

Feudalism and Government: What changes did the Normans make to England?

Topic Summary

- Before the Normans arrived in 1066, the English were ruled by the King and the Anglo-Saxon **aristocracy** (the Earls). The king could make anyone an earl but he could also take land away. Earls had to provide military support in times of war and give their housecarls and **fyrd** when required.
- The basic framework of the Saxon state (how England was governed including the system of landholding) remained the same which helped William assert his authority over his new kingdom.
- However, systems became more **formal** under the Normans. For example, the Normans used **‘writs’** (written notifications sent around the country) as the Anglo-Saxons had. The Normans issued far more writs as they attempted to **centralise** control. This ensured William had complete control (even when he was in Normandy).
- Initially, William did not intend to replace every Anglo-Saxon landowner with a Norman. However, by 1076, the last English earl, **Waltheof**, had been beheaded and there were only 2 Englishmen who held land directly from the king: **Thurkill of Arden** and **Colswein of Lincoln**. By 1096, all of the senior positions in the Church were held by Normans. So whilst William wanted to retain some of the Saxon earls their lack of loyalty meant they were replaced by Normans.
- The feudal system gave the king more power and allowed him to rule the country with very few Normans. The king’s ownership of land gave him huge powers of **patronage**. Land was used to reward loyal followers who had fought alongside William in the Battle of Hastings e.g. Robert de Mortain had loaned his ships to William and was given 20 counties of England in return.. The use of the **Oath of Fealty** along with the granting of land helped the Norman kings establish control.

