

## The Battle of Hastings

On 1st October Harold was celebrating his victory over King Hardrada at a banquet in York when he heard that William of Normandy had landed at Pevensey Bay. King Harold immediately assembled the huscarls who had survived Stamford Bridge and marched south. He travelled at such a pace that many of his troops failed to keep up with him. When Harold arrived in London on 5th October and there he waited for the local fyrd to assemble and for the troops of the Earl of Mercia and the Earl of Northumbria to arrive from the north. After five days Harold decided to head for the south coast without his northern troops.

When Harold realised he was unable to take William by surprise he positioned himself at Senlac Hill near Hastings. Harold selected a spot that was protected on each flank by marshy land. At his rear was a group of trees.

At nine in the morning the Norman archers walked up the hill and when they were about a 100 yards away from Harold's army they fired their first batch of arrows. Using their shields, the huscarls were able to block most of this attack. The Norman infantry then charged up the hill. The English held firm and the Normans were forced to retreat. Members of the fyrd broke ranks and chased after the Bretons. William ordered his cavalry to attack the English who had left their positions on Senlac Hill. English losses were heavy and very few managed to return to their place at the top of the hill.

William decided to play a cunning trick on the English army. William ordered his men to 'retreat' and many of the English thought that the Norman army had been defeated and began to chase them down the hill. Once the English shield wall had been broken William ordered his cavalry to charge. Without the protection of the shield wall, the English were helpless.

Harold had kept his bodyguards - the huscarls - with him but they could not stop the onslaught and Harold and his men were slaughtered by the Normans. After this battle, William marched through Sussex and Kent crushing any resistance to him. He had himself crowned King William I on Christmas Day in Westminster Abbey.