

# William the Conqueror

(1027 – September 9, 1087)



William the Conqueror, born 1027, died September 9, 1087, is my seventh cousin, 26 times removed. The ancestor in common with William and me is the ninth century Norwegian Viking, Eystein Glumra Ivarsson. Glumra Ivarsson is William's sixth great grandfather and Glumra Ivarsson is my 32nd great grandfather on my Mother's

Abney side of the family. William is the 17th great grandfather of affluent Englishman Edward Southworth, first husband of Alice Carpenter, on my Father's side of the family. Alice, through her second marriage, is my seventh great grandmother. William is the 31st great grandfather to my Westmoreland grandchildren: Katie, Jack, Lily, Sarah and Sam.

Early in his adult life, he was known as William II, Duke of Normandy. It was later that he became better known as William I, or William the Conqueror, King of England. He subdued rebellious vassals, defeated King Henry I of France at Val des Dunes (Henry is William's first cousin, twice removed). William defeated Harold, Saxon King of England at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. He was crowned King of England on December 22, 1066, according to some reports. Others place the coronation on Christmas day. The coronation was in Westminster Abbey. So, it can be said that this part of our family did not immigrate to England. They conquered it!

"William I, a Frenchman, was the first of many, many English Kings to be crowned in Westminster Abbey. Westminster Abbey marked the scene of many great events in English history. All the English rulers from the time of William the Conqueror, except Edward V and Edward VIII, were crowned there. Technically, William was not the actual first coronation in Westminster. Harold, the counselor to King Edward the Confessor, sought to usurp the crown upon Edward's death, in spite of William's coming to claim it. Harold had a rush job done to crown himself in Westminster Abbey. However, Harold's coronation, in a sense, does not count, as he was not of Royal blood. William was of Royal blood. In fact, William was a first cousin, once removed to King Edward the Confessor.

"What was the background about why William got involved in England?

"King Edward the Confessor (1002?-1066), an Anglo-Saxon king descended from Alfred the Great, was crowned in 1042. As king, Edward lacked influence among England's Anglo-Saxon nobles, because he had lived in the Normandy region of northwestern France before becoming king. Edward's Anglo-Saxon father-in-law, Godwin, Earl of Wessex, tried to dominate Edward's reign. Edward resisted Godwin's efforts by relying on Norman advisers and administrators. Godwin died in 1053.

"King Edward was a pious man. He founded Westminster Abbey in 1042, which was completed in 1065. In 1161, Pope Alexander III canonized Edward (declared him a saint) and gave him the title of Confessor.

"King Richard I is the ancestor common to William I and King Edward. Richard is the great grandfather of William, and the grandfather of Edward

"Edward was childless, and a dispute arose over who should succeed him. His first cousin, once removed, William, Duke of Normandy, claimed Edward had promised him the throne. But when Edward died in 1066, the English nobles chose Harold, Godwin's son, as king. William then invaded England, defeated Harold, and was crowned king. So, William rallied the troops and stormed across the English Channel to make claim on Edward's alleged promise to him.

"William invaded England on September 28, 1066 and prepared for victory.

"The Battle of Hastings Plans:

"Harold learned that William had landed at Pevensey in the south of England when he was in the north of the country recovering Stamford Bridge and York. He marched his troops south as fast as possible, stopping in London for reinforcements. He took up position at Caldbec Hill, along the Senteclache Ridge, a few miles north of Hastings. As the ridge had deep ravines, streams and marshy ground on either side, Harold blocked William's only road out of the Hastings peninsula so forcing him into a frontal attack. By positioning his army at the top of the hill, he had clear visibility all around him and forced William's army into continually running up the hill to attack. Harold built a shield wall that stretched in rows along the ridge and which was made up of his housecarls, thegns (nobles) and fyrdmen. Being skilled fighters, the housecarls and thegns were positioned in between the fyrdmen who were unskilled, poorly armed and inexperienced peasant soldiers. Harold expected the wall to hold firm against assault and for William's men to tire and weaken from having to attack uphill. This would eventually allow Harold's army to launch

a counter-attack with relatively fresh troops strong enough to defeat the opponent.

