

Learning for



Memory

The Middle Ages

Key Stage 3 History

Booklet

5

M. Wakeford

5. Norman England

What challenges to his rule did William the Conqueror face on becoming king of England and how did he face them?

William's coronation in 1066 did not spell the end of English resistance to the Normans. When Edward the Confessor died, the Witan had wanted his successor to be English and chose Harold as the best available candidate. A foreign king might have wanted to take away land from the existing Anglo-Saxon nobles and hand it over to his own followers. The earls and thegns fighting in the battle of Hastings must have been well aware that this was a battle for their own survival. They could not submit to William as their king, without the possibility of losing their lands, wealth and power.

We know that William persuaded many of his men to join him in the invasion of England with the prospect of some big reward – land – at the end. Now that he was king, they would expect to be getting something in return for their bravery and support on the battlefield. We have also seen that William and his men were capable of brutality when they plundered and burned whole swathes of the English countryside. Thus, having William as their new king could not have filled the majority of the English people with delight. How did they react? Well, as with most things, reactions were mixed. Some people accepted William's rule, but equally some refused to do so.

Rebellions against William

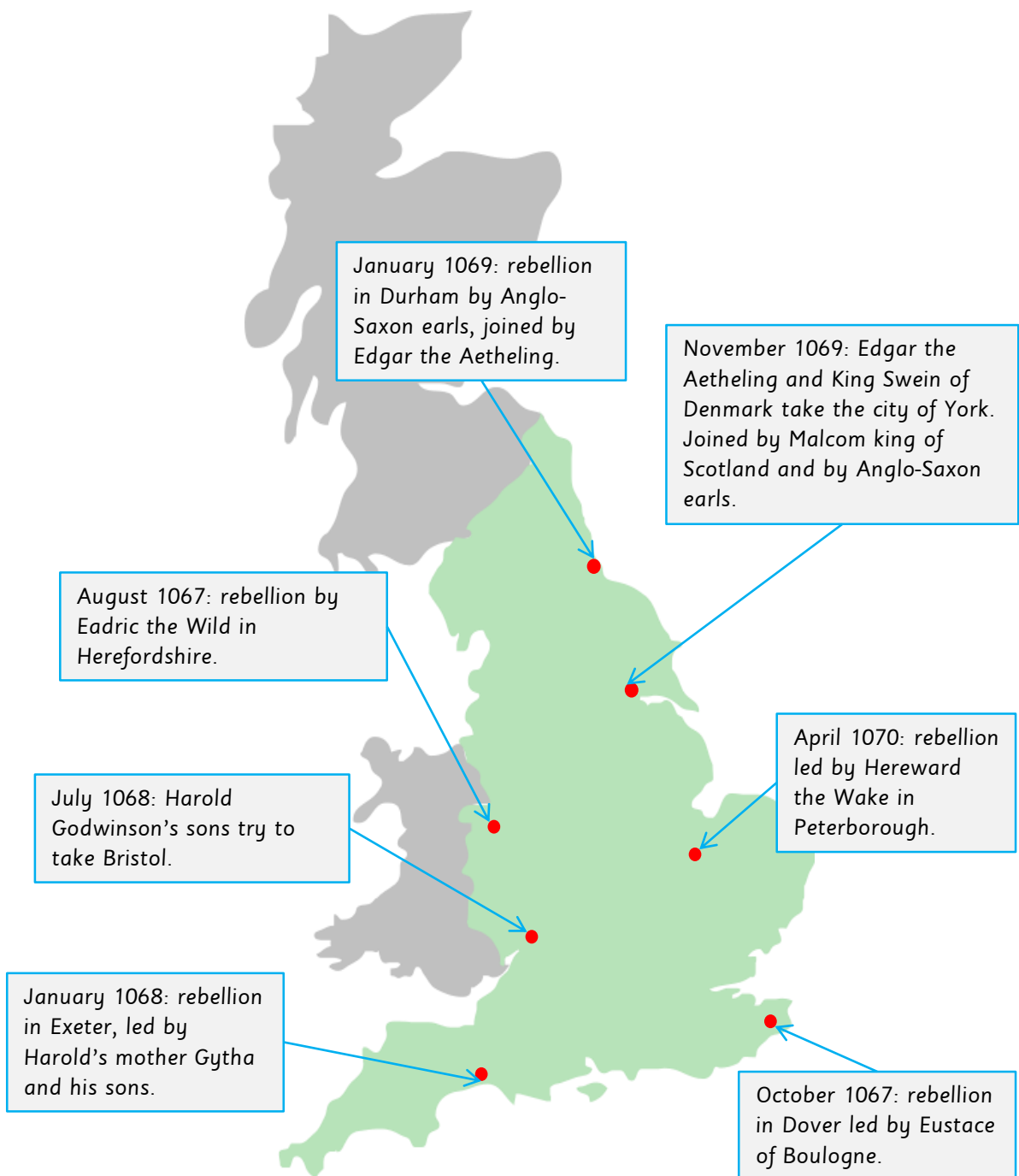
There were many **rebellions** against William in the early years of his reign. The most important of these rebellions involved the two surviving Anglo-Saxon earls, Edwin and Morcar, as well as Edgar the Aetheling. In 1069, they were joined by the king of Scotland (who had married Edgar's sister) and by the king of Denmark. Together, they represented a serious challenge to William's rule up in the north of England and they were able to take the important city of York.

