

Wace's Norman Conquest

Roman de Rou (ed. A.J. Holden) III 5543 – 8990

a translation by Ian Short

King Edward had had a long life, and his reign, too, had been a long one. But one source of sadness for him was the fact that he had no children, no close relatives or kinsmen who could take over the kingdom and govern it after him. He gave a great deal of thought to who might inherit his kingdom when he died, and after much reflection he made it known on many different occasions that his wish was to grant his inheritance to duke William [of Normandy]. He was related to him, and the finest of all his kinsmen. He had been brought up by his father duke Robert [I], in whose service he had been very attentive, and all the advantages he enjoyed came to him through being a member of the ducal household. Among all those who enjoyed the king's favour, Edward loved William more than anyone else. Out of esteem for the noble family in which he had been raised, and in view of the duke's excellent personal qualities, Edward wished to make William heir to his kingdom. (5564)

In England there was a steward by the name of Harold [Godwinson], a man of high nobility, who held a position of great power throughout the kingdom by virtue of his reputation and the deeds of valour he had performed. He was the most powerful man in the land, powerful in terms of the men he had at his disposal and the powerful allies he had made. His wardship of the royal household meant that the whole of England was under his control. He was English on his father's side and Danish on his mother Gytha's, a Dane born and raised in great opulence. She was a lady of the highest nobility, as was her due, given that she was sister to [king] Svein [Forkbeard] and aunt to king Cnut. She was also earl Godwin's wife and Harold's mother, and her daughter Edith was king Edward's queen. Harold enjoyed the king's favour, Edward being married to his sister. (5582)

After the death of his father Godwin, who had choked on a small piece of food [in 1053], Harold wished to cross over to Normandy in order to secure the release of [his brother and nephew] who were being held hostage there, and for whom he felt extremely sorry. When the time came for him to take leave of the king, Edward begged Harold not to go: the king not only refused him permission to cross over to Normandy and speak with William, but explicitly forbade him to do so. He could very quickly find himself outmanoeuvred by William who was extremely shrewd. If he wanted his hostages back, he should send messengers instead of going himself. This is what I have found in the written record, but another book informs me that Harold went because Edward had asked him to, in order to assure duke William, Edward's cousin, that the kingdom was to be his when Edward died. I do not know what the real reason was, but we find both of them in written sources. (5604)

Come what may, Harold set out, whatever his real business might have been and whatever his intentions were. Something that is destined to happen cannot be prevented from happening, and something that must be, cannot for any reason fail to come about. Harold set sail from Bosham in two boats that he had had fitted out. I cannot tell you what error was made, whether it was the

helmsman's fault or because of weather conditions that deteriorated. What I do know is that things went wrong, because Harold was not able to land in Normandy and was forced to enter the territory of Ponthieu. It was not possible for him either to turn back or to land unobserved. (5622)

One of the local fishermen, who had been to England and had seen Harold several times, recognised his face and the way he spoke. Eager not to tell anyone else, he went discreetly to count Guy of Ponthieu. He told him that, if he were willing to come with him, he would find something very much to his advantage. For an outlay of only £20, he could enable the count to earn as much as £100 by turning over to him a prisoner worth £100 or even more. The count agreed to do as he proposed, and the fisherman, keen to pocket the money, pointed out Harold to him. The earl was taken to Abbeville, from where he managed to send word, on the quiet, to the duke in Normandy explaining how things had turned out, how he had come to Normandy to visit him but had been blown off course. He had come bearing a message for him, but had gone astray on the way. He had been captured by the count of Ponthieu and, despite being innocent of any crime, had been put in prison. He called on William to get him released, in return for which he would do whatever the duke asked of him. (5652)

Guy, fearing the worst, had placed Harold under very close guard and had him sent to Beaurain to keep him out of the reach of the duke. William thought that, if he could get hold of Harold, it would be very much to his advantage. By dint of promises and presents, flattery and threats, he got Guy to hand Harold over to him. In this way William took charge of the earl, and the duke rewarded Guy with a fine manorial estate on the banks of the river Eaulne. (5664)

For several days William treated Harold as a highly honoured guest, as was only right. He had him attend several splendid tournaments, and acted with great generosity towards him. He provided him with horses and armour, and on three or four occasions – I am not sure of the exact number – he took Harold with him to Brittany when he had to fight the Bretons. In the interim the duke held talks with him, as a result of which Harold agreed to hand England over to him the moment king Edward died. The duke offered to give Harold one of his daughters, Adela, in marriage, if he so wished. Harold would swear an oath to that effect if that is what William wanted, and the duke gave his assent. (5680)

William arranged an assembly at Bayeux, so it is said, for this oath-taking to take place – a grand formal council. He requested all the holy relics to be brought together in one place. He had an entire crate filled with them, then covered them with an ornate silk cloth. Harold knew nothing of this; he saw nothing, and no one explained anything about it to him. On the cloth William placed the finest and most precious reliquary he could select – I have heard it referred to as the 'Ox-Eye'. Harold's hand trembled as he stretched it out over the relics and he gave a shudder. He then made his solemn declaration and swore his oath according to the wording that someone specified for him. He swore that he would take the duke's daughter Adela as his wife. He also swore that he would surrender England to the duke. He would do everything in his power, if he was still alive after Edward's death, to bring this about, as far as his power allowed him and according to the information he had. 'So help me God,' he said, 'and the holy relics on which I have just sworn!' At this a large number of people shouted out: 'May God grant it so!' (5706)

When Harold had kissed the relics and got to his feet, the duke took him over to the crate and made him stand beside it. He removed the cloth that had been covering everything under it, and

pointed to the relics inside on which the earl had sworn his oath. When Harold saw the relics that William was showing him, he was extremely frightened. He made preparations for his departure and took his leave of the duke. William escorted him part of the way, during which time he kept urging him, with great insistence, to do what was right. When they said farewell, William kissed him in the name of fidelity and friendship. Harold crossed the Channel speedily and without mishap. (5724)

The fateful day arrived, as it must, inevitably, since everyone must end their lives in death: the time came for king Edward to breathe his last. It had been his fervent wish that, were it possible, William should have his kingdom. The duke was, however, too far away and had delayed coming over for too long: it was not possible for him to increase the time he had available. King Edward had taken to his bed with an illness from which he was not going to recover. He was, in fact, at death's door, and his strength was already ebbing fast. Earl Harold informed his allies and others, then summoned his relatives. Together with some close supporters, he came into the king's bedchamber. Acting on Harold's instructions, an unnamed English nobleman was the first to speak: (5742)

'Sire,' he said, 'it grieves us profoundly to see you about to leave us. The prospect of finding ourselves leaderless is one that strikes great fear into us. We have no means of prolonging your life or of finding someone to die instead of you. We all of us have to face death individually, and no one can die in place of someone else. We are not able to protect you from death, and you cannot escape dying. Whatever happens, your death is inevitable: dust must return to dust. Once you have gone, you have left no heir to bring us solace. You are an old man by now and have had a long life, without, however, having had children: no son, no daughter, no sort of heir to outlive you, someone to see to our protection and defence, and to become our hereditary king. Throughout the length and breadth of the country, people are in tears, crying out and saying that without you they also are dead. Never again will they know peace, they say, and in my opinion they are right: without a king there will be no peace for us, and the only king we can have will come to us through you. While you are still alive, bestow your kingdom on someone able to guarantee peace in the future. May God forbid that there is ever a king incapable of making peace! Any kingdom where there is no justice and no peace is a wicked and worthless place. Someone who fails to maintain peace and to administer justice has no right to govern any kingdom he may have. You are a good and honourable man: you have done good in the past and will do so in the future. You have served God and will inherit God's kingdom. In the great sadness we feel at your passing, our only consolation is knowing that you are going to God. Gathered around you here are the leading figures in the country and the most loyal of your friends. They have all come with a single request, and it is one you must surely grant them seeing that each and every one is here to make an identical appeal, namely that Harold be your country's king. This is the best possible advice we can give you, and the best possible course of action you can take.' (5788)

As soon as the spokesman uttered Harold's name, all the Englishmen in the chamber shouted out their approval: he was absolutely right in what he said, and the king should believe him. 'Sire,' they say, 'unless you agree, we will never have peace in our lifetime.' (5794)

The king then sat up in bed and, turning to face the English nobles, said: 'My lords, you know only too well, and you have heard me say so many times, that I have guaranteed my kingdom, when I die, to the duke of Normandy, and some of you here have even sworn an oath to this effect.' (5802)

Harold, rising to his feet, replied: 'Sire, whatever you have already done, allow me to be king and let your land be mine. All I ask for is what is yours by right to give; you will be doing nothing more for me than this.' 'Harold,' replied the king, 'you will have it, but I am certain that it will be the death of you. Knowing the duke as I do, and the barons he can count on and the huge army he can muster, God alone can save you.' To this Harold replied that, if the king were to say exactly what his wishes were, he would carry them out and do whatever was necessary. He was not afraid of the Norman, nor of anyone else. (5818)

The king turned to him and said – I do not know whether or not he did so of his own free will – : 'Let the English now decide between a duke and a king, be it Harold or someone else. To this I give my consent'. (5822)

This is how Edward, since he could not have William, came to make Harold his heir. There had to be a king since there was a kingdom, and no kingdom should exist without a king. Edward had given his barons permission to do as they pleased. The king died, as die he must, and this was a cause of heartfelt sorrow for the English. His body was buried at Westminster with full honours, and the tomb which was made for him – it is still there to this day – was truly magnificent. As soon as Edward was dead, the wealthy and powerful Harold had himself anointed and crowned. Never was he willing to utter a word about the matter to duke William. He received the homage and fealty of the richest and most senior of his subjects. (5840).

