



HISTORY BIOGS

FIGURES FROM HISTORY

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

William the Conqueror was the first Norman king of England, reigning from 1066 until his death in 1087. He is responsible for commissioning 'The Domesday Book', one of the most important historical documents ever created.



William was the son of the unmarried Duke Robert 1st of Normandy and his mistress Herleva.

His illegitimate status and his youth made things difficult for him after he succeeded his father, as did the chaos which plagued the first years of his rule.

During his childhood and early teens, members of the Norman aristocracy fought each other, both for control of the child duke, and to assert their dominance. In 1047, William was able to quash a rebellion and begin to establish his own authority over the duchy, a process that was not complete until around 1060. His marriage in the 1050s to Matilda of Flanders provided him with a powerful ally in the neighbouring Flanders.

By the time of his marriage, William was confident enough to arrange the appointment of his own supporters as bishops and abbots in the Norman church. His growing power allowed him to expand his ambitions, and he secured control of the neighbouring country of Maine in 1062.

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In the 1050s and early 1060s, William became interested in the English throne. The dying Edward the Confessor, his first cousin once removed hadn't had any children, so the succession was in doubt. Other potential claimants were waiting too, including the powerful English earl Harold Godwinson, whom Edward had named as king on his deathbed in January 1066. Arguing that Edward had previously promised the throne to him and that Harold had sworn to support his claim, William built a large fleet and invaded England in September 1066. He was victorious over the Anglo-Saxon forces of Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings, and suppressed subsequent English revolts in what has become known as the Norman Conquest.

For the rest of his life he struggled to consolidate his hold over England and his continental lands, and he struggled to control his eldest son, Robert Curthose. In 1086, he ordered the compilation of the Domesday Book, a survey listing all of the lands in England along with their pre and post Conquest holders. He died in September 1087 while leading a campaign in northern France, and was buried in Caen.

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