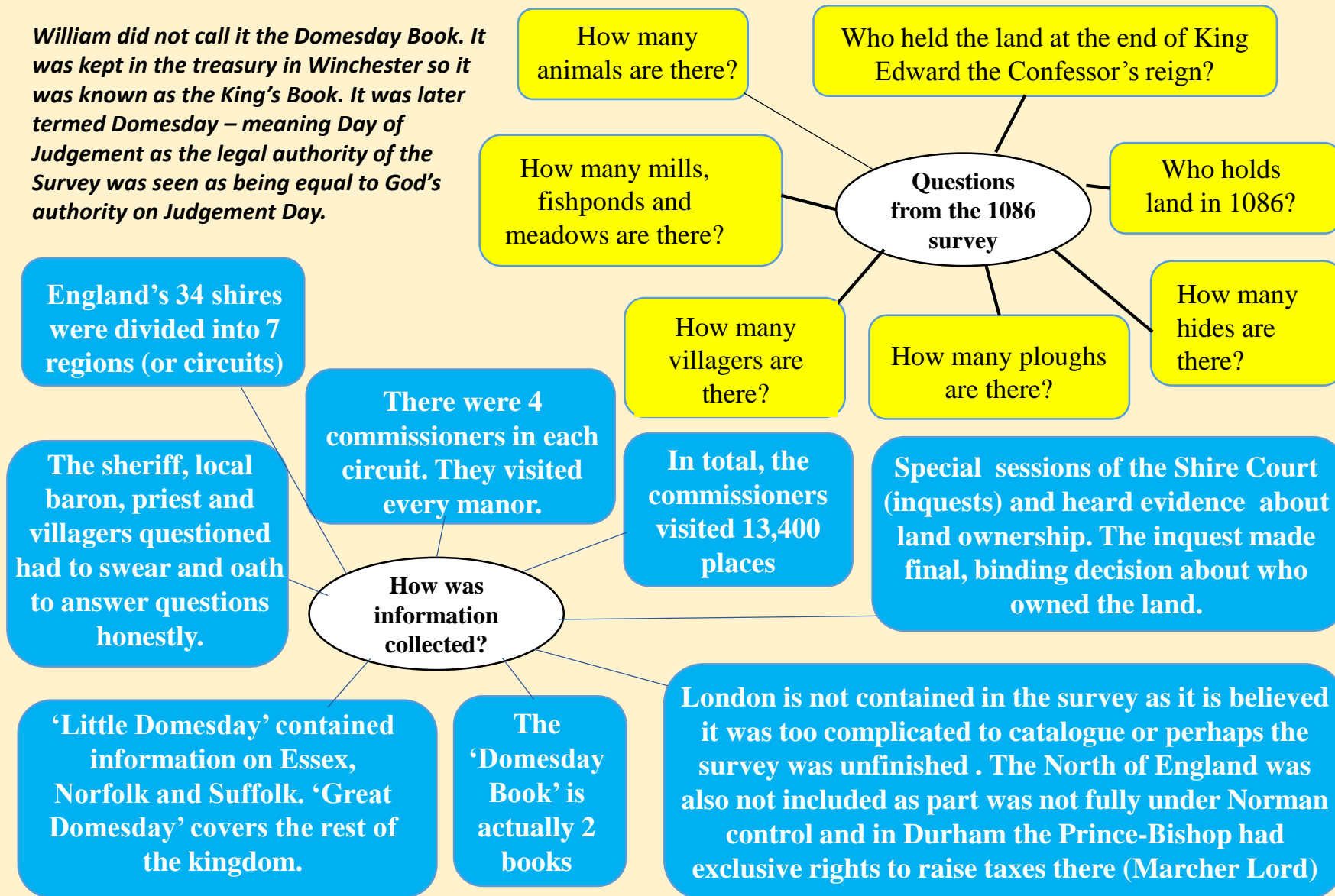
	Similarities between Normans and Anglo-Saxons	Differences between Normans and Anglo-Saxons
Land Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under both systems a form of social hierarchy dictated what was expected of individuals based on their status, and what they needed to do for the people above them and below them in the system. The King and the Church owned most of the land Peasants working on the land still had to pay their lord a tax of their produce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After 1066, barons (or tenants-in-chief) were not allowed to dominate huge areas of the kingdom. Under the Saxons there had been about half a dozen Earls who were extremely powerful (e.g. Godwin), some wealthy thegns and many minor landholders. William wanted to change the balance of power and so created 200 new landholders who were not as wealthy as an earl in Saxon times but wealthier than a thegn. These new landholders (barons) swore fealty to the King. This system of oaths ensured William’s power was protected, as in return for land Barons had to promise loyalty, uphold his policies and to fight for William. William only gave large areas of land to his ‘Marcher Lords’ e.g. the Bishop of Durham (Northumbria) and William FitzOsbern (Hereford). These had power over difficult border regions and had special powers to raise their own army and taxes. The Church was given more land (25%) which allowed the construction of new cathedrals and monasteries helping William claim religious legitimacy and political power (e.g. senior churchmen such as Bishop Odo were placed in areas that needed to be brought under Norman control).
Military Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thegns (Saxon) and Knights (Norman) both promised to provide military service to the King. Each tenant-in-chief (Knight, Baron) provided soldiers for William’s army. Local areas still provided troops for the army (Fyrd) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knights made an oath to their lord – this did not happen in Saxon times as it was seen as a ‘religious duty’. Knights always had to carry out military service for at least 40 days of the year or pay scutage (a tax to avoid service). Marcher Lords on borders with the North / Wales (see above) – became almost independent rulers with the task of defending against raids.
Inheritance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feudal Incidents: if a tenant died without an heir the land would be returned to the lord who could sell it off. As the king owned most of the land, he profited from this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property was passed on to the eldest son –primogeniture. This meant Normans could keep large estates of land therefore maintaining power and controlling who inherited the land. The king could also control the marriage of widows and charge fees when tenants died.
Government by Writ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main issue of government was to issue an order in writing (writ). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Normans issued more writs than the Saxons did. The King’s writs centralised the power and took it away from barons and bishops.
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system of local government remained largely unchanged and was controlled by the shire-reeve (sheriff). England remained split into 134 shires with a sheriff in charge of each shire. Duties included making annual payments to the king, collecting taxes and raising armies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saxon sheriffs were replaced by Normans because loyal sheriffs were vital to maintain control over the kingdom. Castellans was a new position under Norman rule – they were responsible for looking after the royal castles and forests (under the new Forest Laws).