Duke William was at Rouen, in the hunting grounds there, holding a bow. He had already strung and tensed it, taken aim and shot with it, then handed it back to a servant-boy. His intention was, I believe, to set out on a hunting trip. He was surrounded by a large number of knights, young noblemen and squires. Suddenly at the postern gate there appeared a sergeant-at-arms who had just at that moment arrived from England. He came straight up to the duke and greeted him. Taking William to one side, he informed him that king Edward had died and that Harold had been made king. As he listened to this first-hand news of Edward's death and Harold's succession, William's face became contorted with rage, and he immediately called off the hunt. He spoke to no one, and no one dared speak to him. He kept on fastening then unfastening his cloak. (5864)

He took a boat across the Seine and retired to his quarters. Here, stationing himself at the end of a bench, he repeatedly walked round and round in circles with his cloak covering his face before finally leaning his head against the back of the seat. The duke stayed like this for a long time, deep in thought, with no one daring to say a word to him. Behind his back, many people were asking: 'What can be the matter with the duke? What makes him behave like this?' (5874)

Suddenly the duke's steward came riding up from the hunting ground. Passing in front of William, he strode through the hall humming to himself. Many people came up to him to ask why the duke was behaving as he was, to which he replied: 'You'll know soon enough, but don't be too keen to find out. What always happens with news is that if you don't hear it first-hand, you're bound to hear it second-hand.' The duke then sat up straight, whereupon the steward said to him: 'My lord, why oh why are you keeping this news to yourself? If we are not to hear it from you first, are we perhaps to hear it later from someone else? You would have nothing to lose by telling us, and it would be of no possible advantage to you to keep it hidden. Do us the kindness of telling us what everyone out there in the town already knows. Absolutely everyone, be they noble or peasant, is

aware that king Edward has met his end and left this world, and that Harold has become king and is acknowledged to have succeeded to the kingdom.’ (5900)

‘All this is a source of great sadness to me,’ said the duke, ‘but there is nothing more I can do about it. I am sad that Edward has died, and sad also that Harold has done me wrong. The person who has stolen the kingdom that was promised and granted to me is the one who has wronged me. Edward had granted it to me, and Harold had sworn to me on oath that it was mine.’ On hearing this, the intrepid Guillaume fitz Osbern spoke up: ‘My lord,’ he said, ‘lose no time! See to it immediately that you take revenge on Harold for having been disloyal to you! The land will not stay Harold’s for much longer, if you are so minded. Muster as many troops as you possibly can, cross the Channel and simply seize the land from him! No person of quality should ever embark on any project only to abandon it, or start something that can be achieved and then drop it completely without a struggle.’ This explains how Harold’s conduct became a talking point throughout the whole country. (5924)

On many different occasions William sent Harold messages demanding that he honour his oath. Harold’s answers were disrespectful: he said he would do the duke no favours at all. He would neither give up any land to him nor marry his daughter. William’s reaction was to break off relations and to issue him with a formal challenge. To this Harold simply responded that he was no longer afraid of him in any way. He then proceeded to expel those Normans with wives and children living in England and who had come at king Edward’s invitation and been given fiefs and important castles. He threw every single one of these out of the country: fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters – none was given leave to remain. (5942)

Harold had himself crowned at Christmas. He might well have spent his time more profitably and done something else instead. Everything he did turned out badly, both for himself and all the country. He had broken his word in order to usurp the kingdom, and his rule proved to be a very short one. He damaged the whole of the kingdom and plunged his own family into despondency. He wanted nothing to do with the duke’s daughter, and had no intention of keeping or reciprocating any promise he had made. But the price that he and those close to him have to pay for such behaviour will be a high one. (5954)

William now understood, from the news that had reached him, that Harold would not keep the promise he had made, and would have nothing more to do with him. So he took the decision to cross the Channel, fight Harold and, the good Lord willing, take revenge on the perjurer. (5962)

Duke William had given a great deal of thought to the disrespectful way in which Harold had treated him in not deigning to consult him before having himself crowned. He had deprived the duke of what king Edward had granted him and ignored what he himself had sworn on oath to do, thereby breaking his word and putting himself entirely in the wrong. William said that if he were able to harm or hurt Harold without crossing the Channel, he would gladly do so. On the other hand, he said he would rather cross the sea than fail to get his revenge and take back what was his by right. So the duke’s preference was to cross the Channel and take revenge on Harold. (5978)

In order to take the final decision, William first of all, and without informing anyone else, sent for Robert count of Eu, whose land bordered on Vimeu, Roger de Montgomery, someone he considered a particularly close ally of his, and Guillaume fitz Osbern of Breteuil, a very warlike

individual. In addition he sent for Walter Giffard, at that time a man of outstanding prowess, his own brother bishop Odo [of Bayeux], and Robert de Mortain, another of the duke's brothers whom he loved dearly. Both of these were in fact William's half-brothers, on his mother's side only. He also sent for Robert de Vieilles, a most honourable baron who was considered a very wise man, being already well advanced in years. He had six sons, all of whom were already knights, men of great nobility and fierce fighters. Robert was lord of Beaumont-le-Roger and had jurisdiction over a wide area. William also sent for Odo au Chapel, whose wife Muriel was the duke's half-sister on his mother's side, and whose father was Herluin [de Conteville]. I do not know if they ever had a child, and I never heard speak of one. (6008)

In advance of ordering full-scale preparations, William disclosed his plan to these barons, explaining to them how he was losing what was his by right, and how it was Harold who had robbed him of it. His intention was to raise a large army, provided the barons would make every effort to help him, cross the Channel and take his revenge. All that was needed was for them to be daring enough to give his plan their approval, and with God's help he would then be able to recover his rightful inheritance. (6018)

The barons all told him that, if need be, they were ready to go with him. They would even, if required, mortgage or sell their own lands to ensure he lost nothing that it was his right to keep. Let him have full confidence in his vassals and in his clerics! 'You have', they told him, 'a great body of noble barons, a large number of wise and valiant men who are just as powerful as we here are. They consider themselves to be the equals in strength of those of us here today. Tell them what you have just told us! People who are to share in the struggles ahead have every right to join this council'. (6032)

The barons were accordingly sent for, and they all arrived together on the appointed day. The duke explained to them how Harold had duped him and robbed him of what king Edward had bequeathed him. He wants revenge, if he can, and to take possession of what he currently cannot have. To do this, he requires a large amount of military aid. Without their cooperation he cannot raise a big enough army and fleet. Let each of those present declare what he can contribute, exactly how many troops and how many boats he can bring with him! The barons replied that they would discuss the matter and would give him their answer once they had consulted, and the duke agreed to this (6047)

Their council lasted a long time, and they spent a long time in discussion. For a long time there was a lack of agreement among them on what their response would be and what sort of military aid they would contribute. They spent a long time deploring the tax burden they so regularly had to bear. This complaining went on for a long time, with people breaking up into small discussion groups of fifteen or twenty, forty or sixty, or even a hundred. Some decided to build boats and cross the Channel with the duke. Others decided not to go because of the large debts they had and their lack of resources. Some were willing, some not. They were still arguing among themselves when Guillaume fitz Osbern took the floor: (6065)

'What are you arguing about?' he asked. 'Above all else, you should not fail your liege lord when his honour is at stake. Your duty is to serve him in exchange for your fiefs. Serve him you must, so serve him with generosity! Don't wait for him to beg you, and don't ask for more time! Come on! Offer him much more than you can afford! Don't give him cause to complain that his campaign has

to be called off because of you. If this business is not resolved, he may very well say, if he were to look for someone to blame, that the failure of the enterprise is all our fault. Give him what it takes to ensure he can't claim that his expedition came to nothing because of you.' (6084)

'My lord,' they replied, 'our problem is the sea. There is no obligation for us to serve overseas. We beg you to speak on our behalf. We give you the responsibility of pleading our cause. Say what you like; we will do whatever you decide.' 'So you're giving me the responsibility, then?' 'Yes,' they replied, one and all, 'that's what we want. Let us all go and see the duke! Speak on our behalf because you know what our position is.' Off went Guillaume fitz Osbern at the head of the barons, and he addressed the duke as their spokesman: (6096)

'My lord, my lord, look at it this way! There are no people on earth,' he said, 'who act as honourably and deserve to be cherished by their lord as much as the men who are serving you at present. You should cherish and look after them. They maintain that, when it comes to furthering your interests, they would risk drowning in the sea or being burned alive, and you can trust them unconditionally. They have been in your service for a long time now, and they have followed you at great cost to themselves, and will gladly continue to serve you into the future. They will do even better in the future than they have already done in the past. They will cross the Channel with you and will double the service they owe you. Someone who usually brings twenty knights with him will be happy to bring forty, someone who used to bring thirty will now be willing to bring sixty, and someone whose custom it was to bring a hundred will readily bring double that number. As for myself, as a token of the genuine affection I have for my lord, I shall bring him, at this time of particular need, sixty ready-rigged boats loaded with fighting men.' (6122)

All the barons present were astonished at what Guillaume fitz Osbern was saying and they complained vociferously. Many of them denied that he had any authority at all for the promises he was making. You would have heard the court in complete turmoil, with much shouting and raging from the barons. Their fear is that the doubling of their service will become a permanent part of their feudal contract and be considered customary and therefore heritable. The whole court is thrown into confusion with so much noise and shouting that no one can hear what anyone else is saying or make themselves heard. The duke, who did not find the uproar to his liking, stepped to one side and sent for the barons one by one. (6141)

