDF/1D73F894DBF34F8EPQ/1?accountid=130472>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

¹⁴ J.M. Carter, Doing What Historian Do: Using the Bayeux Tapestry to Discover the Past. *The Clearing House* [online], vol. 70, no. 1 (1996), pp. 24. Available from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/docview/196835742/fulltextPDF/1D73F894DBF34F8EPQ/1?accountid=130472>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

historians and scholars a physical representation of Norman warfare. It also gives us a view of how the Normans viewed themselves and wanted to be remembered. The Bayeux Tapestry could perhaps be considered a physical embodiment of Norman legacy. It shows us the military prowess of the Normans and how they came to take over England, perhaps the two most broadly acknowledged and well-known examples of the Norman legacy. The Bayeux Tapestry could perhaps be considered a piece of propaganda, projecting an air of Norman power and might onto the audience that is perhaps untrue and doesn't exist. It could also be viewed as a tool for legacy building and shaping, specifically created so that those in the future would remember the Normans and associate them with certain characteristics such as power, fierceness and strength.

The Domesday Survey is another notable example of the Norman legacy. It is a survey of all of England, under the control of William the Conqueror, and what England contained. In his book *Time and the Hour*, D.C. Douglas describes the Domesday Survey as containing '...how much each landholder in England had in land and stock and how much money it might be worth.'¹⁵ The Domesday Book, as it most commonly referred to, shows how smart and wealthy the English Normans were. The Normans were making a very detailed record of their new holdings, trying to understand this almost alien land that they had just rescued from the Anglo-Saxons and brought into the safety of Christianity.¹⁶ William the Conqueror uses the information he finds out as a result of the Domesday Survey to alter his and their legacy. The Domesday Book relates back to the Norman legacy by giving the Normans the appearance of civilised people trying to make the surrounding world better, by saving others from aliens and barbarians and then introducing those they had saved to Christianity. This makes the Normans seem like good people. While in all reality, they were not so good. The early Normans were very heavy believers in the practice of pillage and plunder; of getting in, grabbing anything of value and getting out by any means possible, even if it meant killing people. The Normans created a fearsome legacy this way and the later generations of Normans did not like that legacy and tried to change the legacy they would ultimately leave behind. The later Normans wanted to be seen as the good guys, doing good deeds for good people and not just doing things for treasure and money. The Normans would eventually convert to Christianity, join up with the Pope and the Papacy, and build churches and cathedrals throughout Normandy and the lands they conquered.

¹⁵ D.C. Douglas, *Time and the Hour* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 223.

¹⁶ D.C. Douglas, *Time and the Hour* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 225.

They would become patrons of the arts and they would assimilate into the lands they conquered, not forcing their Norman culture on anybody. They would instead try to blend Norman culture and traditions into the local practices. The wine example previously mentioned is an example of this.¹⁷ While their initial legacy makes them out to be selfish money hungry guys, the legacy ultimately left by the Normans as a whole is of a reformed warrior class that tried to be good but still ultimately did pillage and plunder when the time called for it. The Domesday Book and the Normans actions affected the legacy they left behind

The architecture of the Normans is another physical example of the Norman legacy. The sheer number of castles built or rebuilt by the Normans is astonishing. From 1066 until his death just over 20 years later, William the Conqueror built over eighty castles across England that were for mostly military purposes.¹⁸ These military castles were often stone installations built in strategically chosen locations. These locations were chosen because they were often easily defensible, near enough a local population to put down any uprisings that may occur and near enough to towns and villages to become the centres of administration for the local area.¹⁹ The most famous example of Norman architecture is the Tower of London, which is flocked to by millions of people every year. It was built in the 1070s by William the Conqueror. It was most likely built not only as a functioning castle, but also as a statement.²⁰ The sight of the castle in all its glory almost forces people to bow down to its awe and glory. T.E. Faulkner of Oxford Reference characterises Norman architecture as having ‘heavy, load-bearing masonry construction, comparatively modest window apertures, deeply recessed doorways, massive columns or piers, and the use of the round arch and its derivatives, the groin- and barrel-vaults.’²¹ These characteristics can all be found in the Tower of London. The Norman’s use of architecture

¹⁷ Alice Mulhearn, ‘The Legacy of the Norman Conquest’, History Learning [online], available at <http://historylearning.com/medieval-england/the-legacy-of-the-norman-conquest/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

¹⁸ Alice Mulhearn, ‘The Legacy of the Norman Conquest’, History Learning [online], available at <http://historylearning.com/medieval-england/the-legacy-of-the-norman-conquest/>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

¹⁹ S.D. Lloyd, ‘Bayeux Tapestry’, Oxford Reference [online], available from <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-381>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

²⁰ The Editors of Historic Royal Palaces, ‘The Story of the Tower of London’, Historic Royal Palaces [online], available from <https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/the-story-of-the-tower-of-london/#gs=nVayz0>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

²¹ S.D. Lloyd, ‘Bayeux Tapestry’, Oxford Reference [online], available from <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-381>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

changed the English landscape into something very Norman and left behind their stamp on England that can still be seen today. It left castles and other installations that still stand today that can be found from Wales to Sussex to Norwich. All this castle building in England and in other Norman settlements gave the Normans a reputation, a reputation that melded into their legacy, as builders and as castle people. Looking at architecture, writing and art of the Normans gives a clearer picture of their legacy. The key characteristics of the Norman legacy, power and strength, are easily seen in each example. They are seen in everything from the strong stone structures that are Norman castles to the fierce fighting scenes in the Bayeux Tapestry.

