

# The Norman Invasion – No Mere Consolation

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SHEILA COPE

BECAUSE the piano recital by Annette Servadei was cancelled owing to lack of support we attended instead an excellent talk with slides given by Professor Richard Eales from Kent University. Disappointment turned to delight as we became aware that we were listening to a specialist in early mediæval history telling us about the Norman Invasion, a topic related to the Society's recent visit to Hastings and to the subsequent exhibition at Castle Fine Arts Studio.

**A**FTER THE BATTLE of Hastings William showed recognition of Kent's strategic importance by marching east from Hastings to Dover, Sandwich and Canterbury and thence via Rochester through North Kent. He circled London on the west and finally approached it from the north. It seems that the story of William negotiating passage through the county in return for the granting of certain freedoms was a legend developed retrospectively in the 13th century. William appointed Odo, his half-brother and Bishop of Bayeux, commander of the royal armies in the area. Delegation through sworn oath of allegiance was the only means of maintaining power. In Kent 50% of land was held by the Church, leaving little scope for greedy barons and Odo began a steady take-over of his Earldom. He commissioned the Bayeux tapestry, made in England, as a "strip-cartoon" propaganda tool. On the temporal side Anglo-Saxons were quickly supplanted by Normans but as far as the Church was concerned, Saxon incumbents were only replaced as they died out. William had wisely arranged his own coronation by the Anglo-Saxon Archbishop of York on Christmas Day 1066. From the ecclesiastical viewpoint a Norman king was preferable to anarchy. Norman influence spread slowly from London; Carlisle was not subdued until 1092.

Domesday Book, basically a landlord's document which takes account of tax-paying men, shows that rent-payers were concentrated in the fertile areas of North and East Kent, while the total population of the area is estimated at 100,000. This was a time of settlement. The Weald was gradually cleared for cultivation and Romney Marsh was drained. Thanet was still separated from the mainland by a channel 150 yards wide. Norman classification indicates that there were slaves in addition to villeins and smallholders. Gradually there was intermarriage, Norman and Saxon names appeared within the same families and French words were adopted. Parishes developed.

Dover, already charged, as were the other Cinque Ports, to provide ships for the king, had flourished under Edward. The population numbered two- to three-thousand, quite large in view of the problems of bringing in daily supplies from the surrounding countryside. William had wanted to accept Dover's surrender but his army sacked the town first. William compensated the inhabitants to secure their loyalty and twenty years later Dover was more prosperous than ever; the value of land had increased by 30%. In spite of problems for shipping caused by a mill at the harbour entrance the port continued to benefit from an increase in cross-channel traffic.

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24th May – 5th June

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