He begged each one of them to do what was needed, in the crisis, to earn his good will and his affection. Considering how things are shaping up, they would be doing him a great favour by doubling their service – or, if they so wished, by increasing it still further. In future, he promised them, the only services they would be required to carry out would be those that were customary throughout the whole country and those their fathers before them had habitually performed. At this, each one of the barons stated how many knights he would contribute for him, and how many boats he was able to supply. The duke had lists drawn up of the knights and the boats that had been promised, which were then set down in writing. The barons indicated their agreement with each one re-stating how many knights and how many boats they would provide, and what the names of the knights were. (6162)

From his brother bishop Odo William received precisely forty boats. [Arnald] bishop of Le Mans, eager to promote the duke's venture, contributed thirty boats equipped with sailors and helmsmen. Each of the barons promised boats, but I have no individual details. Then William's good

neighbours the Bretons, the people of Le Mans, of Anjou, Ponthieu and Boulogne were invited to come and help him out with the numbers he needed. If he were successful in conquering England, he promised estates to those willing to join his campaign. To a large number of them he promised regular allowances, generous wages and handsome gifts. He enlisted a wide range of mercenaries, ever eager to profit from war. (6180)

In all good faith and as a friendly gesture, William informed king Philippe [I] of France, his overlord, of his intention to cross the Channel and attack Harold, because he was defrauding him and acting disloyally in all his dealings. William went to Saint-Germer in Beauvaisis to talk to the king. There he explained the situation he found himself in. If Philippe were willing to offer him the sort of assistance that would enable him to get back what was rightfully his, he would hold England from the French king and be happy to perform the necessary service. (6192)

Philippe declared that he was not willing to go along with this: he would never agree to William crossing the Channel. Philippe's men had earlier made their representations and had advised the king against supporting William's venture and allowing him to extend his power any further. William already had too much power, and this was potentially a source of concern to Philippe. It would be foolish of him to let the duke improve his position even more. Were he to allow William to have access to the great wealth, riches and estates that would become available to him from overseas, as well as the fine knights he would have at his disposal in Normandy, he would never again in his lifetime be at peace with an aggressive people like the Normans. This was why king Philippe had to make every effort to thwart duke William, to stop him from going over to England and increasing his power still further. (6210)

'If you want to come to the duke's assistance,' the French barons said, 'you cannot do so without having to pay the price. The whole of France will suffer and be impoverished as a result. No Frenchman will follow you over to England, no Frenchman will cross the Channel. Any misadventure that might befall you there would cause you endless shame. The duke's request is designed to further his own ends, and you yourself will gain no advantage from his conquering England. You will never enjoy the service he will owe you. He gives you little service as it is, and would give you even less if he were victorious. The more he has for himself, the less he will do for you.' (6224)

In view of what the French barons said – and they would have said even worse things if that were possible – the king was unwilling to help the duke. On the contrary, he wished to hinder him as much as he possibly could. I am not aware of what the king actually replied, but I know for certain that he failed to support the duke. When William came to take leave, he felt deep-seated resentment. 'I shall go, sire,' he said, 'I'll do the best I can and attempt to recover, if God so wills, what is mine by right. If I succeed – and God grant that I do! – you will not find me acting against your interests, and you will not act against my interests by encroaching on what is mine. If the English manage to defend themselves successfully and I fail in my attempt, all I will lose is my head, and it will be the end of good times for me. My children will inherit my land, and you will never set out to conquer it from them. Whether I survive or whether I die, and whatever I decide to do, I couldn't care less about any threats from anyone.' (6246)

Unwilling to press the king any further, William immediately left. He requested count [Baudouin V] of Flanders, as his friend and [father]-in-law, to join him on his venture. In reply the count said that, if William needed his military assistance, he first wanted assurances about how

much of England he would get and what the partition would be. William said that he would go and discuss it with his barons and seek their advice, then let him know the decision by letter. He went off, however, and did nothing more about it. What he did do next was something quite unheard-of: he took a small sheet of parchment without any writing at all on it. He then affixed his wax seal to the blank sheet, having first written on the seal tag that Baudouin would have as much of England as was specified in the attached letter. (6270)

William sent the letter to count Baudouin by way of an educated and long-serving servant of his who duly delivered it. Breaking open the seal the count unfolded the letter. He glanced at it without noticing anything, then passed it to the servant for him to read it out. With great civility the servant said to the count: 'There is nothing written on it, and nothing is what you can expect, and nothing is what you will get. The duke is seeking to safeguard the honour of your sister [Judith, wife of Tostig] and your nephews. In the event of their gaining control over England, no one would have more claim to sovereignty than you. They would make you lord over the whole country, and it would be yours as much as it would be theirs. But if God so wills, it will be duke William who conquers England, and it will be without any help from you.' I do not know what Baudouin's reply was, because the messenger immediately left. (6292)

The duke wished to ensure that the conquest he was preparing was legitimate, so he sent some of his most eloquent clerics to the pope to inform him how badly treated he had been by Harold. He had broken his oath and had lied: despite swearing an oath that he would do so, he was refusing to hand over the kingdom which king Edward had conferred on the duke. He had also now gone back on his promise to marry William's daughter. The duke called on the pope to punish Harold's perjury in accordance with the law of Holy Church. Should it be God's will that William conquer England, he would hold the kingdom from St Peter and perform service for it to no one but God. Pope [Alexander II] gave his assent and sent William a banner together with a beautiful, splendid and extremely costly ring. Its precious stone, the pope informed him, was set on one of St Peter's teeth. By means of these tokens the pope informed William that he gave permission, in the name of God, for him to conquer England and to hold it from St Peter. (6318)

As the time approached for the invasion to start, a huge star with three long trails pointing south appeared in the sky, and it stayed there shining for fourteen days. A star such as this habitually makes an appearance when a new king is to succeed to a kingdom. I myself have seen a large number of elderly people who witnessed this either early in their lives or more recently. Anyone wishing to use the correct astrological term should refer to this as a comet. (6328).

Duke William was overjoyed to receive the banner and permission from the pope. He sent for smiths and carpenters, and you would have seen timber and materials being rushed to all the ports throughout Normandy, bolts forged and planks trimmed, boats and warships rigged, sails spread, masts erected. With great energy and at great cost, they spent the whole of one summer, August included, preparing the fleet and mobilising the troops. In the whole country there was not a single knight, no fit fighting man, no decent archer, no honest peasant old enough to fight, whom the duke did not seek out to cross over to England with him. To the barons he promised estates, to the minor nobles income from property. (6350)

Once the boats were fitted out, they were left at anchor on the Somme before being taken to Saint-Valéry, where they were handed over to the barons. The Somme was completely covered

with boats and small craft, and this is where the river gets its name ['sum total'] from. The Somme divides Ponthieu from Vimeu, which extends as far as the river Eu. The Eu divides Vimeu from Normandy, a country with a separate jurisdiction. Eu is the name of both the river and the castle, and the town occupies a splendid site on the river itself. (6362)

The duke's army was composed of men from many different regions. Count Aimery of Thouars, a man of great power who could command a huge number of troops, had come to join in. Alan [Rufus] added a large contingent of Breton knights to those crossing the Channel. Fitz Bertrand of Le Pallet was also present, as was [Joscelin I] lord of Dinan and Ralf de Gael, and there were many other men there from Breton castles. Some came from Brocéliande, a long wide forest whose features are much praised in Brittany and which is frequently mentioned by Breton storytellers. It has a fountain that springs up from its stone surround and, in hot weather, is much visited by huntsmen. They use their horns to scoop up the water that they then sprinkle on the stone below, thereby causing the rain to come pouring down. For this reason, in olden days it would rain a great deal in the forest and thereabouts, which is something I cannot explain. If the Bretons are telling us the truth, fairies are also seen in the forest together with many other extraordinary phenomena. There are hawks nesting there, and also a large number of big stags. The peasants, however, have totally deserted the place. I myself set out there in search of marvels, and saw the forest and the countryside around, but found not a single marvel. I left foolishly in search of stupidities, and came back stupidly, convinced I was a fool. (6398)

News about the duke's decision to cross the Channel and attack Harold for taking England from him quickly spread round the country. Mercenaries came flocking to William, either singly or two by two, four, five, six at a time, or even in groups of seven, eight, nine or ten. He enlisted each one, making all sorts of promises and rewarding them generously. Many came following arrangements they had made with him earlier. Others wanted land from him if his invasion was successful, and yet others asked for wages or regular income and different sorts of grants. In many cases they were impatient because they had their own expenses to meet. (6416)

I have no wish to undertake to make a written record of the number of barons, knights, minor nobles and mercenaries that the duke had at his disposal at the moment his fleet was ready to sail. I do, however, clearly remember, as a young boy, hearing my father say that there were four short of seven hundred boats that set out from Saint-Valéry – boats of all sorts and sizes carrying weapons and equipment. I have, however, also seen documents according to which there were as many as three thousand boats under sail, though I have no idea how true that is. What we can know, on the other hand, is that, given the large number of boats there were, the number of men must have been enormous. (6434)

Much to the barons' annoyance, they were held up a long time in Saint-Valéry waiting for a favourable wind. So they prevailed upon the monks to bring out the reliquary of St Valéry which they then placed on a mat in the middle of some fields. All the barons who were due to set sail came to pray before the holy relics. They had soon covered the reliquary completely in offerings of money, shortly after which the weather turned fair and the wind favourable. (6446)