William's reaction was swift and brutal. His army put down the rebellion, and then devastated the countryside in the north of England, leaving nothing behind that could support life. This event is called the 'Harrying of the North'. Orderic Vitalis, an Anglo-Norman monk writing in the 12th century, tell us:

"In his wrath, he commanded that crops, herds, chattels and food of every kind should be put to the flames and reduced to ashes."

As a result, tens of thousands of people starved to death. Another 12th-century chronicler, John of Worcester, wrote that food was so scarce in the aftermath, that people were even reduced to eating human flesh.

Rebellion: armed resistance to the government or ruler. Another word that can be used with a similar meaning is 'revolt'.



Rebellions against William 1067-1070

One look at the map above shows just how widespread the resistance to William was in those first few years. There were rebellions all around the country, not just in one or two locations. During this time, William was frequently on the go, marching from one part of the country to another, in order to stamp his authority.

Such was the strength of his military machine though, that he was able to put down each of these rebellions relatively easily. The most significant of the rebellions was up north in November 1069, prompting William's harsh response in the 'Harrying of the North'.

Sentence completion:

Complete the sentences below, using the information you have learned so far.

William faced many rebellions against him after becoming king of England, because ...

William faced many rebellions against him after becoming king of England, but...

William faced many rebellions against him after becoming king of England, so...

The northern rebellion of 1069 was a serious challenge to William's rule, because ...

The northern rebellion of 1069 was a serious challenge to William's rule, but...

The northern rebellion of 1069 was a serious challenge to William's rule, so...

After the 'Harrying of the North', ...

Recap questions:

1. Who were the Lollards and where did their name come from?
2. What kind of life would a monk have had in a Benedictine monastery? Give at least three facts.
3. What type of person was a housecarl?

Motte and bailey castles

Much of William's military success has also been attributed to his use of the motte and bailey castle, which was very common in Normandy but little known in England. Castles offered many advantages:

- They provided a good look out over the countryside (as they were built on a hill).
- They were a place to shelter soldiers and to launch an attack from.
- They provided a safe place for collecting money (the geld was later collected in castles).
- Courts were held there, dispensing justice locally. They could also be used as a jail for criminals.
- They were a sign of Norman power and **prestige**.

It has been estimated that the Normans built around 500 castles during William's reign. Castles were built in areas where the Normans were vulnerable and they were put under the charge of men that William trusted. Everywhere that William put down a rebellion, he would have a castle built. They were a highly visible sign of Norman might and power.

A 1067 entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle complains that the Normans:

“built castles far and wide throughout the land, oppressing the unhappy people, and things went ever from bad to worse.”

And Orderic Vitalis, an Anglo-Norman monk writing in the early 12th century, tells us that castles:

“were scarcely known in the English provinces, and so the English – in spite of their courage and love of fighting – could put up only a weak resistance to their enemies.”

