



## BATTLE OF HASTINGS

In the fourth century CE, a group of tribal warriors called the Saxons invaded British shores and started to take over the country. At first, the Romans pegged them back, but eventually, a line of Anglo-Saxon kings ruled the entire country. Eventually, in 1042, England crowned King Edward the Confessor. He ruled until he died in 1066. Unfortunately, the succession of the throne was anything but simple.

Just as the throne became available, no fewer than four people staked a claim to it. William of Normandy was King Edward's cousin and claimed that Edward had travelled to Normandy before he died and promised the throne to him. There is no evidence to support this now, and even at the time people doubted it was true, but it is possible that this did happen.

Harold Godwinson was Edward's brother-in-law. There was no blood connection which made his claim more tenuous. However, there is more evidence that Edward promised the throne to Harold. On top of this, Harald Hardrada was King of Norway and considered England to be part of his kingdom because many Scandinavians had invaded England before. There was also Edgar Atheling. He was the last surviving Anglo-Saxon prince and so would have continued the line of Saxon kings.

In the end, the real choice came down to two people: William and Harold Godwinson. Harald Hardrada already had control over his own country and wasn't prepared to go to war to win England. Edgar was only a teenager and wasn't considered old or strong enough to hold the country together during the war.

Harold already had control over most of Southern England and was considered the most powerful man in the country. As a result, he was crowned King of England in January of 1066. Almost immediately, William reacted. His ancestors were Vikings who had a large kingdom, and he wanted the same. That meant taking England.

At the end of September that year, William invaded England. He landed in Pevensey with roughly 7,000 men and immediately seized the city. Harold heard word that William had invaded and headed out to meet him. William left Pevensey and made his way to Hastings with his army. When he arrived, he took the time to organise his forces. During this time, they erected a wooden castle.

Most of Harold's men were farmers as well as soldiers and had to gather their crops. They had been allowed to leave to do this at the beginning of September, so Harold's army was weaker than it normally would have been. It was also almost entirely infantrymen on foot with swords. The French army, on the other hand, was heavily armed with archers and cavalry on horseback.

Harold had intended to launch a surprise attack on William, but one of William's scouts spotted the enemy forces. William left the castle and marched to Senlac Hill. The site is located near to what is now known as the town of Battle. Harold was camped at the top of the hill with his army. Having the higher ground was a big advantage and should have won Harold the battle. It was impossible for the French archers to fire uphill and the cavalry couldn't get any speed on their horses to overwhelm the English. However, luck still had a part to play.

A rumour started to spread that William had been killed. Nobody knows it was intentionally started as a plan, or just happened. The French army started to panic and flee. The English saw an opportunity to finish the battle and raced down the hillside to attack the retreating French. At that point, William rode through the French army, declaring that he was alive, and his army rallied and turned. Suddenly, the English didn't have the high ground, and the French cavalry was able to inflict tremendous damage. By dusk, Harold had been killed. According to many historians, Harold was killed by an arrow to the eye and William was ready to lead his forces to London to claim the throne of England.

## SUMMARY FOCUS

1. Why was Harold Godwinson's claim to throne not very strong?
2. What happened that caused William to invade England?
3. What had happened before to make Harald Hardrada think he should be king?
4. What did William do as soon as he reached Hastings?
5. What happened after the English left the hill?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**R**

On which hill was Harold camped?

**R**

Why weren't the French archers effective?

**V**

Find and copy a word from the text that means "on purpose".

**V**

Write a definition for the word "tenuous".

**I**

What evidence is there that Harald Hardrada wasn't very interested in ruling England?

Answers:

1. He didn't have a blood connection to the previous king
2. Harold was crowned king
3. The Scandinavians had invaded England
4. Organised his troops/built a wooden castle
5. William turned his army around and they attacked

R: Senlac Hill

R: They were firing uphill

V: Intentionally

V: Very weak/not very strong

I: He didn't want to go to war to achieve it