The duke had a lantern fixed to the top of the mast of his boat so that it could be seen by the other vessels which could then set their course to follow him. His boat also had a gold-coloured copper weathervane set on top of the mast. On the front of the boat – or prow, to use the nautical

term – they fixed the figure of a child in copper carrying a primed bow and arrow. It had its face pointing towards England and gave the impression of shooting in that direction. Whatever course the boat followed, it looked as if the figure was shooting straight ahead. Only two of the boats in the fleet foundered, and given all the men they were carrying, I cannot be sure whether or not they were overloaded. (6464)

The duke had a huge cavalry, and his fleet was composed of a very large number of boats. There were also countless infantry and archers, all courageous fighting men, and in addition carpenters and skilled workmen, fine blacksmiths and farriers. All the boats, keeping in formation, headed for the same port. They all made landfall together, and together they dropped anchor. All together they pulled the boats onto dry land, and all together they began unloading. Where they had landed was near to Hastings, that was where they first came ashore. They drew up their boats in long rows, one tightly up against the other. Then you would have seen all those splendid sailors, splendid squires, splendid fighting men disembarking, unloading the boats, securing cables, carrying shields and saddles ashore, coaxing out war- and saddle-horses. The archers were the first to disembark, the first to make their landing, each one with their bow at the ready, their different quivers at their sides. Each one of them was shaven and had closely cropped hair, and they all wore short clothes designed for attacking as well as fleeing, turning right round as well as simply stepping to one side. They reconnoitred right along the coastline without encountering a single armed man. After the archers it was the turn of the knights to disembark, which they did dressed in their hauberks and carrying their weapons, their helmets strapped on and their shields hanging round their necks. They came out onto the beach in groups, each fully armed on his warhorse, sword at the ready. With lances erect they rode to where the ground was flat. The barons had banners, and the knights pennons. Having first secured the area, they took up position alongside the archers. Next it was the turn of the carpenters who came ashore holding large axes in their hands, hatchets and mattocks hanging from their belts. (6512)

They joined the archers and the knights before deciding to look for a suitable location to construct a fortress. They then unloaded the ready prepared timber that the count of Eu had brought with him. They dragged it ashore along with large barrells of cut dowels. Before dusk had fully fallen, they had finished erecting a small stronghold, around which they then dug a ditch, thus making it a highly secure fortification. Then you would have seen kitchens laid out, fires lit and supplies of food brought in, and the duke was able to sit down to a meal. The barons and knights had plenty to eat, as William had brought more than ample provisions. Everyone had a good meal and enjoyed a good drink. They were very happy to be on dry land. (6534)

Before the boats left the Somme, a certain cleric had come to duke William claiming to be knowledgeable in the arts of astronomy and necromancy. He maintained that he could predict the future and he practiced many different sorts of divination. He had cast lots for duke and predicted that he would cross the Channel safely and would achieve his ends without even having to fight. Harold, he explained, would promise the duke to arrange things so that he would recognise William as his liege lord and hold the kingdom of England from him. Thereafter the duke would return home safe and sound. The cleric's prediction turned out to be correct as far as the successful sea crossing was concerned, but wrong about the fighting. (6552)

When William landed safely in England, he remembered the soothsayer, asked after him and insisted he be found. One of the helmsmen replied that the man had had an accident in one of the boats that had sunk and had drowned at sea. 'That's of no consequence,' said the duke, 'he wasn't much of an expert anyway. Someone who couldn't predict his own future would make a bad job of predicting mine. Had he been a proper soothsayer, he should have predicted his own death. It is foolish to place one's trust in someone who claims to know how another person's future will turn out but fails to foresee his own death. He's the sort who looks after other people's business but ignores his own.' The soothsayer was not spoken of again, and the boats were pulled up onto dry ground. (6572)

When the duke first came ashore, he stumbled and fell forwards onto his hands. From everyone who saw it, there immediately arose a cry of 'What a terrible omen this is!' In a loud voice William retorted: 'My lords, by God in majesty, I have taken possession of this land in both of my hands. It will never be given up without a fight. Everything here belongs to us. I'm going to see now exactly who the brave men are!' A man then ran inland as far as some peasant's house and pulled down a handful of thatch from the roof. He came hurrying back with it to the duke. 'My lord,' he said, 'step forward and receive this grant of possession that I am making you! I hereby grant you formal possession of this land. Now you are, beyond dispute, in possession of this country.' To which William replied: 'I accept, and may God be with me!' He then issued a general proclamation ordering the sailors to drag all the boats onto dry ground and then break them up and hole them to prevent any cowardly individuals from coming back and using them to make a getaway from the fighting. (6598)

I cannot possibly give a written account of everything that was happening at one particular time, nor can I recount events simultaneously to you. What I can do, however, is to tell my story by jumping from one event to another. What actually happened here was that, once the fleet had landed, William had ordered his men to get fully armed, and during their first day in England they did not venture beyond the coast. The following day they reached Pevensey castle, and there the squires, foragers and those mercenaries with their eye on booty were able to plunder as well as secure more provisions before those in the boats ran out. You would then have seen the English taking to their heels, chasing round after their cattle, abandoning their houses and going to cower, terror-stricken, in the cemeteries. (6616)

There was a knight living in the region who, on hearing the commotion that the peasants and villeins were making at the sight of that huge fleet landing, understood that the Normans were invading and had come to conquer the country. He positioned himself behind a rise in the ground so that he could not be seen by anyone, and from there he was able to observe the fleet landing. He saw the archers disembarking followed by the knights. He saw the carpenters, saw their axes, saw the huge number of fighting men, saw them draw up in companies, saw timber unloaded from the boats, saw the stronghold erected, saw the fortifications strengthened, saw the ditch around it dug, saw the weapons and shields being brought out. He was very disturbed at everything he saw, so he girded his sword, took his lance and said to himself that he would go and tell Harold what was happening. He set out, rode all day, went to bed late and got up early. Night and day he rode on in search of his lord Harold. He finally caught up with him on the other side of the Humber, in a town where he had just finished his evening meal. (6644)

Harold was in an extremely belligerent frame of mind. He had just defeated his brother Tostig north of the Humber, and things had gone well for him. Despite Tostig being Harold's brother, the two had quarrelled and had each gone his own way. Seeing how things had turned out for Harold, and that, rightly or wrongly, he was now king, Tostig, aided and abetted by some friends of his, had requested him to grant him his father's fief and the land he had inherited. He was not asking for anything excessive, and would recognise Harold as his overlord, become his man and render the same services as those his father had performed for king Edward. Harold had been unwilling to do this, and he had not even offered Tostig something equivalent to what he had asked for. In a fit of rage, Tostig crossed over to Denmark and returned with a number of Danes and Norsemen. They landed in the region of York, and when this came to Harold's attention, he prepared for battle and then attacked Tostig. He fought face to face with his brother, and defeated him and his troops. Tostig was killed in the region of Pontefract [Stamford Bridge], among many other depravities of which Harold was guilty in the area. (6674)

Harold returned from [the north] extremely pleased with himself. But it is foolish for anyone to be triumphalist, since a single moment of happiness can be snuffed out in no time at all; bad news soon replaces the good; killing someone can lead to the murderer himself losing his life; rejoicing can be a harbinger of disasters to come. (6682)

Harold was in high spirits and openly swaggering as he made his way back. Then out of nowhere a messenger appears with the sort of news that would bring him back down to earth. Up rides the knight who had come from Hastings. 'The Normans have landed,' he said, 'and have dug in at Hastings. They intend to take the land from you unless you are able to put up a good defence. They've already constructed a fortification with a ditch and defensive platforms.' (6694)

'I am sad and extremely sorry', replied Harold, 'that I was not there when they landed. This is really a stroke of bad luck for me. I would have done better to have lost all the land Tostig was asking for than not to have been there at the coast when William came ashore. I would have mounted a good defence and stopped the Normans in their tracks, pitched them all into the sea and watched them drown. They would never have made it ashore, never seized anything that belongs to us. Unless they were able to drink the sea dry, they would not have got away with their lives. But this is how God in heaven has willed it. I can't possibly be in two different places at the same time.' (6710)

There was a baron in England – I am not able to give his name – who was one of the duke's most loyal supporters and had become an intimate member of his household. He would never wish anything bad to happen to William if it lay in his power to prevent it. Discreetly he sent word to the duke to the effect that, in his opinion, he had not brought enough troops over to England and had too few men to successfully carry out his mission. The English had great quantities of fighting men and were very difficult to defeat. His advice, which he offered in all good faith and as an act of friendship, was that he should go back home to Normandy before Harold returned from the north. He was afraid, he said, that William might get into difficulties and come to grief, and this would cause him great distress. William's immediate answer was to tell him not to worry on his behalf or to have any fears. He should rest assured that, even if he had only ten thousand instead of the sixty thousand and more excellent knights he actually had, he would still do battle. He would never leave England, he said, before he had taken his revenge on Harold. (6740)

Harold came hurrying back to London. He mobilised the English army from everywhere around, with orders to muster immediately and be ready for battle on the day he designated. The only excuse for non-attendance would be disability. He would have attacked duke William at once, or at least set a day for the battle, but he preferred to wait for the arrival of the large number of barons he had mobilised. They came in great haste once they heard the summons. (6752)