Though the Normans were heavily invested in Britain and France, they did not venture other parts of the world as much. The Normans did gain lands in southern Italy and their adventures in Italy can be seen in the writings of William of Apulia's *The Deeds of Robert Guiscard*.²² They also gained the Kingdom of Sicily, which was written about by Geoffrey Malaterra in *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of Duke Robert Guiscard his brother*.²³ The Normans did not venture into Asia and only very briefly did they venture into the Near East, going only the short distance to Jerusalem. As a result of this, the Norman legacy is not felt very much in these areas if at all. If one turns westward towards the New World of North America, the Norman legacy is not felt at all. This is characterised by the fact that the Normans are not studied in North American Universities. McGill University in Canada does not have any courses listed that study the Normans.²⁴ Harvard University in the United States of America only has one mention of the Normans in their course listing, a single course that focusses on the '...in-depth exploration of the cultural history of Sicily between the Bronze Age and the Norman conquest....'²⁵ This course would not cover Sicily under the Normans, just in the years leading

²² William of Apulia, *The Deeds of Robert Guiscard*, provided in the course reader.

²³ Geoffrey Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of Duke Robert Guiscard his brother*, provided in the course reader.

²⁴ McGill University, 'Arts Undergraduate Courses', McGill University [online], available from <https://mcgill.ca/study/2018-2019/faculties/arts/undergraduate/courses>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

²⁵ Harvard University, 'Regional Study: Sicily', my.HARVARD [online], Available from [https://courses.my.harvard.edu/psp/courses/EMPLOYEE/EMPL/h/?tab=HU_CLASS_SEARCH&SearchReqJSON=%7B%22PageNumber%22%3A1%2C%22PageSize%22%3A%22%22%2C%22SortOrder%22%3A%5B%22IS_SCL_SUBJ_CAT%22%2C%22IS_SCL_SUBJ_CAT%22%5D%2C%22Facets%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%22Category%22%3A%22HU_SCL_SCHEDULED_BRACKETED_COURSES%22%2C%22SearchPropertiesInResults%22%3Atrue%2C%22FacetsInResults%22%3Atrue%2C%22SaveRecent%22%3Afalse%2C%22TopN%22%3A%22%22%2C%22SearchText%22%3A%22\(CRSE_ATTR_VALUE_HU_LEVL_ATTR%3AUGRDGRAD%20%7C%20CRSE_ATTR_VALUE_HU_LEVL_ATTR%3APRIMGRAD%20%7C%20CRSE_ATTR_VALUE_HU_LEVL_ATTR%3APRIMUGRD\)%20\(ACAD_ORG%3A%5C%22CLAS%5C%22\)%22%2C%22DeepLink%22%3Afalse%7D](https://courses.my.harvard.edu/psp/courses/EMPLOYEE/EMPL/h/?tab=HU_CLASS_SEARCH&SearchReqJSON=%7B%22PageNumber%22%3A1%2C%22PageSize%22%3A%22%22%2C%22SortOrder%22%3A%5B%22IS_SCL_SUBJ_CAT%22%2C%22IS_SCL_SUBJ_CAT%22%5D%2C%22Facets%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%22Category%22%3A%22HU_SCL_SCHEDULED_BRACKETED_COURSES%22%2C%22SearchPropertiesInResults%22%3Atrue%2C%22FacetsInResults%22%3Atrue%2C%22SaveRecent%22%3Afalse%2C%22TopN%22%3A%22%22%2C%22SearchText%22%3A%22(CRSE_ATTR_VALUE_HU_LEVL_ATTR%3AUGRDGRAD%20%7C%20CRSE_ATTR_VALUE_HU_LEVL_ATTR%3APRIMGRAD%20%7C%20CRSE_ATTR_VALUE_HU_LEVL_ATTR%3APRIMUGRD)%20(ACAD_ORG%3A%5C%22CLAS%5C%22)%22%2C%22DeepLink%22%3Afalse%7D), accessed [15/11/2018].

up to the Norman conquest. Looking to the southern hemisphere and Australia, the University of Queensland's History department does not offer a single course on the Normans.²⁶ Any mention of the Normans that might happen to be made would only be made in passing. This is all radically different from universities in Norman-inhabited countries. The University of Wales Trinity St. David in Lampeter, UK teaches a course relating to the Normans. The entire course is dedicated to the plight of the Norman race and is taught by the esteemed Dr. Harriet Webster.

From course listings in universities around the world, it is obvious that the Norman legacy is only felt by any degree in countries directly controlled by the Normans. The Norman legacy is complex. It is made up of a variety of characteristics, such as warrior-like and strong, and is seen through a variety of mediums, such as art and architecture. While the small details of Norman identity are discussed by scholars from around Europe and selected other parts of the world, there is no denying that the Normans left behind a lasting legacy that can be seen to this day.

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²⁶ The University of Queensland Australia History Department, 'Course List for the History Single Major', The University of Queensland Australia [online], available from <https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/the-story-of-the-tower-of-london/#gs.=nVayz0>, accessed on [15/11/2018].

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