How important was the Domesday Survey?

Theories about the purpose of the Domesday Survey:

- A 'tax book' with the aim of finding out how much people owned, so they could be correctly taxed.
- The survey was commissioned in 1086 due to the threat of the Count of Flanders and a Danish Viking invasion in 1085. William called a war council together in Gloucester and ordered that a geld (form of tax) be raised to pay for his army. However, the invasion never came. Soon after William ordered the inventory be drawn up to help him raise tax in the future.
- The survey could also have been ordered so that King William could be better informed about his kingdom. The survey provided a formal, written record of England at the time of the introduction of the Norman feudal system.
- William could legalize Norman ownership of English land and evidence that William was the legitimate heir to Edward the Confessor.
- It demonstrated that whoever owned land did so by the King's authority, making the Norman barons legitimate rulers also.
- The survey would help resolve future land disputes. As the survey was drawn up fairly and with key people from each hundred contributing to the record of who owned what it became an agreed reference point.
- The result of the survey did allow William to gain as much money from taxes as possible. He could make sure feudal lords were not withholding money, which would make them a threat to his power.

William did not call it the Domesday Book. It was kept in the treasury in Winchester so it was known as the King's Book. It was later termed Domesday – meaning Day of Judgement as the legal authority of the Survey was seen as being equal to God's authority on Judgement Day.



What does the Domesday Survey tell us?

- Who owned the land in 1086
 - King = owned all of the land but granted 1/4 to the Church and directly owned 20%
 - How much wealth the population did or did not have
 - In 1086 there were 2000 knights in England
 - There were 10,000 Norman settlers living in England
- There were approx. 2 million people living in England in 1086
- The estimated wealth of the land under Edward the Confessor compared to in 1086

How far did law and order change under the Normans?

Courts

Law Enforcement

Trial and Punishment

Shire Courts: As under the Anglo-Saxons, England was divided into **shires**. Shire courts met **twice a year** dealing with cases of land disputes, crime, taxes and rebellion were heard by a **sheriff**. These remained the main method of enforcing law and order in local areas.

Hundred Courts: A shire was divided into hundreds (100 hides in size but could differ). These continued under the Normans looking into local issues and were smaller than the shire court.

King's Courts: These remained the most powerful court of law in England. The court was presided over by the king himself or a designated official. It dealt with cases with which the **King had a direct interest** e.g. breaches of the peace.

Church's role: A criminal could get to a church could claim **sanctuary** and not be arrested for **40 days**. After this time, they would have to choose exile or trial by ordeal.



The Anglo-Saxon law and order system was very effective and in many ways superior to the Norman system, so William retained many of the English practices and merely introduced a few Norman changes.

Hue and cry: In Anglo-Saxon England, the **local community** was relied upon to enforce the law. When a crime was committed, witnesses would raise the **hue and cry** to help apprehend the criminal. Another example of community justice was the **tithing**, a group of about **10 men aged twelve and over** who were **collectively responsible** for one another's good behaviour. The Normans retained these features.

Constables / watchmen: These were elected, usually **elders of the village** whose job it was to ensure all villagers kept to the **curfew**. They remained poorly paid and reluctant law enforcers.

Oath system: Anglo-Saxons placed a high value on promises. People made the '**common oath**' of allegiance to not be involved in any major crime. If they did their entire family was punished e.g. exile for the criminal and their family.

Fines: Paying **compensation** was the main form of punishment for most minor crimes and was used in both Anglo-Saxon and Norman England.