Very soon thereafter it came to the duke's attention that Harold was mustering a huge army. He had come back to London having previously been in the north, and it was there that he had killed his brother Tostig. William's reaction was to summon one Hugue Margot, a tonsured monk of Fécamp, a man of considerable learning and a well known and highly respected figure, whom he proceeded to send as his envoy to Harold in London. Once he had found him, Hugue addressed the earl in the following terms: 'Pay attention to what I have to say, Harold! I come as an envoy from William, so listen to the message that I shall relay to you! The duke says that you have lost no time in forgetting the oath you swore to him in Normandy some time ago. You have failed to keep the pledge you made him. It is nevertheless still possible for you to make amends: just give him back the crown and all the authority that goes with it. Neither of these is yours by right of inheritance. The title of king is not something you inherited, nor did you succeed to it by virtue of any of your ancestors. (6776)

Before king Edward fell ill, and at a time when he still exerted full legal authority, he granted the kingdom and its lands to duke William, the favourite of all his relatives. He was entirely within his rights to make the gift he did, and he made it to the best person he could possibly choose. All this he did when he was still in full control of his faculties, well before he fell ill and died. He granted the crown to William, and this is the matter in which you have wronged him. The fact is that you even heard Edward make the grant, and you raised no objection at the time. Far from opposing the nomination, you actually swore an oath to honour it. So do what is right by him now: give back the land that is rightfully his before any more harm comes of it! The sort of armies that you and William are capable of raising can only end up inflicting huge damage and incurring heavy losses. Should this happen, it would be entirely what you deserve. Many innocent people will pay the price, of that I am certain. Give William back the kingdom that you have taken from him! If you persist in keeping it, you will do so at your peril!' (6796)

Someone who once saw Harold said that he had reddish hair, and he was indeed an extremely arrogant and hot-tempered person. What Hugue Margot had said, and especially his threatening tone, incensed Harold. I believe that he would have gone as far as to lay hands on the messenger had not his brother Gyrth jumped up and gone to stand in front of the king. Margot was dismissed by Gyrth, and having no desire to stay around any longer, he left without taking proper leave. He neither said nor did anything else, and I have no more information about his mission. He went back to duke William and told him what bad treatment he had suffered at Harold's hands. (6810)

Harold's next step was to engage an envoy who knew French and send him off to duke William to deliver the following message: 'Tell the duke this: I'll have him know that he has no reason to accuse me of breaking any promise or any oath, if indeed I was ever rash enough to promise or swear anything. I did what I did in order to make sure I was released. I swore an oath and agreed to do everything he demanded in order to guarantee my own safety. I deserve no criticism

for what I did because I was not acting of my own free will. William had the upper hand, and my fear was that, if I did not do as he asked, I would be obliged to stay in Normandy for ever and never get back home. And if I have wronged him in any way, I will make amends as I myself see fit. If it is payment in kind that he wants, I will compensate him as far as I can. I will refit all his boats for him, and see to it that he is given safe conduct. Were he to reject this offer, let him know in no uncertain terms that I shall attack him this Saturday, assuming, that is, that he stays around long enough to face me. Saturday is the day when I shall engage hostilities.’ (6838)

So the envoy had come and spoken to the duke on Harold’s behalf, and told him to go back to his own country and disengage from England. Harold would, he said, refit the duke’s boats and give him safe-conduct. He would, in addition, give him sufficient gold and silver to allow him to pay off all the men who had come over with him. (6846)

Duke William’s response was as follows: ‘Grateful as I am for his kind words, I have not come over here with so many fighting men simply to take his money. My aim is to take possession of the whole country. This is what king Edward granted me, and what Harold himself swore on oath to uphold. He even handed over two young high-born hostages, one Godwin’s son, the other his nephew, and I still have them under my control. They are legally mine, and I shall hold on to them until I take possession, if I can, of the land that is rightfully mine.’ (6860)

The messenger replied, saying: ‘My lord, you are asking too much of us, too much of my lord Harold in seeking to destroy his reputation and his honour. Asking him to hand his kingdom over to you implies that he would not have been brave enough to defend it against you. As it is, he is still in excellent health, not wounded, not weakened, and not so handicapped by the war he has been waging that he should give the land up to you. It is not right and proper, if I may say so, for him to hand over his kingdom to you in the way you demand. Harold is in fact unwilling to concede anything to you, and you are in no position yourself to take anything away from him. (6874)

He is, however, willing, out of friendship for you and as a gesture of goodwill – but certainly not because he is in any way afraid of the threats you are making – to give you whatever you please in the way of gold and silver, money and clothing, provided you go back to your own country before both sides come to blows. If you reject this offer, you can be sure that on Saturday, if you are still prepared to face him, he will be waiting on the battlefield. Saturday is the day when he will engage hostilities.’ (6884)

Duke William agreed on the day when they were to do battle, after which the envoy took his leave. Before he set out, the duke ordered him to be given a horse and some new clothes. The messenger came back to Harold in his new clothes and gave him an account of what had happened. He explained how respectfully he had been treated and showed him the new set of clothes the duke had given him. Harold very much regretted not having treated Hugue Margot in the same manner. (6896)

While Harold and William were holding talks through the intermediary of envoys, clerics and knights, the English troops had been mustering in London. As they were on the point of setting out, or so I have heard it said, one of Harold’s brothers, Gyrth, addressed his brother in the following terms: ‘Fair brother,’ he said, ‘you should stay behind here. Make over command of your troops to me, and I’ll take the risk of doing battle against William. I have never come to any understanding

with him, never sworn anything, never pledged my word. I have no allegiance to him, and have sworn no oath of fidelity to him. It is just possible that we might be able to settle all this without the two sides coming to blows. If it is you who does the fighting, it will be as a perjurer, and my fear is that you could come off worst on account of the perjury, and that victory will go to the side that is in the right. On the other hand, if I were to lose or be taken prisoner, you would still, God willing, be in a position to marshal the troops and go into battle. Either that or come to some arrangement with the duke whereby you could govern your kingdom in peace. (6924)

While I am away fighting the Normans, your task will be to go and set fire to the whole of the countryside, destroy towns and homes, plunder and carry off food supplies, pigs, sheep and cattle, to prevent the Normans from finding any food or other means of sustenance. Remove all the food and leave them nothing to eat. In this way you will be able seriously to unnerve them and force them to go back home. William himself will pack up and go when there is nothing left for him to eat.' (6938)

This Harold refused to do: there was no question of Gyrth going off to fight the duke without him, no question of Harold setting fire to homes and towns, no question of him plundering his own subjects or taking anything that belonged to them. 'How could I possibly harm the very people it is my duty to govern?', he said. I should not, and cannot, damage or harm people who should be safe under my protection.' (6948)

There was wide support for Gyrth's proposal, and this was how everyone wished to proceed. But intent on showing just how courageous he was, Harold swore an oath to the effect that his men will never enter the battlefield without him, and will never have to fight without him. Otherwise, he said, they would take him for a coward, and people would condemn him as someone willing to send out men who were dear to him to somewhere he dared not go himself. (6958)

This is how Harold came to leave London, there being no way of keeping him there. He advanced at the head of his fully armed troops until he found a suitable location to raise his standard and attach his pennon. This was the precise place where Battle abbey was subsequently constructed. Anyone attacking him there, Harold said, will encounter stiff resistance. He surveyed the spot and decided to have a good ditch dug round it. On three sides he left three openings which he gave orders to be properly guarded. (6972)

The Normans stayed awake all that night, fully armed and on their guard. All night they were uneasy, having been told that the English would come and attack them sometime during the night. As for the English, they also feared that the Normans would attack, so stayed awake all night keeping watch. The next morning, at the crack of dawn – commonly called daybreak – those two noble warriors Harold and Gyrth, emerging from their tents and crossing the lists, mounted their horses. They were not accompanied by any knights, squires or foot soldiers, and the only arms they carried were a shield, a lance and a sword. Their aim was to reconnoitre to see exactly where the Normans were. (6994)

The two of them kept riding with eyes peeled before finally reaching a vantage point where they stopped, and from where they were able to see just how close to them the enemy were. What they saw was a large number of huts, wooden shelters and well appointed tents. They could hear all the horses neighing and see weapons glinting in the sun. They stayed watching for a long time

without exchanging a word. I have no idea what they did then or said or what decision they came to, but when they were on the point of leaving and returning to their camp, Harold was the first to speak: (7009)

‘Brother,’ he said, ‘there are a huge number of troops here. The Norman knights are extremely good and experienced when it comes to close combat. Tell me what you think I should do in view of their numbers. The only course of action I dare take is to go back to London and raise more troops.’ ‘Harold,’ replied Gyrth, ‘you despicable coward! This decision has come too late. This is no time to run away; you need to press on and attack. What a contemptible coward you are! When I convinced your barons to beg you to stay behind in London and told you to let me fight instead of you, you would have absolutely nothing to do with the idea. This could well cause you serious trouble. You turned down what I proposed because you did not trust me or the others. Now you are willing to do as I suggested, but this time it’s me who is not willing. Your bombast has very quickly melted away, and what you have just seen has made your courage desert you. If you turn back now, people will say you are taking to your heels, and if you are seen to be fleeing, who could stop your army from doing the same thing? If they were to scatter, they could never be brought together again.’ (7040)

Harold and Gyrth went on arguing until they almost came to blows. Gyrth in fact tried to hit Harold, but by digging his spurs into his horse, the earl contrived to make his brother miss. Gyrth’s blow landed on Harold’s horse behind the saddle, close to where his shield was. Had he managed to hit Harold, he would certainly have sent him tumbling to the ground. Gyrth continued insolently upbraiding Harold and accusing him of being a coward. (7050)