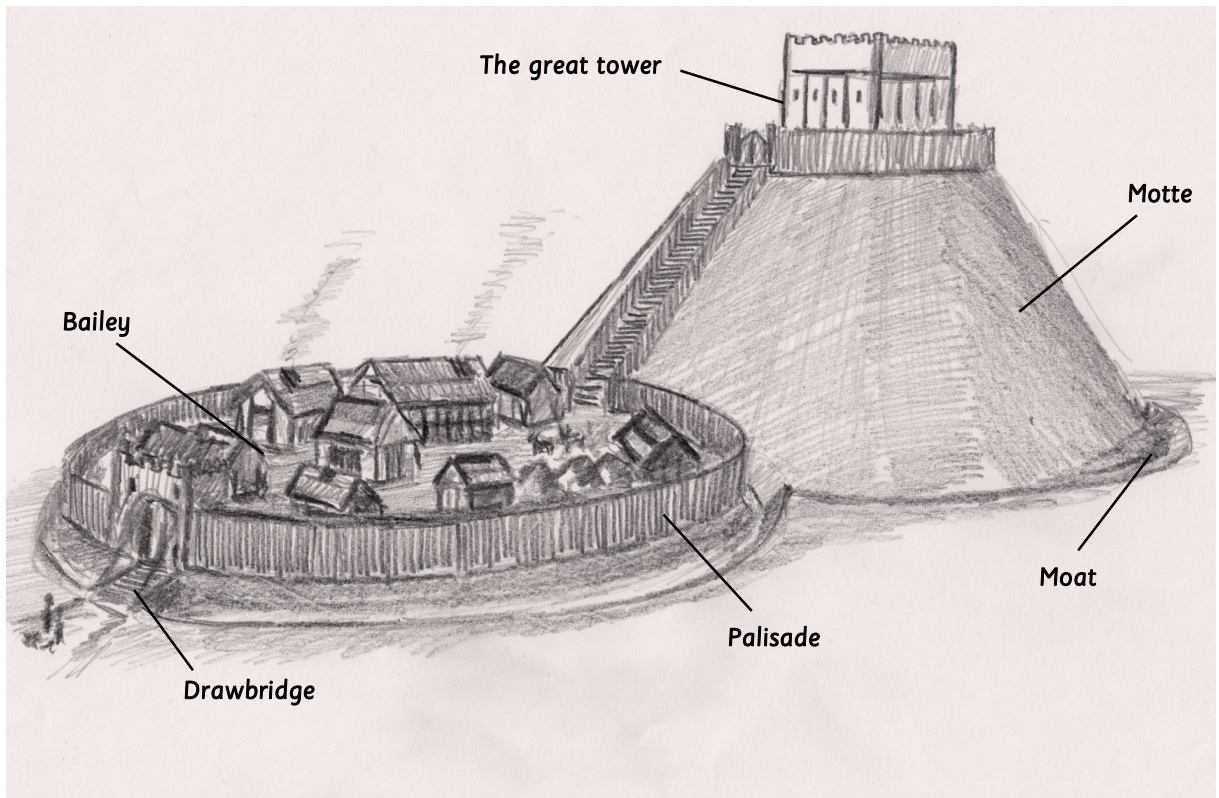
Most motte and bailey castles were made of wood, and could be constructed relatively quickly. Some very high status castles were partially built with stone, such as the White Tower at the Tower of London (which used high quality stone imported from northern France).



The White Tower, Tower of London

Prestige: something or someone that is admired and respected.

A typical motte and bailey castle



The great tower

This was the highest point in the castle, also known as the keep. The great tower was the most visible sign of Norman power, and could probably be seen from miles away. It was used for ceremonial purposes, to show off the authority and prestige of the Normans. It was also the safest part of the castle if it came under attack.

Motte

This was a mound of earth, 15 to 30 metres high, upon which was built the great tower.

Moat

This was a ditch surrounding the castle, often filled with water.

Bailey

This was a yard with buildings to house an entire community (the lord and his family as well as soldiers and servants). There would have been homes, stables and kitchens in the bailey. Archaeological evidence, including jewellery, furnishings and the remains of foods that were eaten, indicate that high-status people would have lived here.

Palisade

This was a wooden fence surrounding the bailey.

Drawbridge

This was the entrance to the castle, which could be lifted up in times of danger.

Copy out:

In your book, draw a motte and bailey castle, and label it with a short description of each section.

Sentence completion:

Complete the sentences below, using the information you have learned so far.

The Normans built many castles in England after 1066, because ...

The Normans built many castles in England after 1066, but...

The Normans built many castles in England after 1066, so...

Recap questions:

1. What was the 'Harrying of the North'?
2. What did the Waldensians and Lollards have in common?
3. What two sides fought, and who won the battle of Fulford?

