

History

How did a Norman become King of England?

Lesson 1 of an enquiry of 4

1. Who were the Normans?

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History of Normandy

Today, Normandy is a part of France but in the eleventh century it had a lot more independence. It was ruled over by the Duke of Normandy. The Duke had to give some support to the King of France but was largely left alone. The Duke was able to make many of his own laws and decide how much tax people should pay. Most importantly, the Duke led his own army so could choose whether or not Normandy went to war. People who lived in Normandy and followed the Duke were called Normans.

The Normans were fierce warriors who had a history of fighting. Thousands of Scandinavian Vikings had **migrated** (moved) to Normandy in the 9th and 10th centuries. At first, the Vikings raided Normandy but by the 11th century, Scandinavians had married local people. As a result the Norman culture included Viking and French influences.



Duke William

William was born in 1028 and ruled Normandy from 1035. He was a large man and someone who had grown up fighting. It tells us much about the Normans character that the Duke was a fierce warrior who had proved himself fighting already. William is said to have had great determination and ambition and was sometimes brutal. William was born when his mother and father weren't married. Nowadays, this doesn't matter but in the eleventh century it made someone seem less respectable. This made some people see William's rule as **illegitimate** which made his control over Normandy weaker. As a result, when William was young, many powerful people in Normandy fought against him to try and take control over Normandy. William had to crush many **rebellions** and fought for his right to rule. As he got older, William was able to better control Normandy. William's thoughts then turned to taking more land.



William and Matilda of Flanders

One of the main reasons that William was able to better control was because of his marriage to Matilda of Flanders in 1051. In the past, marriage was often about power, rather than romantic love as it is today. Matilda's family was powerful in France and Flanders. Flanders was also important because lots of trade between England and the rest of Europe passed through it. Matilda was also **legitimate** which meant that she was born to two married parents. Matilda was therefore very important to William as their marriage made William's standing in Normandy stronger. Matilda was considered calmer than her husband and their marriage produced several children.



Glossary

Migrated - movement of a group of people from one place to another

Illegitimate - People in the 11th century were considered illegitimate if they were born but their parents weren't married (nowadays this doesn't matter!). If rulers were illegitimate they were often seen as less respected and had a weaker claim to rule.

Legitimate - Someone who is seen as a rightful ruler because their birth was 'respectable'. (In the 11th century your parents had to be married for your birth to be seen as 'respectable').

Rebellions - armed resistance against a leader or country.



Comprehension Questions

1. Who ruled over Normandy?

Sentence Starter: The ruler of Normandy was called...

2. What powers did the ruler of Normandy have?

3. Why was fighting an important feature of the Norman way of life?

4. What was William like as a person? What experiences in his life may have made him this way?

5. Who was Matilda of Flanders?

Challenge Question: What were the differences between William and Matilda?

Clue: Think about their family backgrounds and personalities.

