

Who were the Normans and why are they so important in England's history

In the early medieval times the land that we today call France was inhabited by different former barbaric tribes. Although there were strong handed rulers who centralised the land several times, like Clovis, Charles "Martel" or even Charles the Great, there was no possibility to take over completely the warrior life- liking soldiers of some provinces especially at the border.

Regular wars and intrigue made the king's position difficult. That is why it was possible for some groups to lead separate wars in their own name, own responsibility and at their own costs.

Such was the situation when the Normans, living in today's Normandy in the north of France, lead by William the Conqueror (*in French: Guillaume le Conquerant*) attacked England and won the battle on the Hastings field in 1066. How much they, the Normans, regarded themselves French and on what level they believed to be Norman is an other question, as well as discussing the reasons (real and fictitious - *you know, the one written in some history books* :) -.

Here the effects of the Normans on England's history will be detailed.

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Under the Plantagenet dynasty, England was often regarded by the conquerors as a French province and they handled the land and its inhabitants accordingly. For hundreds of years, no English crowned head could speak English for the official language was French and Latin. The bigger trouble was, however, that most of the knights and noble men after 1066 could not express themselves in English which was much more problematic. The English inhabitants got to know very fast the hastiness of the Norman cavalry and how fearful and aggressive they were. So bloody was the battle by Hastings that most English nobles died the others were disregarded or chased away.

So what could have happened in such a situation? The royal and noble courts used their language. Their servants, English peasants and little nobles, had to learn French, at least some expressions.

Over the years they got used to each other's language. Have you ever wondered why there are separate names for the meat on the table and the flesh on the field? The English peasants called their cattle cow, the French nobles ordered beef (*today it is boeuf*). Let us see a table comparing these words:

English word for the animal	English word for the meal	French word (modern)
cattle, cow	beef	boeuf
sheep	mutton	mouton

... and the row could be continued. Now it is not hard to imagine, how the French influenced the English language and how such world like *prison, tower, court, justice*, etc. came into the English.

Sometimes the French brought in new words. Sometimes these words abolished the old English words. Sometimes they became synonyms with different stylistic shades and this is the most interesting part of the Norman effect. Let us examine the following pairs and their stylistic value:

look for - search - seek
ask - question - interrogate - demand
answer - respond - reply
etc.

Also, some names became fashionable. Robert and William are such English names that the Norman "intruders" made fashionable.

In brief, this is the importance of the Norman conquest and occupation in England's history. It made the language wider, more colourful and one step closer to the condition that it can become today's "common language".