They came galloping back to their tents, pretending they had never quarrelled, and when they re-joined the army, there was no sign of any ill feeling between them. Harold’s brother Leofwine, who was younger than Gyrth, had got up early and gone into Harold and Gyrth’s tent. When he failed to find his two brothers where he had left them the previous evening, he thought he was never going to see them again. He assumed that they had been betrayed, captured and handed over to their enemies. Then you would have seen him grief-stricken, bellowing and shouting out like some madman. When he finally got to know that they had gone to reconnoitre the Normans, he and his close companions, together with the earls and barons, quickly mounted and rode out of the camp. (7070)

Lo and behold, at that precise moment the two brothers arrived back. They were taken to task by the barons for having left camp so rashly and without adequate protection. Everyone then returned to the camp and prepared for battle. Harold dispatched two spies to find out how many companies, barons and armed men William had brought with him. Hardly had they reached the Norman army when they were discovered and brought before William in fear of their lives. When the duke learnt that they had come to estimate how big his army was, he had them taken to inspect each of their tents and to be shown the extent of his army. He was anxious not to treat them badly or disrespectfully, so he saw to all their needs and gave them a meal and a drink before setting them free. (7092)

Back in the camp the spies explained to Harold the high esteem in which they had come to hold the duke. One of the Englishmen had seen how closely shaven the Normans were and how they had no hair left on their heads. He had assumed they were tonsured priests qualified to sing mass.

He was amazed to see them all cropped and clean-shaven, and told Harold that William had brought with him more priests than knights or other soldiers. Harold replied that they were, on the contrary, valiant knights, brave, bold and awesome fighters. 'And they don't wear beards or have whiskers like us,' Harold explained. (7110)

Duke William next appointed as his envoy an educated and intelligent monk, an experienced man of excellent reputation, and sent him to king Harold. He presented the earl with a choice of three possibilities and invited him to choose one of them. He was either to hand England over to William and marry his daughter, or he was to submit to the judgement of the pope and curia, or he accept the duke's challenge to come and meet him in single combat. Whichever of the two of them survived or emerged victorious would have the whole of England without any preconditions, thereby sparing the lives of the loser's army. Harold's reply was to reject all three choices: he would not keep any promise he had made him, nor would he submit to any sort of judgement, nor would he fight him in single combat. (7130)

The day before the battle was definitely due to take place, duke William addressed his barons to keep them informed of what his intentions were. He explained that he wanted to speak with Harold about his robbing him of what was his by right. He wanted to call him to account, to his face, to see what he had to say for himself. He would accuse Harold of perjury and call on him to keep his word of honour. If he were unwilling to make amends and to agree to a reconciliation between them, he would immediately issue him with a formal challenge and attack him the following day. If, on the other hand, he were ready to make peace and do as William wished, he would give him all the land north of the Humber as far as Scotland. (7148)

The barons gave their approval to what William proposed. A number of them added: 'Fair lord, we wish to make one point. If we are to have no other choice but to fight, let us do so straightaway. Let there be no more wasting time! We have no need to delay any more, as it could only be to our disadvantage. Harold's army is getting bigger by the day: each day more and more fighters join up.' The duke agreed that, indeed, there could not be any more delay. (7162)

Together with nineteen other close companions, William mounted his charger. All had their swords at the ready, and the squires who accompanied them carried the other weapons they needed. Then a further hundred knights mounted their horses and followed the first group, keeping a good distance behind them. Then another thousand knights mounted and followed the hundred in such a way that they never lost sight of any of the one hundred and twenty knights who were now in front of them (7174)

Whether via a monk or some other cleric – I know not which –, William summoned Harold to come and speak to him in open country. He had nothing to fear, and could bring with him as many people as he liked; their security would be guaranteed. The point of the meeting was to discuss a possible peace agreement. Gyrth did not wait for Harold to reply. He did not want him to say anything or go and talk with the duke, so he immediately jumped to his feet. (7185)

'Harold', he said, 'is not going. Tell your lord to let us know what he intends to say. We want to know what sort of peace agreement he has in mind, what exactly he wants to take away from us, and what he is willing to leave us.' While the envoys who had to convey Gyrth's message to William were already on their way back, Harold summoned his close companions and all his barons, one by

one, so they could hear exactly what the duke had to say in reply. 'He can tell us whatever he likes,' said Gyrth. (7197)

William's reply to Harold was that, if he were to keep his promise, he would give him Northumberland with the result that he would have whatever part of his kingdom lay north of the Humber. He would also give Gyrth the land that had belonged to his father Godwin. Should they not agree to this settlement, William would lay charges of perjury against Harold regarding the marriage to his daughter and the surrender of the kingdom to him. He had incontrovertibly broken his word of honour, and if he did not make amends, he would issue a formal challenge against him. And the English, and everyone else, should know that everyone who marches with Harold against the Normans, and everyone who aids and abets them in this, faces excommunication by the pope and curia. News of the excommunication met with loud protests from the English: they were much more afraid of being excommunicated than they were of fighting the battle. You would have heard them remonstrating loudly and conferring one with the other. Even the bravest amongst them wanted the battle to be called off. (7224)

'My lords,' said Gyrth, 'I quite understand just how alarmed you are. You fear the battle, and want there to be a peace agreement. I want peace as much as you do, if not more perhaps. But I am also very much afraid of William who is a highly crafty sort of individual. You have heard what he said, and how his aim is to humble you. He will leave you as much as he likes of the land that is not his to give. If we accept his offer and move north of the Humber, he will then push us even further away and leave us with even less territory. He will never stop outsmarting us, and will end up whittling us down to nothing. Once he has secured victory everywhere and has possession of most of the country, he will allow us to have only a very small part of it, with the prospect of taking even that from us. He wants to have possession of the whole of the country and is attempting to trick us into accepting a small and barren part of what is a very big country. (7249)

There is yet another reason to be fearful, and one that affects you more than me, since I expect to be able to provide for myself. He has already granted all your lands to his own knights from abroad. There is not a single count or baron who hasn't received a generous gift of English land from him, no county or barony, no castle or bailiwick that William has not already given away. I can also tell you for certain that he has accepted the homage of several people who are to be given the land that you have personally inherited. They will drive you out of your own land and, even worse, kill you. They will expel members of your household, make your sons and daughters destitute. They are not coming simply to rob you of your worldly wealth, but to ruin you and your heirs. You must defend yourselves, your children and everything you own! (7270)

My brother has never himself given away, and never ordered anyone else to give away, any of your great fiefs or estates or ancestral lands. If it were possible for English earls to retain their earldoms, barons their rightful baronies, and if their sons could inherit fiefs from their fathers and take over from them, I can assure you that I would not dismiss the possibility of our finding some sort of reconciliation with the Normans, and would not be bringing this matter up with you now. This situation would be one that we could tolerate and that it would be preferable for us to accept. But if you are to lose your homes and all your other possessions, your estates and the lands where you have always been raised, what will you do, and what will become of you? What country would you flee to? What would become of your children, your wives, your sons, of everyone, lord or peasant?

To what country would they go only to become beggars and scroungers? If they lose what belongs to them here, how will they go about replacing it with what belongs to other people elsewhere?' (7294)

As well as having heard what Gyrth had to say, and what others said on his behalf, the English were also told that Harold intended to increase the fiefs that the barons were currently holding, and that he was promising others far more than he could possibly deliver. You would then have witnessed a wave of enthusiasm sweeping over them: they called on God and swore in his name that the Normans will live to regret the day they ever crossed the Channel. It was a rash and foolish thing to do. The same people who had earlier been demanding peace and had feared the battle to come, suddenly discovered that they had reserves of great courage and were now eager for the fight. Gyrth had caused such alarm at the meeting that anyone now speaking in favour of peace was simply not listened to any more, and was in danger of incurring the displeasure of the most powerful people present. (7312)

Duke William and his men took no further action. They returned to their camp convinced that there would certainly be a battle the following day. You would have seen lances piled upright, hauberks and helmets made ready, stirrups and saddles adjusted, quivers filled, bows strung – everything needed in preparation for the battle to come. The night before battle was to be joined, so I have heard tell, the English were in high spirits, laughing and joking. They spent the whole night eating and drinking with no idea of going to bed. You would have seen them leaping around, dancing, skipping and singing – and shouting out [in their gibberish]: 'Make merry and drink up! Good health to you! Let the beer keep flowing! Here's to our health! Drink to me! Drink half, then drain the cup and drink to thee!' (7334)

Unlike the English, the Normans and the French spent the whole night in prayer and supplication, confessing their sins to the priests. Where no priest was available, they confessed to the person next to them. The day on which the battle was due to take place was a Saturday, and because of this the Normans, following the recommendation of the clerics, vowed that, if they survived, they would never again eat meat or fat on that particular day. (7348)

Bishop Geffroi de Coutances, who heard the confessions and gave his blessing, imposed penance on many of them. So did the bishop of Bayeux, who was also bishop of all Bessin, who behaved in a most dignified manner. His name was Odo fitz Herluin, and he was duke William's half-brother on his mother's side. His wealth, in terms of gold and silver, was such as to enable him to bring his brother a large number of forces, knights as well as other fighters. (7360)

The battle I am describing took place of the fourteenth day of October, on the feast of St Calixtus which that year fell on a Saturday. The army priests in their new, makeshift chapels spent the night awake, praying to God, fasting and in supplication, in private prayer as well as reciting the psalms, the *Miserere*, litanies and the kyrial, praying and begging for God's mercy, reciting the Lord's Prayer and singing mass, some the *Spiritus Domini*, others the *Salus Populi*, and yet others the *Salve Sancta Parens*, particularly appropriate for that day, Saturday. (7380)

