**Key words for the Anglo-Saxons and Normans topic**

abbess

Woman in charge of a nunnery (also known as an abbey).

abbot

Man in charge of a monastery.

Archbishop

The highest rank of bishop. There were two archbishops in England – one of Canterbury and one of York. In 1066 they had equal power and status.

anointed

Touched by holy oil in an important religious ceremony, e.g. a coronation

barter

Exchange goods with other goods, rather than paying with money. Anglo-Saxon towns had a barter economy.

bishop

A leading role in the Church. Bishops were responsible for their own bishopric.

bishopric

An area whose religious affairs were controlled by a bishop. Also known as a diocese.

blasphemy

The use of words (including swear words) that would offend God.

blood feud

Old Saxon tradition families taking revenge on others if one of their own was killed or injured. Still used in the North in Edward the Confessor’s reign.

Breton

A person from Brittany, an area in northern France.

cavalry

Soldiers on horseback. These men were wealthy and highly trained. William’s cavalry played an important role in his victory at Hastings.

ceorl

Free peasants who owned their own farmland.

chaplain

Priest who worked directly for a wealthy person and their family. Noblemen and royalty often had their own chaplains.

chronicler

Monk who recorded recent events – very useful for historians. From the word ‘chronicle’ meaning story or account. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives us a useful account of the Norman Conquest.

Church courts

Courts specially for priests and other clergy. Their sentences were often more lenient (less harsh) than other courts.

claim to the throne

A person’s reason for thinking he should be king. Four men had claims to the throne in 1066 when Edward the Confessor died.

coronation

Holy ceremony when kings were crowned (not “coronated!”) by a leading churchman and officially became king in the eyes of God. Harold’s coronation was on the same day as Edward the Confessor’s funeral.

crown

Richly decorated headwear only worn by kings and queens. When historians talk about the crown, however, they often mean the monarchy, rather than the physical object. To seize the crown means to become king, not just stealing a fancy hat. Loyalty to the crown also means loyalty to the king or queen, rather than to a piece of jewellery!

Crusade

A battle or war fought for religious reasons. William saw his invasion of England as a crusade because he claimed Harold had broken holy oaths.

Danelaw

Area in northern and eastern England settled by Vikings and their descendants. Some of their traditions and customs still differed from those of the Saxons in 1066.

Danish marriage

Arrangement that allowed men to marry a second wife. The second marriage was not official as it didn’t take place in a church. Harold and Edith Swan-neck had a Danish marriage.

demesne

(Say “de-main”.) Land owned by a king or lord. Their demesne was like their personal estate.

duchy

Area controlled by a duke. William ruled over the Duchy of Normandy in northern France.

earl

The most powerful kind of nobleman in England, before and after the Conquest.

earldom

Large area ruled by an earl. There were between four and six main earldoms in England before 1066. William created more earldoms and made them less powerful than those in Edward’s reign.

embassy

A group of people sent by a king to discuss important issues with a foreign ruler. Harold led an embassy to Normandy in 1064.

famine

Widespread starvation leading to many deaths. The Harrying of the North caused famine in northern England in 1070.

fenland

Boggy, marshy area of land. There was a revolt in the fenlands of East Anglia in 1070-71 led by Hereward the Wake.

fief

A piece of land granted by a king or lord. The holder of that land therefore owed the king or lord loyalty.

Flanders

A region made up of modern-day northern Belgium. People from Flanders spoke Flemish. Matilda’s marriage to William meant Flanders and Normandy were connected to each other, and Flemish forces made up part of William’s army at Hastings.

forest

An area of land used for hunting animals. William made sure forests were only available to royalty. The largest forest he created was the New Forest in Hampshire.

forest laws

Harsh laws that only applied to forests, to make sure they could only be used for hunting by royalty.

forfeiture

Giving up money, goods and land as a punishment.

fyrd

The least experienced men of the Saxon army. The fyrd was made up of peasants and ceorls who may have had some military experience but had to supply their own weapons and armour.

garrison

The stationing of troops in one place, usually a town or castle, so they are ready to defend it. Garrison is a noun and a verb – soldiers made up a garrison, and a castle could be garrisoned.

genocide

The mass killing of a particular group of people, often because of their ethnicity or religion. The Harrying of the North by William has been described as a genocide by some historians.

holy day

An important day in the Christian calendar when people did not work.

housecarl

Experienced, highly-trained and well-equipped Saxon soldiers.

hue-and-cry

The practice of drawing attention to a crime by shouting to warn others (e.g. “Stop! Thief!”). People would then work together to catch the criminal before they could run off.

hundred

Administrative unit of Saxon England, comprising around 12 villages. Each hundred had its own reeve. Many hundreds made up a shire, and several shires made up earldoms.

infantry

Soldiers who fought on foot.

knight service

The length of time a knight owed to his lord each year.

labour service

Work carried out by peasants on behalf of their lord.

Marcher earldoms

New earldoms created by William to deter revolts in the Marches and rebellions by the Welsh.