"William was unprepared for Harold's speedy arrival at Caldbec Hill, but quickly gathered his troops and went to meet him at Senlache. His army was divided into three sections, each with a commander. The left section comprised mainly of Bretons, the central section were Norman under William's command, and the right section was made up of the French and Flemish. Each section was divided into three rows - the archers, the infantry and the cavalry. William's plan was to use the archers first to send their arrows into the English ranks, followed by the infantry in hand-to-hand combat and to finally advance with the cavalry who had the height and power of being on horseback. The effect would be a three-pronged attack and a gradual build up in power that would demoralize the English.

"THE BATTLE:

"The battle took all day beginning early in the morning of 14th October 1066 with William's archers firing the first arrows into English ranks. William followed up his plan with an attack by the infantry and then by the cavalry, but Harold's army was stronger than expected and William's army sustained many casualties. The Bretons on the left flank panicked due to their lack of experience, the unexpected strength of Harold's army and the noise and confusion. They failed to keep in line and got ahead of the other two sections on their right. In their panic they began to retreat. Harold's less experienced fighters broke rank when they saw the Bretons retreating, and William's army slaughtered them.

"William retreated and regrouped. The second and following assaults went according to William's plan and he supported his troops by joining in the charge on horseback. Both sides became

more tired as the day wore on and suffered heavy casualties. As the supply of arrows was running low, William ordered the archers to fire them high into the air for the final assault so that they fell into the rear ranks of the English army. This caused high casualties and the collapse of the English shield wall. The Norman's penetrated the ranks and killed Harold. With the morale of the English troops shattered by the death of their leader, the battle ended in defeat for the English, although the housecarls (the *Pingalio*) and thegns continued to fight to their deaths. However, more recently, historian Nicholas Hooper criticized Larson and stated that "it is time to debunk the housecarl"; according to Hooper, housecarls were not in effect distinguishable from Saxon [thegns](#), and were mainly retainers who received lands or pay (or both), but without being really a standing army. Hooper asserts that while the Housecarles might well have had superior *esprit de corps* and more uniform training and equipment than the average Thegn, they would not necessarily have been a clearly defined military elite. Over the following months, William captured Canterbury, Winchester and London. He was crowned king on Christmas Day 1066.

"WHY DID HAROLD LOSE?"

"Harold was badly prepared to face William's troops. William had spent months preparing for invasion in a secure position and environment in Normandy. Harold's tenure as king was weak from the time of his accession and, although aware of the threat from Normandy, he was occupied by other events at home.

"William built up his army and support in feudal tradition promising lands in England to those who joined his army and eternal paradise to anyone who died during the battle. He'd also obtained the approval of the Pope in his plans so gaining greater support and turning the invasion into a crusade. The knights were

recruited with their own horses, men and equipment. Over the months, William's army was rigorously disciplined and trained before being ready to sail for England, but they had to wait until September before having a favorable wind. William's plans suffered a setback when the fleet got caught in a storm and he had to take refuge and regroup in the Somme estuary. However, as a result, the distance he had to cover in his crossing was considerably shorter and the next opportunity he had to sail was at the time when Harold was in the north of England.



"William's decision to land at Pevensey was important. Pevensey was on a lagoon to the west of Hastings and was a scarcely populated area. The lagoon was a shelter from the weather as the ships could be beached high up on the land at high tide. The Hastings peninsula was bordered by Pevensey Lagoon to the west and the River Brede to the east so providing it with natural protection from attack and only one way in and out of the peninsula to the main land in the north.

"William quickly established his presence on the peninsula including building up the Roman Fort at Pevensey and taking Hastings.

"Harold was not so lucky in his plans. Some weeks before the invasion, he had mobilized troops along the coast and sent his navy to the Isle of Wight to intercept William's fleet, but he was unable to keep them there, as they became demoralized waiting for William's army to set sail and concerned about gathering in the harvest in their home towns. Harold disbanded them at the beginning of September and lost many of his ships in the same storm from which William had been forced to take refuge. When he received news that William had landed at Pevensey, Harold

was fighting the invasion of Harald Hardrada of Norway in the north.

"Despite his battle plan and his choice of a strategic location, Harold's army was exhausted from having to travel north and fight at Stamford Bridge, and then hastily return south without time to rest. Harold's support from the north was limited, and, although the Earls of Mercia and Northumberland had begun riding south, they turned back when they heard of Harold's death. Except for the housecarls and thegns, Harold's men were not trained and did not have the distant attack advantage of the archers or the power of the cavalry. In accordance with English tradition, those of Harold's army who were on horseback rode to the battle location and then fought on foot while William's cavalry walked to the location and then mounted for battle.