The sung masses came to an end at first light, and this was when all the barons came together to see the duke. As a result of their discussion they decided to divide the army into three divisions and to attack the English at three different points. The duke went and stood on a rise in the

ground from where he could see the majority of his men. With his barons grouped round him, he addressed his men in a loud voice: (7390)

‘It is right and proper for me to hold you all in great affection, and to place my trust in you unconditionally. I have to thank you for having crossed the Channel for me. You have come to this country to serve my interests and to preserve my honour. Sadly I cannot at the moment show you the gratitude I should, but as soon as I am able, I will do so, and you will have your share of the possessions I will acquire. If I am victorious, so will you be. If I capture land, you will have some of it also. But I can assure you in all sincerity of one thing: I have not come to England simply to satisfy my personal demands or to secure what has been promised to me. I am here to take revenge for the crimes, the acts of treachery and perfidy which the men of this country have, time and time again, committed against us Normans. (7410)

They have committed acts of malice against my family and other people as well. Their treachery enables them to do whatever they want; treachery is the only means by which they know how to commit their evil acts. On the night of St Brice’s day [in 1002] they committed a truly horrendous act of treachery when, in a single day, they caused untold grief among the Danes by massacring them all in a single day. They had all had a meal together and, as the Danes slept, the English killed them. I do not consider it a sin for us to kill people who believe they are justified in acting like this. You have certainly heard also how [in 1035] Godwin betrayed [king Edward’s brother] Alfred [Ætheling] by first welcoming him, kissing him, eating and drinking with him, and then treacherously taking him prisoner and tying him up. Next he handed him over to evil king [Harold Harfage] who imprisoned him in the Isle of Ely and then had his eyes put out before killing him. He then had all the Normans taken to Guildford and proceeded to put them to death. He did so in groups of ten, sparing only one in each group, and when he had finished and saw how many were left, he considered that there were too many of them. So – just picture the infamy! – he went on to decimate those who had survived the first decimation. (7436)

If it is pleasing to God, we will avenge crimes such as these, and more besides, that they have committed against both our ancestors and our allies whose own conduct had been exemplary. Once we have conquered them – which we will do without any difficulty – their vast quantities of gold and silver and other possessions will be ours. So will their manorial estates, that are particularly splendid. There are no men, in the entire world, as strong and as courageous as you who are gathered here today. You are, all of you, brave fighters, tried and tested warriors.’ (7450)

The cry went up: ‘You won’t see a single one of us shirk the fight. None of us is afraid to lay down his life, if needs be, in our devotion to you!’ William replied: ‘I thank you for that. For God’s sake, don’t let yourselves be overawed! Hit them hard right from the start! Don’t bother with booty! We’ll share it all out between us. Each one will have plenty. There is absolutely no point in your settling for peace or running away. The English will never love the Normans, and never spare a Norman’s life. They have been perfidious in the past and are still perfidious now, dishonest before and still to this day dishonest. (7466)

Don’t drop your guard, as they will have no pity on you. Whether you fight bravely or flee like cowards, it will be a matter of indifference to them: they will no more admire you for fighting bravely than they will spare your life if you flee. And if you flee, you will get no further than the sea. There you will find neither bridge nor boat, no steersman and no boat for him to steer. What is

more, the English will catch up with you, and you will die a shameful death. You would die more honourably in fighting than ever you would in fleeing. Fight, then, and win, since there is no safety to be found in fleeing. I am convinced that we will emerge victorious. We have come here in search of glory. Be in no doubt that victory is in our own hands!' (7486)

William had still not finished speaking when Guillaume fitz Osbern came riding up on his well armoured horse. 'My lord,' he said, 'we are wasting far too much time! Come on! Come on! Let's all arm up!' Everyone went off to their tents where they made all haste to put on their equipment. The duke was sorely hassled by people wanting to consult with him, but he treated all of his vassals most honourably, providing them with loads of arms and a large number of horses. He then made his own preparations and asked for his sturdy hauberk. One of his men hoisted it up in his arms and brought it to William. But as he lifted it to put it on the duke, without meaning to, he turned it back to front. William first placed his head in it and had almost finished putting it on when he realised it was back to front, and quickly turned it back round the right way. This caused great consternation among those who witnessed the scene. (7510)

'I've seen many a man,' said the duke, 'who, if the same thing had happened to him, would not have taken up arms again that day and would not have gone onto the battlefield. But I personally have never believed in fate, and never will. I place my trust in God. God does as God wills in all things, and makes what he wants to happen happen. I have never had any time for fortune-tellers, and have never placed any confidence in people who claim to know the future. I commend myself entirely to our Lord God. That's what I'm doing in the case of my hauberk. Have no fear! The real meaning of my back-to-front hauberk being turned round the right way again is that things are liable to change and can always be reversed. You will see a duke, so named after his duchy, turned into a king. In my case, the duke that I used to be will become king. That's all you need remember!' (7530)

Making the sign of the cross, he seized the chainmail, lowered his head into it and slipped on the hauberk. He strapped on his helmet and girded his sword that a young lad had brought him. He called for his trusty steed. It had been sent to him from Spain by a king who much admired him. There was no better animal anywhere, and at the touch of a spur it would become fearless even in the thick of battle. Walter Giffard had gone to Compostela and brought it back with him. William lent forward, took the reins and planted his feet in the stirrups. He spurred the horse, and it sprang forward, turned and reared up. Seeing the duke bear arms so spectacularly, the viscount of Thouars exclaimed to those around him that he had never before seen anyone look so good under arms, nor who rode so expertly, nor who handled such splendid weapons, had such a handsome hauberk, brandished his lance so well, looked so comfortable in the saddle and so secure as he wheeled round. 'There's no knight like him in the whole world. A fine figure of a duke – and of a future king. Let him do battle, and we will see him triumph. Shame on anyone who would leave him in the lurch!' (7560)

The duke ordered a number of horses to be brought up, and they formed a train behind him. Each one had a sturdy sword hanging from the front of the saddle, and the squires leading the horses were carrying steel-tipped lances. The next to arm were the barons, the knights and then the infantry. They set off in three fully armed divisions, each one with several commanders and other

officers who would rather sacrifice their limbs or even lay down their lives than act in a cowardly fashion. (7574)

The duke ordered a servant to bring out his standard, the one that the pope had sent him. He brought and unfurled it, and William took and raised it up, before calling out for Raoul de Conches [Tosny]. 'Be my standard-bearer!' he said. 'Such is your right, and I wish to honour the fact. Your family are the standard-bearers of Normandy by hereditary right, and the holders of the post have all been admirable knights.' 'I thank you', replied Raoul, 'for recognising our entitlement, but take my word for it: I won't be carrying the standard today. I formally renounce this service I owe you. Instead I will serve you differently, in another sort of guise: I will accompany you into battle and will fight the English for as long as I stay alive. My hand alone, I can assure you, will be worth more than those of twenty other people.' (7598)

Turning his head, the duke called forward Walter Giffard. 'Take this standard,' he said, 'and carry it into battle!' 'My lord,' replied Walter, 'please, for heaven's sake, just look at my white hair. My strength is not what it used to be. I've grown weak and easily get short of breath. Holding the banner needs someone capable of sustained effort. Instead I will fight in the battle. None of your men can match me when it comes to wielding the sword, and I promise you that mine will be dripping with blood' (7614)

In a very stern voice William replied: 'My lords, by God in majesty, this looks to me like betrayal, as if you're letting me down in my hour of need.' 'No, my lord, that is not the case,' replied Giffard. You will never find us committing treason. My refusal is no crime. The fact is that I have a very large company of knights and fighting men from my own fief. I've never had a better opportunity of serving you than I have at present, and serve you I shall, if God so wills. I would even die for you, should I ever need to. I would give my life for yours.' (7628)

'My affection for you,' replied the duke, 'has always been strong, but now, upon my word, it is even stronger. If I survive this battle, you will reap the reward for this for ever more.' William then called forward a knight who was, so he had heard, held in very high esteem. He was called Turstin. He was the son of Rou le Blanc and lived in Le Bec-en-Cauchois in the Pays de Caux. The duke handed the standard over to him, for which Turstin expressed his gratitude by making a low bow. He was more than willing to take on the task, and he performed it well. Because of this, his family still to this day have exclusive rights to this post as part of their inheritance. It is right and proper that all Turstin's heirs should have unhindered possession of it. (7644)

Without dismounting, duke William called forward Roger de Montgomery. 'I am placing great trust in you,' he said. 'You are to go over there and attack the enemy from that direction. That excellent fighter Guillaume fitz Osbern, my steward, will ride with you and join in the attack. You will have the troops from Boulogne and Poix as well as all my mercenaries. Alan [Rufus] and brave Aimery will come from the other direction at the head of the Poitevins and the Bretons, and all the barons from Maine. I will attack right down the middle, into the thick of the fighting where things will be at their most violent. I will have with me the bulk of the army including my close allies, my family members, my noble vavassors, whom I expect to lend me the strongest support.' (7666)

Everyone was armed: all the barons, cavalry, infantry, and each of the foot soldiers carried a bow in addition to a sword. They had head-coverings and wore gaiters on their legs. Some had

sturdy leather jerkins which they tied at the waist, others padded tunics. They had strapped on their quivers and sword-sheaths. As for the knights, they had gleaming hauberks, glinting helmets and leggings of iron. They carried lances, and their shields were strung around their necks. These had heraldic devices so designed that the Normans would recognise each other, thus preventing them from striking or killing one another. (7684)

