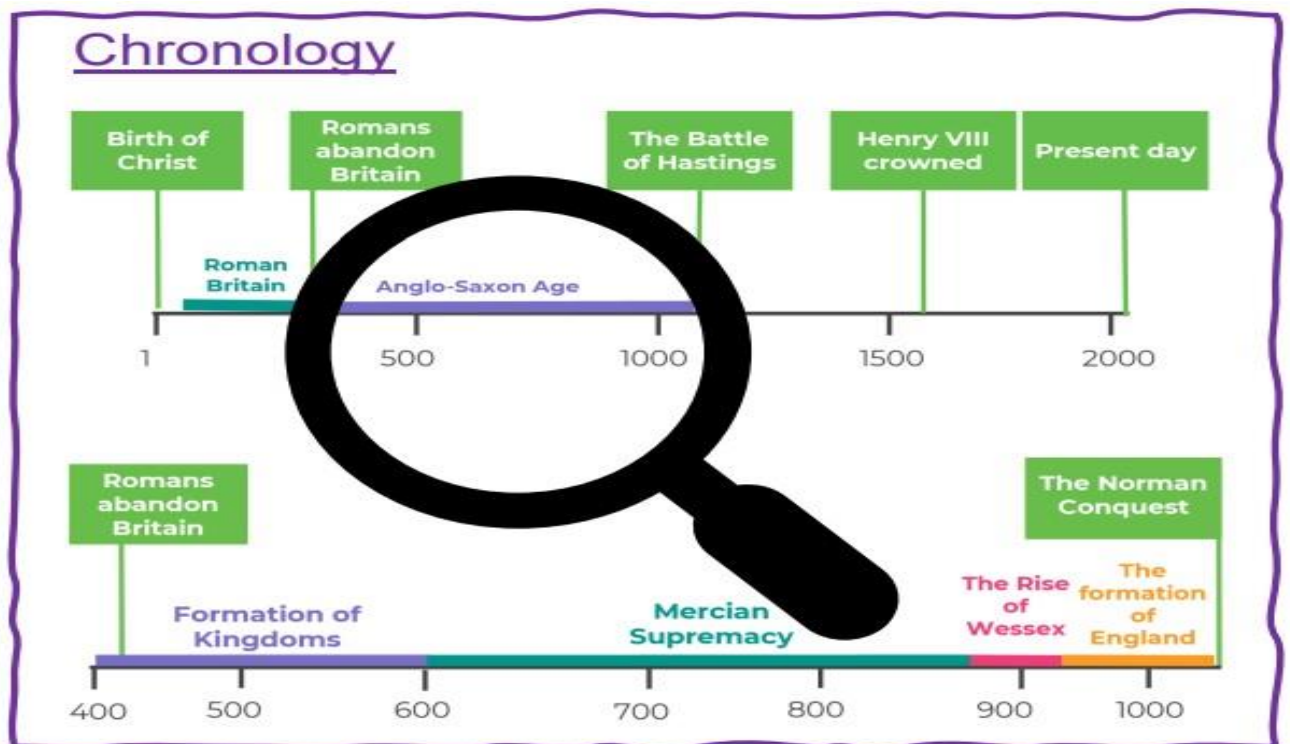


How did a Norman become king of England?

Key Knowledge

Timelines and Chronology



The first timeline gives an overview of the last 2000 years, from the Birth of Christ to the Present Day. This is known as the Common Era (CE) and also as AD (Anno Domini) which is Medieval Latin for “In the Year of Our Lord” marking all dates following the birth of Christ.

The second timeline zooms in on the Anglo-Saxon era which marks the period between the end of the Roman Empire in Britain (AD 410) and the Norman Invasion of AD 1066.

Life and Society in England pre-1066

England was one of the wealthiest kingdoms in Europe. This was due to successful farming and trade in the towns and villages. The king, his earls and the Church all profited from this through taxes.

The Anglo-Saxon community in England was basically a rural one. Most people depended on the land for survival. At the top of the social system was the royal house. This consisted of the king and **aethelings** who claimed a common ancestry with the king.