## "THE RESULTS

"William was crowned king of England on Christmas Day 1066 (some say December 22 instead). There followed 88 years of Norman rule. The French and English cultures merged and the feudal system was introduced. This led to a tough discipline and training and it took away much of the Anglo-Saxon's freedom and rights. England's strength grew and she became a powerful force in European politics because of her tie with Normandy. Her army and navy were built up as well.

In 1085 William ordered a survey of English assets and this became known as the "Doomsday Book." William's reign was not easy, and there were rebellions which were quickly suppressed, but the Norman Conquest changed the face of England forever."

Source: World Book Encyclopedia, CD version, 1998

## AND HERE ARE THE LATEST WORDS!

There is another claim of world significance made for King William I, as learned from the lectures of University of North Carolina English literature professor, Dr. Elliott Engel. Dr. Engel highlighted the historical fact that conquerors of the world traditionally required the conquered peoples to use for language in commerce and in government the language of the conqueror. William the Conqueror chose not to do that. He allowed the conquered English people to continue their language in commerce and in government transactions, while the French of the conquerors became commingled, often using French and English words in the same sentences so that people from both backgrounds would understand the meanings. These French words, in reality, became embedded into the English language, thus being a major reason that English has evolved into being the language of the world having the largest number of words.

So, it can be said that William the Conqueror is responsible to a large degree for the English language having the largest vocabulary in the world. In Dr. Elliott's 1994 lecture at the Richardson, Texas Civic Center, he said that the Oxford Dictionary then contained about 450,000 words. He said that a complete French dictionary would have about 150,000 words and that a complete Russian dictionary would have about 130,000 words.

"The history of Windsor Castle begins in the year 1070, when William the Conqueror built the original wooden structure located in what is now the inner most point of the castle. William chose the site for its superior military advantages; namely, that attackers would have to battle uphill in order to reach and overtake the castle. Although none of original wooden structure built by William remains in the Windsor Castle of today, the modern

Windsor Castle still occupies the same ground. Henry II was the first monarch to transform the wooden fortress to a stronghold of stone, adding a stonewall which stood tall around Windsor Castle England. Parts of this wall can still be seen today."

Source:<http://www.destination360.com/europe/uk/windsor-castle.php>

William died September 9, 1087 from wounds received in a battle at Mantes, England. After being wounded he died at Rouen, England.

The New Law of the Land as set down by William the Conqueror and his advisors:

"First that above all things he wishes one God to be revered throughout his whole realm, one faith in Christ to be kept ever inviolate, and peace and security to be preserved between English and Normans.

"We decree also that every freeman shall affirm by oath and compact that he will be loyal to king William both within and without England, that he will preserve with him his lands and honor with all fidelity and defend him against his enemies.

"I will, moreover, that all the men I have brought with me, or who have come after me, shall be protected by my peace and shall dwell in quiet. And if any one of them shall be slain, let the lord of his murderer seize him within five days, if he can; but if he cannot, let him pay me 46 marks of silver so long as his substance avails. And when his substance is exhausted, let the whole hundred in which the murder took place pay what remains in common.

"And let every Frenchman who, in the time of king Edward, my kinsman, was a sharer in the customs of the English, pay what they call "Scotland lot." This was done according to the England. This decree was ordained in the city of Gloucester.

"We forbid also that any live cattle shall be bought or sold for money except within cities, and this shall be done before three faithful witnesses; nor even anything old without surety and warrant. But if anyone shall do otherwise, let him pay once, and afterwards a second time for a fine.

"It was decreed there that if a Frenchman shall charge an Englishman with perjury or murder or theft or homicide or "ran," as the English call open rapine, which cannot be denied, the Englishman may defend himself, as he shall prefer, either by the ordeal of hot iron or by wager of battle. But if the Englishman be infirm, let him find another who will take his place. If one of them shall be vanquished, he shall pay a fine of 40 shillings to the king. If an Englishman shall charge a Frenchman and be unwilling to prove his accusation, either by ordeal or by wager of battle, I will, nevertheless, that the Frenchman shall acquit himself by a valid oath.

"This also I command and will, that all shall have and hold the law of the king Edward in respect of their lands and all their possessions, with the addition of those decrees I have ordained for the welfare of the English people.