Trial by Ordeal: As with the Saxons, the Normans believed in '**Judicium Dei**' (**the Judgement of God**) to determine a person's guilt or innocence. They utilized the trial by ordeal system established by the Anglo-Saxons.

Ordeal by fire – this involved a person putting their arm into a cauldron of boiling water or holding a red hot iron bar and walking 3 paces. If the wound started to heal after 3 days the person was innocent; if it did not they were guilty.



Ordeal by water – a suspected person was strapped to a chair and thrown into a lake. If they sank they were innocent; if they floated they were guilty, and then executed. This was because the belief was that pure water would reject the guilty.

Shire Courts: Under the new Norman system of land ownership shires were now smaller. **Castles** were where the sheriff now based. The importance of Shire Courts declined due to the increased importance of **Honorial Courts**. This was where the tenants could appeal cases directly with their lord.

Hundred Courts: Under the Normans, the Hundred Courts met **more frequently** than Shire Court and were run by the **Sheriff's deputy** (rather than the head of a local family).

King's Courts: Under the Normans King's Courts (or Royal Courts) became more powerful under the **Curia Regis (King's Council)** where writs were issued. This court became more powerful under **Henry I** (William's son) who due to a period of stability was able to further reform the system of law and order in England.

Ecclesiastical Courts: The Normans gave the Church more involvement in the law. Ecclesiastical (Church) Courts were presided over by Bishops and Abbots and dealt with issues within the Church (e.g. **religious or moral crimes** such as adultery or sex before marriage) or crimes committed on Church lands or by Church men. Often more lenient punishments were given out e.g. a **pilgrimage to show penance**.

Oath system: The Normans no longer punished the criminals family. A change made the Normans was the introduction of **murdrum fines** which stated that if any Norman Earl was murdered then the entire area around where the criminal lived was heavily fined. This was introduced as a **deterrent** to local Anglo-Saxon populations who resented their new Norman lords.

Written Laws: Another way the legal system became more modern was that laws were written rather than oral, which made them easier to enforce. All writs and charters (the way laws were recorded) were written in **Latin**. Latin was the most common written language and became **the language of government**.



Fines: The introduction of more fines rather than brutal punishments shows a **more modern approach** by the Normans in comparison to the Anglo-Saxons. The Normans ended the practice of the criminals paying **compensation** to the families of victims (**Wergild system**) and instead introduced the concept of paying fines to the government. This made the enforcement of law a **lucrative source of income** for the Normans.

Punishment: The **bloodfeud** was dying out (practice of killing or inflicting similar injury in revenge for an attack on one of your family). However, it was still used in some parts of the North where the **Danelaw** applied. King William was keen that execution be used as a last resort for very serious crimes. Instead, **mutilation** was used e.g. blinding or castrating the guilty.

Trial by Ordeal: The Normans introduced a further ordeal. **Ordeal by Combat** – if a nobleman was accused of a crime he would fight his accuser, and whoever won the fight was thought to be right. The loser was wrong and was usually dead by the end of the fight.

Continuity

Change

Topic Summary

1. Peasants had the hardest lives of all and many lacked any real freedom. They farmed to survive (subsistence farming) and many made little profit.
2. Some peasants moved to the towns to find better jobs. Others were trying to break free from the ties of the countryside.
3. The rich had a far more varied diet than the poor, although it was less healthy. The poor ate healthy food but were vulnerable to shortages.
4. Many towns grew in size and importance under the Normans.

