

Deepening Understanding

YR4 Non-fiction Text

The Battle of Hastings by Laura Curtis



Nearly one thousand years ago there was a battle, a battle so significant it has endured in the memories of generation after generation. One of the most famous events in English history, this conflict - born out of a dispute between two rival men - changed our country forever. Let us now explore the mighty clash that was the Battle of Hastings.

The Battle of Hastings happened because of a quarrel between two rival claimants for the English throne. On his deathbed, King Edward the Confessor named Harold Godwinson as his heir. However, a few years before, Edward had told William of Normandy he would be the rightful successor. Harold, who had been present at the time of the oath, had apparently promised to honour William's right to be king. Once Edward had died however (on 5th January 1066), both men decided that the crown was rightfully theirs and the only way to solve the issue was through a battle.



Timeline of the Battle

21st September 1066

Harold Godwinson marched his army from London to York.

25th September 1066

The Battle of Stamford Bridge - Harold's army defeated the Vikings.

27th September 1066

William, Duke of Normandy, set sail from the shores of Northern France.

28th September 1066

William and his army crossed the English Channel and landed at Pevensey on the south coast of England.

14th October 1066

The two armies met at a field near Hastings. Harold is killed and William the Conqueror is victorious in the Battle of Hastings.

Christmas Day 1066

William was crowned King William I at Westminster Abbey.

The Battle - What Happened?

At the beginning of the battle, the Anglo-Saxons had a very effective tactic because they interlocked their round shields to make a shield wall. This created a very strong defence against the Norman army. However, the Normans tricked the Anglo-Saxons by repeatedly attacking and retreating. As a result, the Anglo-Saxon army broke ranks in pursuit of the 'fleeing' enemy. Once Harold's army were no longer protected by the shield wall, the Norman army took advantage and attacked. By the evening, the battle had ended. Harold Godwinson had been killed, the Anglo-Saxons dispersed and the Normans were victorious.



The Bayeux Tapestry

Victorious, William the Conqueror commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry which is a 70 metre long piece of intricately detailed embroidery detailing all the events of Norman Conquest including the death of Edward the Confessor, the voyage from France and the Battle of Hastings itself.

What Really Happened to Harold?

The most commonly held belief is that Harold was killed when an arrow hit him in the eye. There are many accounts detailing this including a poem which describes his death that was caused by the lethal arrow. The most famous depiction is in the Bayeux tapestry where a man seems to be pulling an arrow from his eye with an inscription sewn in Latin above, 'Here King Harold is killed'. Other historical sources, however, do not record any arrow at all. Instead, these accounts state that King Harold was killed by knights stabbing him to death.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Bayeux Tapestry was restored and some of the images were distorted by the new stitching, including the angle of the arrow over Harold's eye. The original tapestry showed him holding a spear above his head. Did he really die by being struck by an arrow?

To this day, the Battle of Hastings remains one of the most important turning points in English history. Upon claiming the throne, William needed to defend his kingdom therefore, built many defensive castles in every part of the country. So when you are next out and about and you see the crumbling remains of a castle, just think about William and Harold. The legacy of the Battle of Hastings still lives on today.

