

## 1066 in 66 MINUTES

**14th September 2023 by David Clarke**

Cleverly utilising supposed newspapers of the time [!], including the *Saxon News*, David delivered his talk in a form of reportage, proving a most convincing, if unusual way to present history. Of course, little was actually reduced to writing in those times, leaving the omnipresent aspect of speculation as to the certainty of many matters of English history then.

The nub of the '1066 problem' appears to be that Edward the Confessor, childless, having become very ill at the end of 1065, was concerned with establishing his successor; he had given hints, but no-one was sure. Perhaps it could be his cousin, William of Normandy, or his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, while the Norse Harald Hardrada had been persuaded by Tostig, Harold's exiled brother, to put himself forward as well. Edward was too ill to celebrate the opening of his new church at Westminster on 29 December 1065, dying on 5 January 1066, his funeral taking place the following morning. In the afternoon of the funeral, however, with what seems undue haste, the Witanagemot proposed Harold Godwinson, who was duly crowned. William wrote to Harold, demanding the throne, but Harold rebuffed him, the Council of Rouen then agreeing to a Norman invasion in what was termed a holy war.

The three claimants were of comparable age, born between 1015 and 1028, each ambitious for the English throne. Indeed, in early September 1066, Hardrada raised 10,000 men and 300 ships, landed at Tynemouth, raided the east coast of England, and defeated Edwin and Morcar (with both of whom Harold had replaced Tostig), as well as several English forces at Fulford, near York. Hardrada's stance on the succession was that he wished to gain the throne as an acceptable Norse claimant, following on from the Danish king Hardicnut, who had died in 1042.

Harold marched his army north in four days, catching Hardrada and Tostig at Stamford Bridge on 25 September, and defeating them in a battle in which Hardrada and Tostig were slain and only 24 enemy ships out of 300 were able to flee home. He then returned to London following Stamford Bridge,

marching back knowing that he was required to meet the anticipated threat from William. Although Harold's fleet was assembled, it remained in port, instead of sailing out to intercept the Normans.

By now, William, having formalised his plans to invade, had had warships and transports built on the Normandy coast. The Pope gave William his backing, on the strength of the assertion that Harold had supposedly previously sworn on sacred relics an oath favouring William, this apparent fact causing many nobles to ally with the Norman cause.

William made a couple of attempts to set sail, succeeding eventually on 27 September, landing at Pevensey in Sussex on 28 September and proceeding to sack several towns. Harold marched from London on 11 October, via Rochester, Maidstone, Bodiam, and Battle, clashing with William at Senlac Hill, near Battle, on 14 October 1066, in what has become known as the Battle of Hastings. Fierce fighting endured from about 9:00a.m. to dusk, the English winning for most of the day, until the Normans pushed forward and sealed victory, Harold being cut to pieces and dismembered [rather than shot in the eye with an arrow as has been told us for generations].

What happened to Harold's body has met with some conjecture, commentators being divided over whether his first wife, Edith the Fair, had it brought to Bosham, or whether it was laid to rest at Waltham Abbey.

After Stamford Bridge, William had been left as sole claimant to Harold's throne, and, following the victory at Senlac Hill, had himself crowned king at Westminster on Christmas Day 1066, suppressing subsequent revolts in what has become known as the Norman Conquest.

In sixty-six minutes, David had taken us through his various newspaper editions from late 1065 until that fateful day at Senlac Hill, a date which has changed English history forever. Up until the present day, no-one other than William the Conqueror has mounted a successful invasion of England, French attempts in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and German attempts in 1940 having been doomed to failure.

*Stefan Gatward*