

October 4, 2004
AP English Notes

Old English is Influenced through Invasions of the French Normans

King William I of England, better known as William the Conqueror was born in 1027. Others referred to him as William the Bastard, being the illegitimate son of Robert I, Duke of Normandy, and Arletta, a tanner's daughter.

In 1066, William of Normandy believed that Edward the Confessor, King of England, promised him the throne of England when he died. (Edward and his wife were childless.) Before William arrived in England, the Witan (the ruling body of England) voted in Harold Godwinson as king. However, Harold Hardrada, (the Viking and known as the Ruthless) also claimed the throne. Godwinson's first order of business was the defeat of Harold Hardrada. He and his army were tired when they met the landing forces of 4,000 to 7,000 Normans with William of Normandy.

On October 14, 1066, William led the Normans to defeat the English forces in the celebrated Battle of Hastings. (Harold Godwinson died a strange death of an arrow through his eye and brain. After William took over the country he slaughtered most of the remaining Godwinsons.) On Christmas Day, William was crowned the King of England in the Westminster Abbey.

William slaughtered many of the 4,000 to 5,000 Anglo Saxon ruling families and gave their property to a select group of his followers (around 180 of his faithful men).

William's rule was stern and he maintained good order in his kingdom. However, he was merciless in the suppression of political opposition. In fact, so merciless was he that he introduced the act of beheading to England in 1076. He ordered the counting of his new belongings in England in the Doomsday Book.

Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories in a frame story, between 1387 and 1400. It is the poem a group of thirty people travel as pilgrims to Canterbury Cathedral. The pilgrims come from all of society except the royal and privileged; the highest ranking individual in this group is the knight. These travelers tell stories to each other to pass the time while they travel to Canterbury.

The General Prologue suggests that Chaucer intends that each pilgrim should tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two tales on the way back. As the printing press had yet to be invented when Chaucer wrote his works, *The Canterbury Tales* has been passed down in several handwritten manuscripts.
