

THE COMING OF THE NORMANS 1042-1066

Read the passage and then answer the questions that follow. Full sentences are not always required.

After Alfred's death in 901, his sons used the forces he had built up to conquer the Danelaw, and unite the whole of England under the royal house of Wessex. England had peace for nearly a hundred years. Danelaw was the area in Northern England where the Danes lived.

Then the Danes came again. A weak king, Ethelred the 'Unready', tried to buy them off with money called Danegeld. But the Danes came in ever-greater strength, until their leader Canute (Knut) became King of England in 1016, and joined England to his other kingdoms of Norway and Denmark. Canute died in 1035, and after the death of his son Harthacanute in 1042 the crown was given to Edward the Confessor. He was a son of Ethelred and had been living in Normandy for his own safety.

Edward brought over his Norman friends from France, to lead his armies, to take high places in the Church and to help in government. Edward was not very interested in government, spending most of his time in prayer. Consequently he was known as the Confessor, and behaved more like a monk than a king! England was ruled by Earls, of whom Earl Godwin, who ruled over Wessex, was the most famous. Godwin died in 1053, and his son Harold took his place.

So there were three groups ready to lay claim to the English throne. Harold was the natural leader of the English. William of Normandy pressed his claim because of his friendship and family ties (cousin) with Edward the Confessor. Finally, the Danes remembered that their king, Canute, had ruled England not so long ago.

Edward the Confessor died without sons to follow him (1066). The nearest heir was a boy Edgar, but the Witan, fearing disorder under a boy king, chose Harold as king. Harold was not the direct heir, so both Scandinavia and Normandy set up as rivals for the crown of England.

Harald Hardrada, King of Norway claimed the throne because his father had struck a deal with Harthacanute, that said if an English king died without a son to hand over the country to, then the English throne would go to the King of Norway.

William Duke of Normandy had schemed for many years for the glittering prize, the crown of England. In 1051 he had come over to see his uncle Edward the Confessor and persuaded the King to make him his heir. On his deathbed, however, Edward named Harold as his successor.

In 1064 Harold, while sailing in the Channel, was wrecked on the Normandy coast. He was taken to William, who refused to let him go until he had sworn to support William's claim to the throne. Harold was forced to take the oath, but thought of it simply as a piece of trickery. All was set therefore for conflict. Whatever the claims, the rivals decided that battle would settle it one way or the other. So in 1066 was fought the battle which was to change once again the pattern of life in England.

A. Answer these questions:

1. Write down the date of Alfred's death. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
2. What did Alfred's sons do? \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
3. What was Danelaw? \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
3. How did King Ethelred treat the Danes? \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
4. When did Canute become King of England? \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
5. Over which countries did Canute rule? \_\_\_\_\_ (3)
6. Who became king of England in 1042? \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
7. Where had Edward the Confessor been living? \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