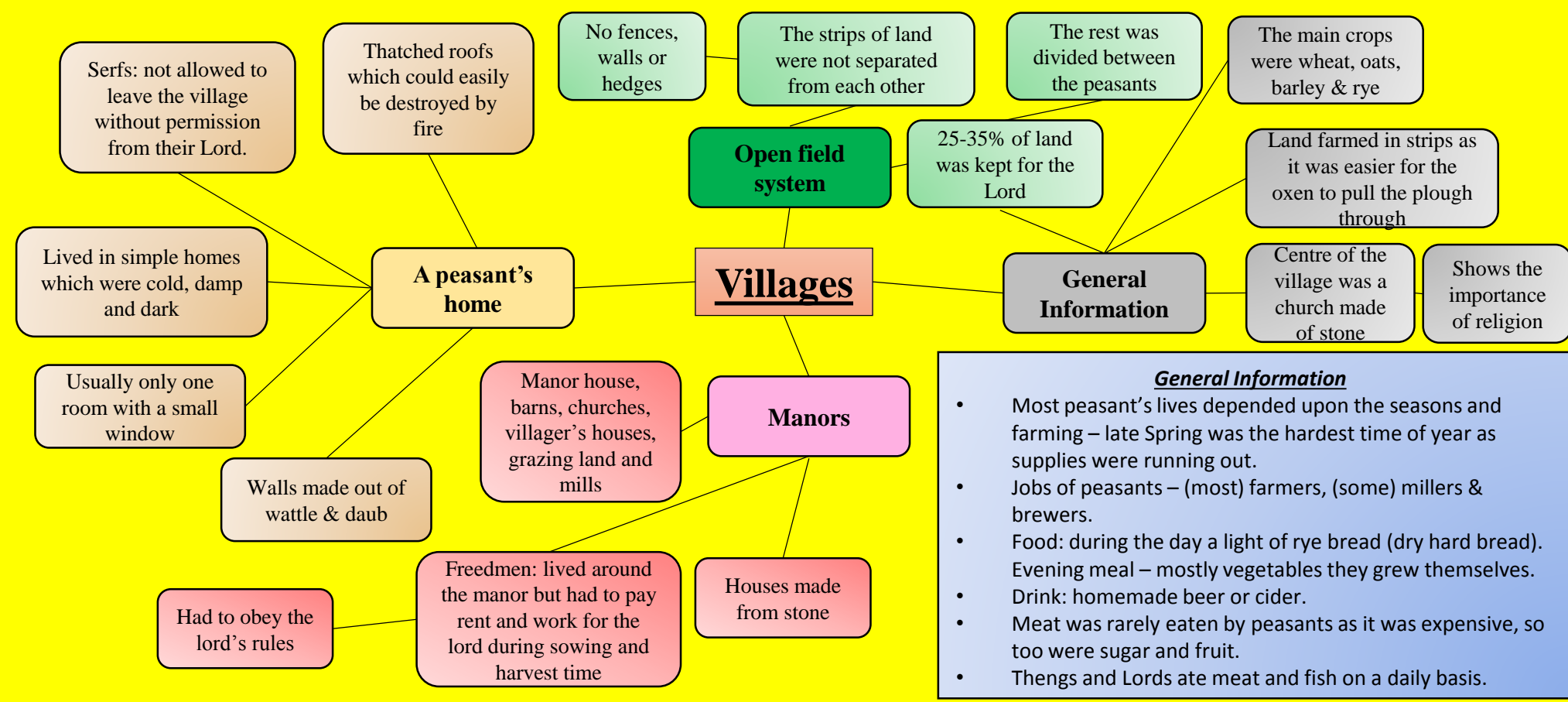
Change and continuity in village life:

- The work people did in the village did not change under the Normans.
- Saxon thegns were replaced with Norman lords who spoke French and followed different customs.
- Rents increased hugely under the Normans and many freemen struggled to pay. They had to become villeins.
- The Normans rebuilt many buildings in stone rather than wattle and daub. In particular, churches. There was an increase in the number of parish priests so each village had one.
- Many lords built water mills to grind grain but charged the peasants to use the mill.
- The Forest Law removed an important source of food.