Towns were not structured in the same way as rural estates were. The major towns such as London, York, Winchester and Oxford were *fortified* against enemy attack. Most commercial activity took place in the towns. It was also home to skilled tradesmen and other professionals such as doctors and merchants. Most people lived in what we would consider to be villages. London was the biggest town in England and yet only had 10,000 residents.

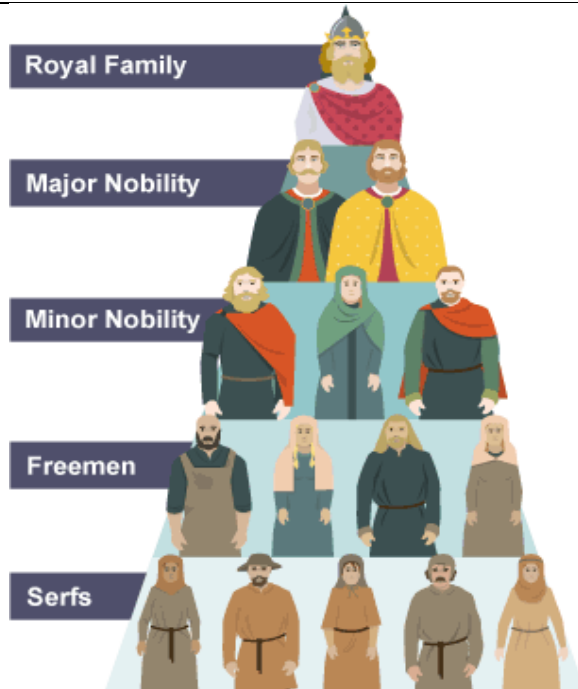
By the middle of the 9th century, the royal family of Wessex was universally recognised as the English royal family and held a **hereditary** right to rule. Succession to the throne was not guaranteed as the Witan, or council of leaders, had the right to choose the best successor from the members of the royal house.

Who ruled?

The King of England from 1042 until his death on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1066 was **Edward the Confessor**. He ruled with the help of a council of wise men called the **Witan**. These were made up of powerful earls, wealthy landowners (called **Thegns**), bishops and other religious leaders. By using the Witan, Edward was able to hear advice from other learned people as well as enabling him to keep an eye out for any rebelliousness as well as managing a large kingdom, with the earls responsible for governing each area.

## How did a Norman become king of England?

Social Hierarchy



**King** – monarch / Head of State

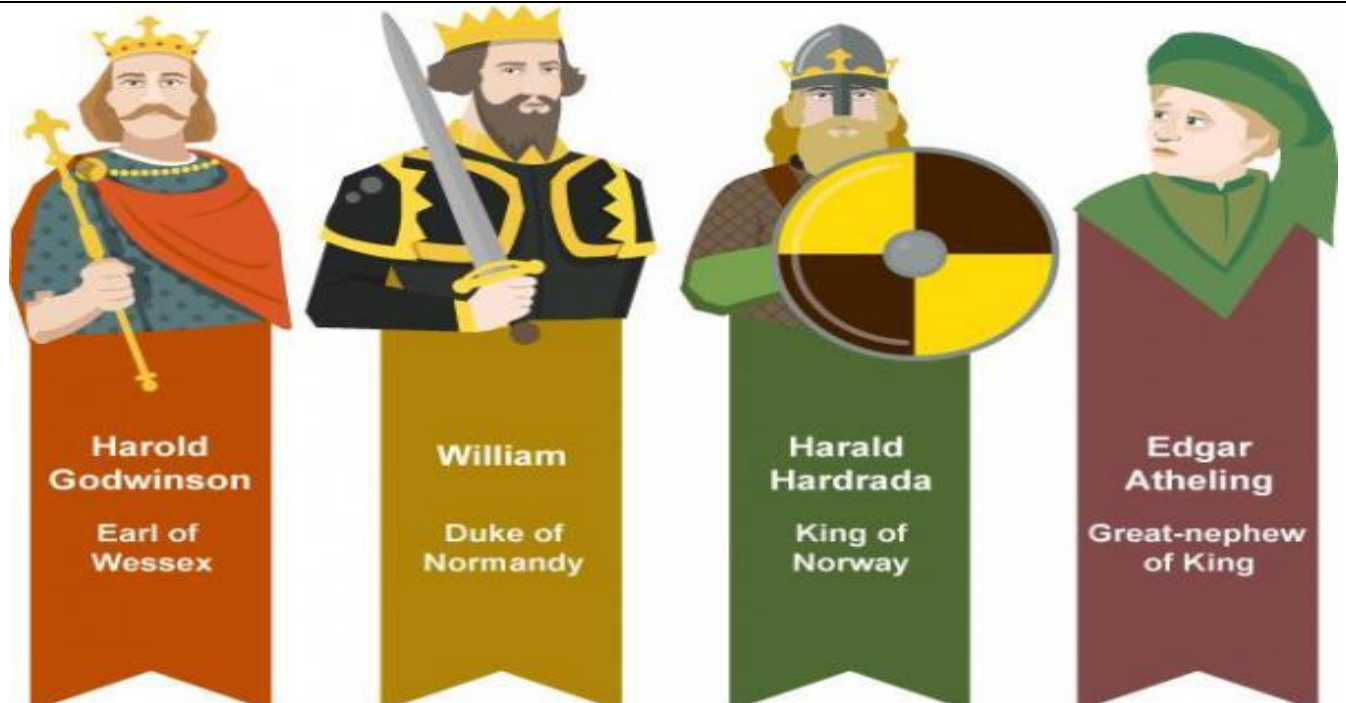
**Earls** – Below the king were the earls, the ruling nobility. The earl was the king's 'right hand man' in a shire. The position was not hereditary, but it became usual in the 10th century to choose earls from a few outstanding families.