"Every man who wishes to be considered a freeman shall be in pledge so that his surety shall hold him and hand him over to justice, if he shall offend in any way. And if any such shall escape, let his sureties see to it that they pay forthwith what is charge against him, and let them clear themselves of any complicity in his escape. Let recourse be had to the hundred and

shire courts as our predecessors decreed. And those who ought of right to come and are unwilling to appear, shall be summoned once; and, if for the second time they refuse to come, one ox shall be taken from them, and they shall be summoned a third time. And if they do not come the third time, a second ox shall be taken from them. But if they do not come the fourth summons, the man who is unwilling to come shall forfeit from his goods the amount of the charge against him, "ceapgeld" as it is called, and in addition to this a fine to the king.

"I prohibit the sale of any man by another outside the country on pain of a fine to be paid in full to me.

"I also forbid that anyone shall be slain or hanged for any fault, but let his eyes be put out and let him be castrated. And this command shall not be violated under pain of a fine in full to me."

Source: <http://www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/laws.html>

In 1066, Halley's Comet was seen in England May 16 and thought to be a bad omen. Later that year Harold II of England died at the Battle of Hastings on October 14. Illustration of Halley's Comet is shown on the Bayeux Tapestry, and the accounts which have been preserved represent it as having then appeared to be four times the size of Venus, and to have shone with a light equal to a quarter of that of the Moon.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet\\_Halley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet_Halley)

It is a positive note for me to discover that the number one priority in William's list of law principles cited above centers upon the worship of God through Christ. The fierceness of William's conquering activities had led me to believe he was pagan, which

was the Norman's Norwegians' roots. However, the Roman Catholic Church, the main Church of Europe in those years, apparently had its influence on William in his French Norman rearing.

"Windsor Castle was originally built by William the Conqueror, who reigned from 1066 until his death in 1087. His original wooden castle stood on the site of the present Round Tower ("A"). The castle formed part of his defensive ring of castles surrounding London, the site chosen in part because of its easily defensible position.

"Early in William's reign he had taken possession of a manor in what today is Old Windsor, probably a Saxon royal residence. A short time later between 1070 and 1086, he leased the site of the present castle from the Manor of Clewer and built the first motte-and-bailey castle. The motte is 50-feet high and consists of chalk excavated from a surrounding ditch, which then became a moat.

"Now the castle was defended by a wooden palisade rather than the thick stone walls seen today. The original plan of William the Conqueror's castle is unknown, but it was purely a military base and nothing structural survives from this early period. From that time, onwards the castle has remained in continuous use and has undergone numerous additions and improvements. His successor William II is thought to have improved and enlarged the structure, but the Conqueror's youngest son King Henry I was the first sovereign to live within the castle.

"Windsor Castle (51°29'02"N, 0°36'16"W) is the largest inhabited castle in the world and the oldest in continuous occupation. Together with Buckingham Palace in London and Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh it is one of the principal official residences of the British monarch. The castle is located in the

Berkshire town of Windsor, in the Thames Valley to the west of London.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windsor\\_Castle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windsor_Castle)

Yet, both in Normandy and in England, William was faithful to tradition, and in England, especially, it became a cardinal feature of his administration to respect, and to utilize, the customs of the kingdom he had conquered. This is especially documented in David C. Douglas's book, "William the Conqueror," Chapter 12 (pp. 289-316).

Source: David C. Douglas, "William the Conqueror," University of California Press, C 1964 ISBN 0-520-00350-0 (this book is in my personal library)

Another famous landmark of London, nestled on the River Thames, is the Tower of London.

"According to Shakespeare, in his play Richard III, the Tower of London was first built by Julius Caesar. This supposed Roman origin is, however, just a myth. Its true foundation was in 1078 when William the Conqueror ordered the White Tower to be built. This was as much to protect the Normans from the people of the City of London as to protect London from outside invaders. William ordered the Tower to be built of stone which he had specially imported from France. He chose this location because he considered it to be a strategic point being opposite the site where Earl Godwin had landed in Southwark in 1051 during his Saxon rebellion against the Norman influence of Edward the Confessor. It was King Richard the Lion Heart who had the moat dug around the surrounding wall and filled with water from the Thames. The moat was not very successful until Henry III employed a Dutch moat building technique. The moat was

drained in 1830, and human bones were in the refuse found at its bottom."

Source:[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower\\_of\\_London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_London)