

I thought I'd tell you today about WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR, who was born in Normandy, in the North of France, in 1028 AD (remember what AD stands for? - Anno Domini) and became the King of England in 1066. He was the last invader from a foreign country to conquer England - since 1066, England has never taken over by another country. France was last taken over by a foreign country in 1940 when it was invaded and defeated by Germany in WORLD WAR II. Germany was last taken over by a foreign country in 1945 when it was invaded and defeated by the British, American and Russian armies, and that brought WORLD WAR II to an end, at least in Europe. So England has a pretty good record for remaining unconquered - if we make it to 2066 without being invaded (which is very likely - that's only 46 years away; though in 2066, I will be 96 years old!!!!), that will be 1,000 years of being unconquered, and William the Conqueror will be able to say, 'No one could do for a thousand years what I managed to do.'



William had a very difficult childhood. At the age of only seven, he became the Duke of Normandy. That's way younger than you are now - imagine if you were seven years old, and you were suddenly told that you had become the Duke of Normandy. How would you react? He was surrounded by people who wanted to rule Normandy in his place - and so were always looking to get rid of him. So William had to be clever and tough to see off all his rivals, but somehow he managed to cling on and by 1060, when he was 32 years old, he was the undisputed ruler of Normandy. But by then William had bigger ambitions. The King of England at that time was a very holy man called EDWARD THE CONFESSOR. But perhaps because he was so holy, he didn't have any children and that created a problem - who would become King of England when Edward the Confessor died. There were three people who had a claim to the throne. The first was HAROLD GODWINSON - who was the head of the richest family in England. The second was the King of Norway, HARALD HADRADA. And the third was your friend and mine, WILLIAM, THE DUKE OF NORMANDY. William thought that he had got Harold Godwinson's support to become King of England - in 1064, Harold had been shipwrecked and taken prisoner in Normandy, and William had freed him, and in return Harold had promised to support William becoming King of England after Edward the Confessor died. But then in 1066, when Edward the Confessor died, Harold turned round and said, 'I was there when Edward died and he said I should be King next, so I'm going to be King!' And he rushed off to Westminster Abbey to have himself crowned King. And by 'rushed' I mean RUSHED - Edward died on 5 January 1066, and Harold had himself crowned King the very next day.

When William heard the news that Harold had become King of England, he was not best pleased, and started putting together an army and ships that could invade England. Harald Hadrada had the same reaction. Harald got in first, landing in the North of England on 8 September 1066. King Harold marched up with his own army to meet Harald Hadrada and they fought a battle at STAMFORD BRIDGE (now the name of Chelsea's football ground!) on 25 September 1066. King Harold won that battle, and Harald Hadrada was killed. But then Harold got news that William had landed in the South of England on 28 September 1066. So King Harold and his army had to march all the way down to the South of England to fight William, and the two armies met at the BATTLE OF HASTINGS on 14 October 1066.