What was the effect of the Norman Conquest on society in England?

The Norman Conquest of England was achieved primarily through military means. William's victory at the battle of Hastings paved the way for him to become king of England and the subsequent rebellions against him were put down by his army. He also cemented his control over the country through the building of an extensive network of castles. Once the dust had settled, however, how much had actually changed in England?

Domesday Book is a valuable source for this enquiry, because it documents the changes in landholding before and after the Conquest. What is striking about Domesday Book is that it shows a clear change in the pattern of landholding.

The Feudal System

After 1066, landholding in England changed to something historians have called a feudal system. Before the Norman Conquest, the great men and women of England would have owned their lands directly. Under the feudal system, all land was owned by the king, who then granted it to men, women or the Church, making them his tenants-in-chief.

In return for being granted the land, these tenants-in-chief (also known as vassals) were expected to give the king their loyalty and service. The service usually came in the form of supplying the king with a number of knights when the king needed to raise an army.

The tenants-in-chief who were granted land by the king would often then parcel out this land and grant some of it to sub-tenants, also in return for service. This created a system of landholding, starting at the top with the king, where all land was granted in return for service.

The term 'feudalism' was coined in the 17th century to try to describe this type of landholding system. It comes from the Latin word *feudum* (or 'fief') which was used in the Middle Ages to refer to land or property. Feudalism is commonly understood to be a system where land is held from a lord in return for service. However, it would be wrong to think of this as a 'system'. It was nowhere near as organised as that! Reality was far more complex and there wasn't always a neat hierarchy of landholding starting with the king and ending with peasants. In some cases, where it suited them, tenants-in-chief held some of their land from someone else's sub-tenant.

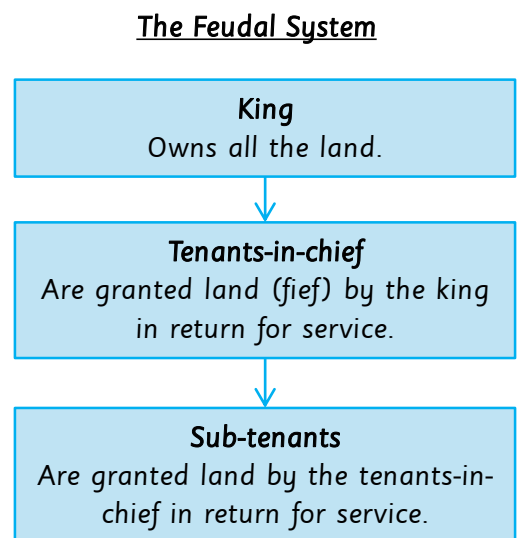


Figure 5.1

Life was more messy and complicated than the term 'feudal system' would have us believe. Nevertheless, it is a useful way to characterise the concept of holding land in return for service. In August 1086, the major landholders in England were all summoned to Salisbury where they swore a solemn oath of allegiance to William for their lands, officially becoming his tenants-in-chief.

At its heart, the 'feudal system' was designed to strengthen the authority of the king, as well as provide him with military power whenever he required it. This, then, was the great prize of William's conquest of England. He went from being a vassal of the king of France, a mere duke of Normandy, to a king who owned all the land of England and could grant it to people of his choosing on condition they were loyal to him and gave him the service he expected.

It was also a tremendously profitable system for the king. When a tenant-in-chief died, his land would not automatically be **inherited** by his heir, but would go back to the king, who would use this opportunity to demand a payment, called a relief, before granting it again to the heir. If the heir was underage, the king would put both him and the estate under his guardianship, and enjoy the profits from the estate during that time. If the heir happened to be female, the king had the right to arrange her marriage (usually in return for a tidy payment from the prospective bridegroom). If the tenant-in-chief was a churchman such as a bishop or archbishop, the king could delay the appointment of his successor and enjoy the income from that land in the meantime

To inherit: to receive money, property, or a title as an heir at the death of the previous holder.

