

## WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR AND BARKING ABBEY



A scene from Barking Pageant, 1931, showing William the Conqueror meeting the Abbess of Barking Abbey

King Harold and his English army were defeated by Duke William of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066. The details of this momentous event and its aftermath were recorded by a number of contemporary or near-contemporary writers, some favouring the French side and some the English.

After killing King Harold and defeating the English army on the battlefield, securing the City of London was of the utmost importance to William because of its strength, its port and its proximity to the royal palace and cathedral at Westminster. In 1070, the chronicler, William of Jumièges, wrote an account of what had happened:

*The Normans, therefore, engaged and inflicted upon the city a great mourning on account of the large number of young men and citizens whom they slew. At length the Londoners saw that they could hold out no longer. Therefore they gave hostages and submitted themselves and all their possessions to their most noble conqueror.*

[Barking Abbey](#), an establishment of some size and importance also close to the City, provided a useful base for William in the immediate aftermath of the battle.

Continuing the sequence of events, another chronicler, William of Poitiers, recorded that:

*He [William] left London and stayed for some days in a nearby place called Barking while certain fortifications were completed in the city to contain the restlessness of its vast and savage population.*

These fortifications were temporary but 12 years later they were rebuilt in stone. The fort still stands today and forms part of the Tower of London known as the White Tower.

William was crowned as King of England at Westminster Abbey on 25 December 1066 having previously taken the submission of the Saxon heir to the throne, Edgar Atheling at Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire. However, William of Poitiers mentions that it was while the new King William was at Barking that Harold's brothers-in-law, the great Saxon earls Edwin of Mercia and Morcar of Northumberland, surrendered to him. Orderic Vitalis adds the name of another important member of the Saxon nobility, Earl Siward (nickname 'bairn' or 'the warrior'), also making his submission at Barking. All these events happened between the battle itself and March 1067 when William returned to Normandy.

Alfgiva was the Abbess of Barking Abbey at the time of the Conquest, and William confirmed her in post granting her:-

*“my peace and love, and all my rights within and without the burgh as fully as any abbess in that monastery of St.Mary had them in the time of King Edward”.*  
(from the Calendar of Charter Rolls held in The National Archives).

This association between Barking Abbey and William did not mean that life was easy for the nuns. Simeon of Durham describes William’s action in 1070:

*By the advice of William (fitz Osbern), Earl of Hereford, and some others, at the time of Lent, King William ordered the monasteries of the whole of England to be searched on account of his harshness and rapacity, and the money which the richer English had there deposited to be carried off and stored up within his treasury.*

Barking Abbey is not mentioned by name but it had Saxon royal connections and is likely to have been a certain target for William’s attention.

### **Primary Sources**

**Translations of parts of the items listed below can be found on the internet. The Libraries Department of Barking & Dagenham holds several translations and editions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Please check the library catalogue which is available on the internet at [www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk](http://www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk).**

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

*Chronicle of Battle Abbey* (1180)

Guy, Bishop of Amiens: *Carmen or Song of the Battle of Hastings* (1067)

Orderic Vitalis: *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* (c.1100)

Simeon of Durham: *A History of the Kings of England* (c.1130)

William of Jumieges: *Deeds of the Duke of Normandy* (1070)

William of Poitiers: *Deeds of William* (1072)

### **Secondary sources held at LBBD Archives & Local Studies Centre**

**The titles listed below represent a small selection from the stock of Barking & Dagenham Libraries. A wider choice can be found through a search of the library catalogue, which is available on the internet at [www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk](http://www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk).**

David Bates: *William the Conqueror* (2004)

D.C. Charles: *William the Conqueror: the Norman impact upon England* (1977)

*Domesday Book, or the Great Survey of William the Conqueror, 1086: Facsimile of the part relating to Essex*, (1862)

R. Mogens: *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Battle of Hastings 1066* (2004)

F.M.. Stenton: *Anglo-Saxon England* (1971)

F.M. Stenton: *The Bayeux Tapestry: a comprehensive survey* (1957)

Ian W. Walker: *Harold, the last Anglo-Saxon King* (2004)