Marches

The borderlands between England and Wales. These had been sources of unrest in Edward’s reign.

mint

Where new coins were made.

monastery

Religious community of monks, where they would pray and tend to the poor and sick. Chronicles were also written in monasteries, and crops grown within their walls, making most monasteries fairly wealthy. Royals and nobles often founded new monasteries to win support from the Church.

motte and bailey

Early form of castle introduced to England by the Normans. Motte means ‘mound’ (not moat!) on which there was a tower for defence. The bailey was the lower area where soldiers lived, stored weapons and kept their horses.

mutilation

Serious wounding of the body. The Normans often used mutilation as a form of punishment. It could involve the ‘putting out’ (removal) of eyes, castratration, or the cutting off of fingers, hands or feet.

nepotism

The giving of favours to friends and family. When Lanfranc became Archbishop of Canterbury he tried to stamp out nepotism.

noblemen (nobles)

The rich and powerful. Earls and thegns were the noblemen of Anglo-Saxon England. William replaced many of them with his own followers and introduced tenants-in-chief (sometimes called barons).

nunnery

Religious community of nuns, also known as an abbey or convent. Nunneries had many similar features of monasteries.

oath

A holy promise. Oaths were taken extremely seriously in the Middle Ages.

occupation

Holding a conquered land and keeping control by military force. William’s victory at Hastings was followed by his occupation of England.

ordeal

The other type of trial used in Anglo-Saxon England. If a jury couldn’t reach a decision on a person’s guilt, the accused faced trial by ordeal whereby they had to put their hands in boiling water. If their wounds healed cleanly, God had proven their innocence.

outflank

To attack an army by moving round the side of their main force.

palisade

The wood fence surrounding the bailey of a motte-and-bailey castle.

papal banner

The flag of the Pope. William’s army was entitled to carry this at the Battle of Hastings, as his invasion had been blessed by Pope Alexander.

peasant

Second-to-lowest rank in Anglo-Saxon society. They held no land of their own and had to work on their lord’s land in exchange for a small area to grow crops to feed their family.

pilgrimage

Journey made for religious reasons. Harold went on pilgrimage to Rome before he became king.

pillage

The act of attacking and robbing an area or town.

pluralism

The practice of holding more than one job in the Church. The Pope disapproved of this and Lanfranc tried to prevent it in England.

raiders

People who pillaged (attacked and robbed) areas or towns.

reeve

Local administrator of a hundred. Reeves of whole shires were called sheriffs (from the term ‘shire-reeve’).

regent

Person who ruled over a country, duchy or earldom when the usual ruler was away. Matilda acted as regent of Normandy when William was away.

relics

Holy artefacts, usually the bones of saints.

resistance

Acting against authority. This could be small-scale, e.g. not following everyday rules, or bigger, e.g. raising an army and attacking the king’s soldiers. There were many examples of Saxon resistance to Norman rule.

saint

A person celebrated by the Church for living a very holy life, and/or for dying for their faith.

saint’s day

Day on which a saint was remembered by the Church. People did not work on saints’ days.

sheriff (shire-reeve)

The king’s chief official in each shire. They followed the king’s instructions which came in the form of writs.

shield wall

Defensive battle formation often used by the Saxons. The front line of the army stood close together so their shields overlapped, making it harder for the enemy to attack.

shire

Area of England – there were about 40 shires in 1066. Several shires made up an earldom, and shires were divided into hundreds.

simony

The practice of selling jobs in the Church to nobles, rather than awarding the post to the most religious and well-qualified person.

slave

The lowest rank in Anglo-Saxon society, making up about 10% of all the English. Slaves had no land and had to work for their lord, who often had a huge amount of control over the slave’s life. The Normans ended slavery in England.

subsistence

Level at which people could support themselves. Peasants often lived at subsistence level, so they could only grow enough to feed their families and nothing extra to sell.

succession

The expectation of who should be king next, and the process of a new king taking over after the death of the previous king. The succession was disputed after Edward died.

tanner

Someone who worked with animal hides and made leather.

thegn

Saxon nobleman, lower-ranking than an earl. Thegns were expected to fight for their local lord, or the king. They were often responsible for small regions.

throne

The seat of the king. Like the word ‘crown’, historians often use throne as a metaphor for the power of the monarchy. When William, Harold and Hardrada claimed the throne, they weren’t just arguing over a wooden chair!

tithing

Group of ten men (aged 12 and over) who were responsible for bringing each other to justice if he committed a crime. The whole tithing would be fined otherwise.

treason

Disloyalty to the local lord or king, punishable by death.

wapentake

The name used for hundreds in the north.

wattle and daub

Building material used for houses in villages.

wergild

Compensation paid to victims or victims’ families under the Anglo-Saxon legal system.

Whit

Christian festival held on the seventh Sunday after Easter.

Witan (Witanagemot)

The council of nobles and bishops summoned by the king. They offered advice but he didn’t have to follow it. Crucially, the Witan approved Harold as king in January 1066.