Change and continuity in town life:

- There were very few towns in Anglo-Saxon England. Towns mainly existed on south and east coasts (due to wool trade). Other towns grew where rivers or important roads crossed.
- 21 new towns were created by the Normans. Most of these were founded because they were built to newly built castles e.g. Ludlow.
- Increased trade with Normandy meant towns in the south grew richer.
- The wool trade continued to grow, and increased trade with Flanders led to expanding port towns.
- The Normans introduced guilds which controlled trade and regulated the quality of goods.
- However, the Normans took control of market trading and increased rents and tolls for ordinary people. Some towns decreased in size and fortune due to increased rents which damaged business e.g. Oxford and York.
- Some towns were destroyed by rebellions.

How did the Norman Conquest affect towns and villages?



- General Information**
- Most peasant's lives depended upon the seasons and farming – late Spring was the hardest time of year as supplies were running out.
 - Jobs of peasants – (most) farmers, (some) millers & brewers.
 - Food: during the day a light of rye bread (dry hard bread). Evening meal – mostly vegetables they grew themselves.
 - Drink: homemade beer or cider.
 - Meat was rarely eaten by peasants as it was expensive, so too were sugar and fruit.
 - Thengs and Lords ate meat and fish on a daily basis.

Why did Norman towns grow?

- Trading centres in livestock, fish, salt and wool.
- Towns attracted people who wanted to set up shops and businesses.
- Most towns were protected by high walls, gates or moats. The gates were guarded and locked at night.
- People moved from the countryside to learn a trade or work as a servant. If a villain managed to live in a town for a year and a day, he became a freeman.

Towns

Features of a Norman Town

- Mixture of residential and commercial properties.
- Churches **and** religious houses
- Houses were built close together and often the buildings were larger above the ground because land in the towns was expensive.
- A high street was the main road through the town leading to the gates. This road would have been wider than the rest.
- Overcrowding led to overflowing waste and an increased risk of disease, house fires and theft.

How did the Normans change Nottingham?

- A new Norman lord to rule over the town.
- A Norman church was built in the Romanesque style in the Norman borough – 'St Peter's Church' in Rome
- A wooden castle was built in 1067-68 and controlled by the Norman Lord.
- New markets were created: weekday markets in the 'late-Saxon borough' and Saturday markets in the Norman borough.
- New boroughs created from the influx of Norman and Saxons to the town.

Medieval Jobs in towns

- **Blacksmith:** skilled craftsmen and highly valued. Made a variety of objects including tools, rivets, nails locks, horseshoes weapons and armour. Many made a very good living in towns.
- **Moneylenders:** Christians were not allowed to lend money so Jews came from Europe to do this work. This made them very unpopular.
- **Barbers:** cut hair, extracted teeth and amputated limbs. The sign for a barber's shop was a red and white striped pole.
- **Bakers:** bread was the main food in medieval times. There were strict laws on pricing and portion sizes of bread. Peasants were allowed to use baker's ovens to bake their own bread.
- **Armourers:** a very skilled role where people made chainmail armour to fit each individual who requested it.
- **Apothecaries:** sold remedies made from herbs and plants.

Hierarchy in Norman Towns

- **Top:** Lawyers, doctors and property owners
- **Middle:** Craftsmen (only when they became a 'master' of their trade). A Burgess (citizen of a town) had more freedom and legal protections. They could serve as watchmen or the town militia
- **Bottom:** Unskilled workers and servants

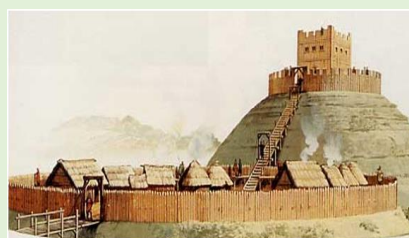
Did the Norman Conquest change everyday life?