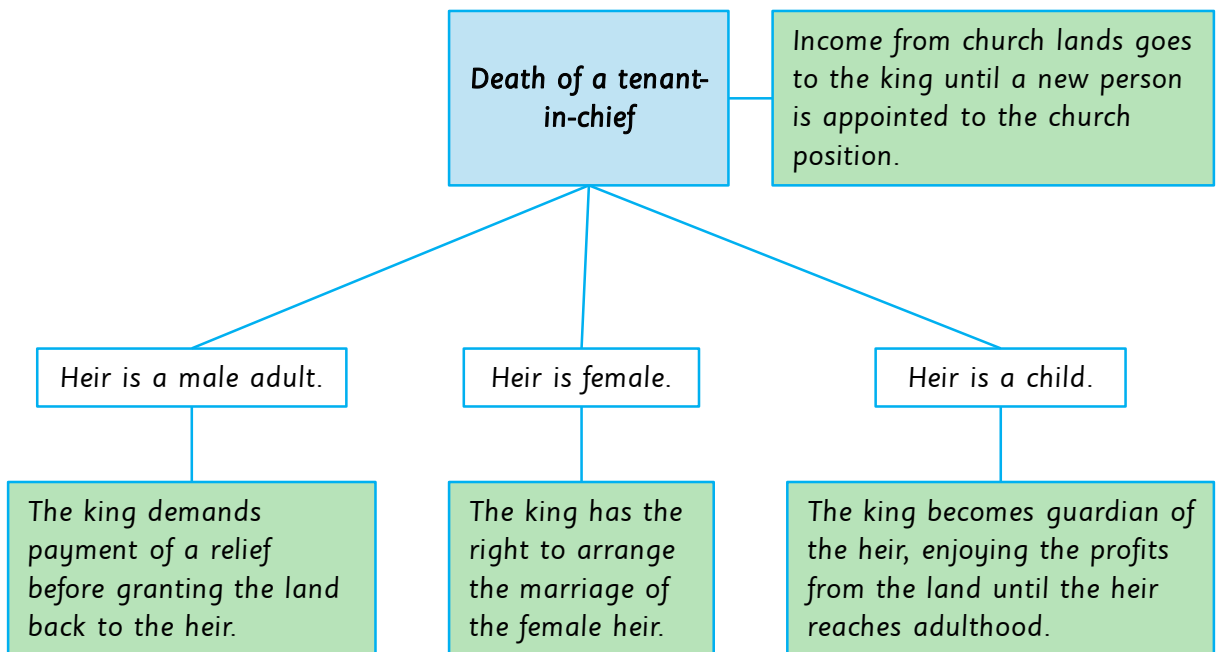


Figure 5.2

Copy out:

In your book, copy out figure 5.1, which summarises the feudal system.

Sentence completion:

Complete the sentences below, using the information you have learned so far.

Landholding in England switched to a feudal system after 1066, because ...

Landholding in England switched to a feudal system after 1066, but...

Landholding in England switched to a feudal system after 1066, so...

The feudal system benefited the king, because ...

Whenever a tenant-in-chief died, ...

Recap questions:

1. What type of castle did the Normans introduce in England after the Conquest?
2. What tactic did William use to try to provoke King Harold into an early battle?
3. What does the word 'hierarchy' mean?

After the Conquest, there were other changes to landholding in England. Through the information contained in Domesday Book, we know that:

- The king was richer than ever before. In 1066, the value of King Edward's lands had been £8,230. By 1086, King William's lands were worth £12,600, over 50% more.
- The Church still held 25% of all the land, although this was now under the feudal system of tenure, which meant the Church owed the king a certain number of knights in return for that land. However, many senior church positions were now held by Normans.
- There were only two earls left, and their power was much reduced.
- Ten barons (great lords) held a quarter of the land in England as tenants-in-chief. These barons were men who had fought alongside William at the battle of Hastings.
- Of the king's 1,000 tenants-in-chief, only 13 of them were English.
- There were around 8,000 sub-tenants who held their lands from tenants-in-chief, but only 10% of them were English.

From Domesday Book, it is clear that the powerful people at the top of the social hierarchy were no longer English. A large proportion of the English nobles had been killed in the battles of 1066, and those that survived were brought down to a lower social status. William of Malmesbury, writing in the early 12th century, complained that:

“England has become a dwelling-place of foreigners and a playground for lords of alien blood. No Englishman today is an earl, a bishop, or an abbot; new faces everywhere enjoy England's riches and gnaw her vitals, nor is there any hope of ending this miserable state of affairs.”

However, it is important to put this into perspective. Normans often inter-married with the English, and within a generation or two, it was no longer clear who was Norman and who was English, except at the very top of society which remained distinctly French, and at the very bottom of society, which remained firmly English.