**Thegns** – Below an earl was a **thegn** (pronounced "thane"). They formed the backbone of the Anglo-Saxon army. With good service they received lands from the king and could rise to become earls.

**Ceorls** – The upper group of commoners including **ceorls** (pronounced "churls", who held land freely and did not pay rent to a lord were known as freemen. Some freemen were expected to attend local courts to solve disputes. The lower group worked on land held by a lord and made their money by selling or exchanging crops or by pursuing craft activities like blacksmithing.

**Serfs and Thralls** – There were many people in England in the 10th century who held no land and worked for others in exchange for food and shelter. There were others who were legally recognised as enslaved and had no civil rights although they could work on their own behalf and earn enough to buy their own freedom. These slaves were known as **thralls**, and included prisoners and lawbreakers.

The Four Claimants



Normally, there is a clear **line of succession**, and it is obvious who the next monarch will be. This was not the case when Edward the Confessor died. He had no children, and his closest living **heir** was his great-nephew **Edgar the Atheling**, who was just 14 years old. Edgar had not been supported or prepared for the role of king. It was decided that he was too young and inexperienced to rule and win the wars that would undoubtedly break out from rival claimants to the throne.

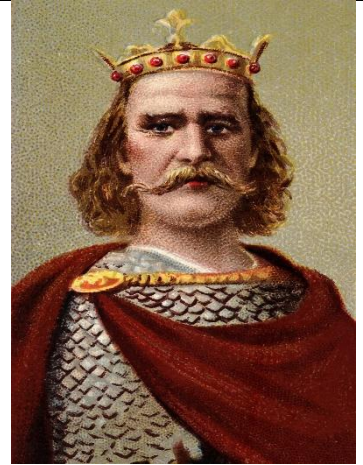
The three main rival contenders for the throne were **Harold Godwinson**, **Harald Hardrada** and **William of Normandy**, who each claimed that they were the rightful heir to the English throne.

## Year 7 – History – Spring 1 2024 – Anglo-Saxon England

### How did a Norman become king of England?

Harold Godwinson

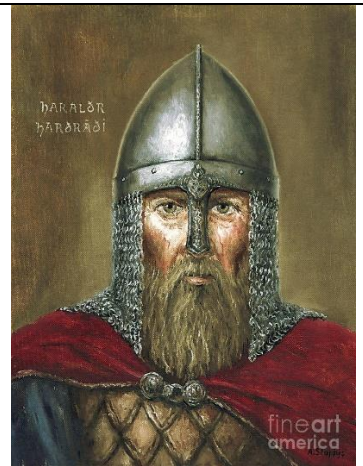
Harold Godwinson was from Wessex, in England. He was a wealthy nobleman, and it is claimed that Edward the Confessor named Godwinson as his successor on his deathbed. Harold Godwinson's sister, Edith, was married to Edward, making Harold the king's brother-in-law. Wessex was the largest kingdom in England and his claim would have been well supported by a large proportion of the English population.