Topic Background:

- When the Normans began to rule England after 1066 many aspects of life changed. A new foreign king now ruled the land and with him French-speaking nobles arrived to inhabit new Norman castles.
- However, the extent of change differed according to social status. For those at the very top of the hierarchy when the Normans arrived, the Norman impact was significant. There was an almost complete change from the Anglo-Saxon system.
- For peasants, at the bottom of the social scale, there was little change. King William's intention was never to change every aspect of English life and make it completely Norman.
- In many areas, it is clear William took positive aspects from both systems to make sure that the governments in both England and Normandy were successful, efficient, profitable and, more importantly, secure.

Norman aristocracy

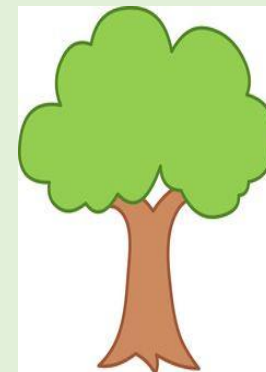
King William was impressed by the Anglo-Saxon financial system, so he retained it and introduced the Exchequer and minting system to Normandy.
 Exchequer = where the king's money is kept
 Minting = the creation of coins
 The Normans introduced trial by jury and trial by combat, which only the aristocracy had the right to demand.



NEW LAWS

Peasants

Some new laws did affect the peasants way of life. Previously, peasants had hunted to supplement their diets, particularly in the winter and spring when their food supplies were running low. New forest laws meant that peasants faced fines, imprisonment or even death if they hunted in the forest.
Murdrum fines also had a big impact on peasant life, the whole area could be fined if a Norman was killed. As a result, the peasants were less likely to support rebellions.



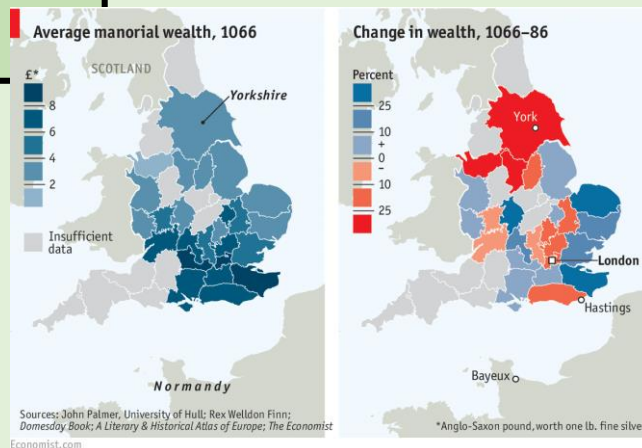
CASTLES

Norman aristocracy

In order to protect themselves from the local Anglo-Saxon population and maintain their status, the earls built castles on their land. The role of castles developed over time so that, as well as being important for defence, they also became centres for trade and commerce.

Peasants

Castles were built very quickly, which must have impressed as well as intimidated the local population. The peasants' land may also have been cleared to make way for a castle. However, many locals such as the blacksmith, carpenter and trades people, lived and worked within the walls of the bailey. So a motte and bailey castle also defended them from attack.



Norman aristocracy

Initially, William attempted to retain Anglo-Saxon landowners. However, many were involved in rebellions and had to be replaced. After the Conquest, William took possession of all of the land. 25% Church / 20% William / the rest divided between mainly Norman earls.
 As a result, smaller earldoms and greater number of earls meant less opposition to the king. Their time was spent between their earldoms.
 A new social class was introduced in the form of knights, who could also be landlords.

Peasants

Although the nationality of their landlords changed, life for peasants did not change significantly in terms of their relationship with the land.

Norman aristocracy

As the vast majority of earls were Norman, the language of the new English aristocracy became French rather than English. Norman French became the language used at court, in law and for government. However, the language of religion was still Latin.
 As time went on, the Norman French and Anglo-Saxon languages started to merge to create the 'Anglo-Norman' language.

LANGUAGE

Peasants

Peasants continued to speak the English they were used to for some time after the Conquest. However, Norman words crept into everyday use, for example, veal, arrow, bow, armour, battle, castle, baron, knight and earl.

LAND