Peasants and slaves

While the Norman Conquest may have been **cataclysmic** for the Anglo-Saxons at the top of the social hierarchy, the opposite was true for the people at the bottom. One change that happened was in the status of slaves. Slavery was very common in Anglo-Saxon England, with around 10% of the population being slaves. The Normans, for all their brutality in war, did not approve of the practice of slavery, due to the growing influence of the Church in Normandy. When Lanfranc, the famed religious scholar and William the Conqueror's great friend, was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070, he quickly made his distaste for slavery evident.

Cataclysmic: catastrophic, disastrous, devastating.

It would not have been practical to ban slavery, as there were so many slaves, but the buying and selling of slaves was stopped. Domesday Book records tell us that the number of slaves decreased by around 25% between 1066 and 1086, and by the early 12th century, slavery virtually disappeared from England.

However, we must not get too excited about the liberation of slaves. They now joined the ranks of the ordinary peasantry at the bottom of the feudal system and became known as serfs or villeins, who were tied to their lord through an obligation of service (usually in the form of manual work). Serfs belonged to the manor they worked on, and they could not leave it to work elsewhere. In many respects, they were still not free.

Besides slaves, the majority peasant population was affected unevenly by the Conquest. Some peasants' lives were relatively unchanged, continuing to work the same lands as before, but for Norman lords rather than English ones. In areas that suffered greatly from the Conquest, such as the lands harried in the north of England or the lands near Hastings that were plundered by William, Domesday Book reveals high levels of devastation, with the value of these lands much decreased, causing hardship for the peasant population there.

Language

The Normans who conquered England spoke French, not English. Thus, French became the language of the nobles, and anyone wanting to improve their social status found it useful to learn the language to help them get ahead. So how come we in England don't speak French today? Before the Conquest, English was highly unusual in being a written as well as a spoken language. Most other Western European countries did not write in their spoken language but in Latin. In England, books, chronicles and official government documents were all written in English. This might help explain why English survived as a language and didn't die out after the Conquest.

From 1070 onwards, official documents stopped being written in English, and switched to Latin. The upper classes all spoke French, but English remained the language spoken among the ordinary people. In due course, it became convenient for the Normans living in England to learn English. Many Normans married Englishwomen, and so it became common for people to speak both languages. Over time, the language of England developed into a hybrid between Old English and French. There are an estimated 10,000 French words in English. This is one reason why modern English is so different to Old English.

English is a very rich language as a result of the French words introduced by the Normans. Often we have two words to describe the same thing, a French origin word and an Old English word. Here are some examples:

French origin	Old English
Liberty	Freedom
Close	Shut
Desire	Wish
Demand	Ask
Forest	Wood
Odour	Smell
Pardon	Forgive

Chivalry

The Normans also had another important influence on English society, through their introduction of the idea of chivalry. This was a code of conduct which said that you shouldn't kill your enemies once they had been defeated.

Before 1066, there had been a tradition in England of solving political problems or family disputes through murder. In Normandy, it had become the usual practice to spare the lives of enemies once they had surrendered. Although the Norman Conquest itself was very violent, the rest of William's reign was striking in that no Englishman was executed after his surrender. For example, Earl Morcar was imprisoned after his capture, not killed. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle begrudgingly acknowledged that after the Conquest:

“no man dared slay another, no matter what wrong he had done him.”

Copy out and complete:

In your book, copy out and complete the table below, briefly describing aspects of society before and after the Conquest.

Society in England before and after the Conquest

	Before Conquest	After Conquest
Church		
Nobles		
Slaves		
Language		
Settling of disputes		

Sentence completion:

Complete the sentences below, using the information you have learned so far.

The Anglo-Saxon nobles suffered most from the Norman Conquest, because ...

The Anglo-Saxon nobles suffered most from the Norman Conquest, but...

The Anglo-Saxon nobles suffered most from the Norman Conquest, so...

Although the Church held on to its lands after the Conquest, ...

Even though English was replaced by French as the language of upper society, ...

Before the Conquest it was common for disputes to be solved through murder, but ...

Recap questions:

1. What kind of landholding system was feudalism?
2. How did the king benefit financially when a tenant-in-chief died?
3. Who was taken by surprise at Stamford Bridge in 1066?

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www.learningformemory.com

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