Harald Hardrada

Harald Hardrada was a Viking and king of Norway. He was also a distant relative of King Cnut, who had previously been a king of England when the Vikings had invaded. Harald Hardrada also had the support of Tostig, who was Harold Godwinson's brother. The two brothers had fallen out. Tostig had been the ruler of Northumbria since 1055, but people rebelled against his rule. The rebels said Tostig had been a selfish and strict leader. Harold Godwinson had advised Edward the Confessor that he should support the rebels, rather than his own brother! Edward agreed, and Tostig was replaced as Earl of Northumbria.

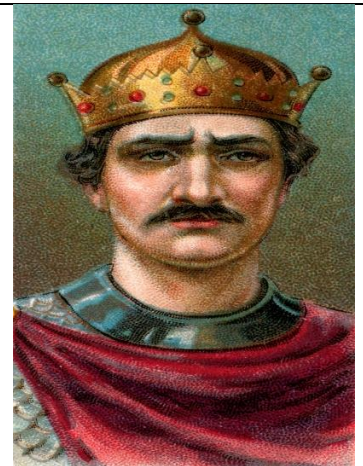
There were a number of ancestors of previous Viking invaders still living in the north of England, and they were supportive of Harald Hardrada's claim to the throne.



William of Normandy

William was a Duke who controlled Normandy, a large region in northern France. William was a distant relative of Edward the Confessor and claimed Edward had promised him the throne in 1051.

William also said that Harold Godwinson had sworn an oath that he would help William take the throne after Edward, in return for helping Godwinson when he had been stranded in Normandy in 1064.



### Think Like a Historian – Big Ideas

**Chronology** - The order that events happen. This allows us to understand how and why events unfold in the way they do, and how they are related. For example, Edward the Confessor's death in January 1066 was the catalyst for the wars between the 4 claimants culminating in the Norman Invasion of 1066.

**Interpretation and Sources** - Interpreting a source requires you to think a bit more about what a source says or shows about a topic. This requires you to identify implicit ('hidden' or less obvious) meanings in historical sources.

## Year 7 – History – Spring 1 2024 – Anglo-Saxon England

### How did a Norman become king of England?

You will need to do this most often with visual sources (for example, The Bayeux Tapestry) that take time to interpret. However, some written sources will often not be explicit enough for you and they will require your interpretation of the information.

**Historical Enquiry** - This is the research that enables you to answer a key historical question: for example, how did a French Norman become King of England in 1066?

### Questions

Who was King of England at the start of 1066?	<b>Edward the Confessor.</b>
What was the name of the group of advisers to the English King?	<b>The Witan.</b>
Which group of people lived in England prior to 1066?	<b>The Anglo Saxons.</b>
What is a Thegn?	<b>A local landowner.</b>
What is the name given to farmer owners and craftsmen?	<b>Ceorls.</b>
What was the lowest level of the social hierarchy leading up to 1066?	<b>Serfs.</b>
What was the name given to slaves who were often lawbreakers, prisoners of war and criminals?	<b>Thralls.</b>
Who was Edward the Confessor's 14-year-old nephew who was one of the 4 claimants?	<b>Edgar the Aetheling.</b>
Who had Edward promised the English throne to in 1051?	<b>Duke William of Normandy.</b>
Who was the King of Norway who also was a claimant to the English throne?	<b>Harald Hardrada.</b>
What was the relation between Harold Godwinson and Edward the Confessor?	<b>Brother in Law.</b>
Who was Harold Godwinson's brother who supported Harald Hardrada?	<b>Tostig.</b>
Which was the largest and most powerful of the old Kingdoms of England?	<b>Wessex.</b>
Where in France was Duke William from?	<b>Normandy.</b>
Who were the Aethelings?	<b>Members of the royal household who claimed a common ancestry with the king.</b>