The foot soldiers with their bows advanced in close formation, and the knights came riding behind them, shielding the archers. On setting out, the infantry and the cavalry stayed in serried ranks, keeping their shape and moving forward at walking pace. They ensured that no one overtook anyone else, no one came too close or lagged too far behind. They were a menacing sight as they advanced together, staying in close formation and with archers on both sides poised to shoot in either direction. (7698)

Harold had mobilised his fighting men: earls, barons, vavassors from every castle and city, every port, town and borough. The peasants came flocking from the farmsteads, carrying whatever weapons they could put their hands on: cudgels, clubs, long pikes and iron forks. The English had taken up position in a field, and that was where Harold was, along with his close companions and those of his country's barons that he had summoned. They had responded immediately to the summons, and had come from London, Kent, Hertford, Essex, Surrey and Sussex, Bury St Edmunds and Suffolk, Norwich and Norfolk, Canterbury, Stamford and also Bedford. As soon as they had received word, they had come also from Northampton, Huntingdon, Warwick, Buckingham, Derby, Nottingham, Lindsay and Lincoln. By late evening you would have seen them still arriving from Salisbury and Dorset, Bath and Somerset, many from Gloucester and Worcester, Winchester, Hampshire and the county of Berkshire. Many came from other regions that we have not mentioned. We cannot supply each and every name, and we have no wish to list them all. Everyone who had heard the news about duke William and was capable of bearing arms came to defend the land against those intent on taking it. Very few people came from north of the Humber. Those who lived there had other concerns: the Danes had come raiding and had inflicted heavy losses on them, and Tostig had made matters worse. (7744)

Harold was well aware that the Normans were coming to attack him early in the morning. In the early hours he had taken up position in a field, and here he deployed all his English army. Early in the morning also he had ordered them to arm and to prepare for battle. He himself had the arms and equipment appropriate to a lord of his standing. The duke, he said, was on the point of attacking him with the intention of conquering England. He explained that it was his duty to confront him and defend the country. He ordered his fighting men, and recommended his barons, to stand together and stay together as they fought back. If ever they broke ranks and dispersed, they would have great difficulty in regrouping. (7762)

'The Normans', he said, 'are courageous fighters, both their infantry and their cavalry. Their knights fight bravely on horseback and are experienced in warfare. If they succeed in breaking into our lines, retrieving the situation will be out of the question. They have brought with them long lances and long swords, whereas you have well honed axes and tall sharpened pikes. In comparison with your cutting edges, their weapons are, as I see it, worth very little indeed. Slash out at everything you can! Don't spare anything that moves! Otherwise you'll be sorry.' (7776)

Harold had a large and fearless army, and many people came to join it from far and wide. But sheer numbers are worth very little to people fighting without God's support. It has been said time and time again that Harold came to grief because he had too few troops. Others – and I am one of them – maintain that, if you do no more than count individual combatants, then William's army would not have had any numerical advantage. But what duke William did have was a larger number of barons and better quality troops, plenty of high-calibre knights and skilled archers. (7790)

The English foot soldiers had sharp axes and pikes. They had also fashioned shields out of window-shutters and other bits of timber. These they used by holding them out in front of them, joined closely together as if they had been planks in a fence, and forming a solid barrier. In the absence of any gap, the Normans would have been unable to penetrate this had they attempted to break in and reach the English. Surrounding themselves with a shield-wall of planks was the way the English chose to defend themselves. If they had managed not to give way, they would not have been beaten that day, and no Norman could have succeeded in breaking through without meeting with an ignominious death from an axe, pike, club or similar weapon. The English wore small, short hauberks and helmets perched on top of their heads. (7810)

King Harold as lord of the English issued a proclamation giving orders that each man should remain resolute and turn to face the enemy head-on. No one should move from where they are stationed, and any Norman approaching should find them ready to engage. Whatever the Normans or anyone else might do, every Englishman had to successfully defend his post. Harold then invited the men of Kent to go and engage the Normans, since these were the people who reportedly claimed first strike. They were to strike first wherever the king might decide to do battle. The duty of the Londoners was to be the king's loyal bodyguards. They were to stay surrounding him and protect the standard. The task of each person on this particular assignment was to see to it that the standard was defended and protected. (7830)

When Harold had completed his preparations and finished issuing his orders, he came riding up into the middle of the troops and dismounted next to his standard. Both his brothers, Gyrth and Leowine, were there with him, and they were surrounded by a large number of barons. Harold stood next to his standard: it was an extremely costly one which glittered with gold and precious stones. After his victory, duke William had this very standard taken to the pope as proof and as a memento of his memorable and glorious conquest. (7844)

The English, in their zeal to begin fighting, were still maintaining their close formation. They had dug a ditch over to one side, running across the field. In the meantime the Normans appeared from behind a rise in the ground in the shape of a company of troops coming up the hill from the lower ground. King Harold, seeing them in the distance, called out to Gyrth and said: 'Brother mine, which way are you looking? Can you see the duke arriving? Our people have nothing to fear from the numbers I see there. There are too few of them to overrun our troops. We have a large number of combatants, knights as well as peasants – as many as forty thousand men under arms.' 'I must say,' replied Gyrth, 'that's a huge number! But I don't set much store by a bunch of peasants fighting the battle for you. A large army you may have, but I am still very much afraid of the Normans and am extremely apprehensive. All these troops from overseas are to be feared, and we must remain wary of them. They fight with cavalry and are well armed. With all those lances, all those shields,

hauberks, pointed helmets, all those swords and blades, bows and barbed arrows, they will crush our troops. Their arrows fly through the air faster than swifts.' (7878)

'Gyrth,' said Harold, 'don't despair! God can always help us, if that is his will. To judge from the troops I can see over there, there is no need for you to fear anything.' As they spoke, the Norman troops they were looking at were suddenly joined by an even larger company advancing in tight formation. They did not, however, join forces, but instead took up position in a different part of the field. Harold saw them and stared. He shouted out to Gyrth and pointed to them. 'Gyrth,' he said, 'our enemy is growing before our eyes. Their knights are coming thick and fast. There are vast numbers of them, and I am very much afraid and feel apprehensive about the battle. In fact I am absolutely terrified.' (7896)

Gyrth replied: 'You were wrong to set a date for battle. I very much regret that you came here at all, instead of staying behind in London or Winchester. But it's too late. That will never happen now.' 'My lord and brother,' replied Harold, 'there's no benefit in hindsight. We've now got to put up a defence if we can. I can see no alternative.' Gyrth said: 'If only you had stayed behind in London, you could have kept our army moving from place to place, and the duke would never have attacked you. He would have been unsure about our strength, and very cautious in his attitude to you. He would have gone back to Normandy or made peace, and you would have been able to keep your kingdom. But you attached no importance to what I said and had no belief in me. You insisted on setting a date for battle, and you opted for it being today. It was you also who wanted it to be in this particular place.' (7917)

'Gyrth,' replied Harold, 'what I did I did for the best. I settled on a Saturday because that's the day I was born. My mother used to tell me that Saturday would always be my lucky day.' 'Only a fool puts his trust in fate,' said Gyrth. 'No sensible person should give it any credence. No sensible person should believe in fortune. Everyone has a day when they are going to die. You say you were born on a Saturday, and now it's possible that Saturday will also be the day you die.' (7928)

At that moment a company of William's men appeared, large enough, it seemed, to fill the whole of the battlefield. The standard from Rome was raised, and the duke took up his position next to it. Grouped round him were the flower of the nobility, the very best, those splendid knights, those brave fighting men, those intrepid warriors, those noble barons, those skilful archers, and those fine foot soldiers who were there to surround and protect the duke. The servants and other menials who looked after small items of equipment and had no role to play in the battle, made their way over towards a nearby hill, while the priests and clergy went to occupy the high ground from where they would pray to God and have a good view of the battle being fought below. (7948)

Harold saw William arrive, saw the fields covered with armed men, saw the Normans split off into three divisions in order to launch their attack at three different points. He does not know which of the three he should fear the most, and is almost at a loss for words. 'My lord and brother,' he said, 'we are in a dreadful situation, and I very much fear that we are facing humiliation. The count of Flanders has betrayed me, and it was foolish of me to have trusted him. The letter and the messenger he sent assured me that William could not possibly have such a huge cavalry as this. That is why,' he explained, 'I put off getting a better supply of troops. I bitterly regret not having acted differently.' (7965)

Harold took hold of his brother Gyrth, and together they went to their positions next to the standard. Each of them was praying that God would protect him. All round them were grouped family relatives and the barons that were closest to Harold. He urged them all to do the best they could. It was not possible for anyone to do anything but fight. Each stood there in his hauberk, his sword at his side, his shield hanging from his neck. The men were holding great axes over their shoulders, poised to strike mighty blows. They were on foot, in close formation. They looked truly ferocious, but if they had foreseen what was going to happen to them, they would have been bewailing their lot and shedding tears at the harsh, painful and sorry fate that was about to befall them. They kept crying out in English 'Holy Rood' and 'Almighty God', which in French mean 'Sainte Croix' and 'Dieu Tout-Puissant'. (7988)

The three companies into which the Norman troops had been divided were designed to attack at three different points. The first and second arrived one after the other, and were followed by the third, the biggest of all, comprising the duke himself and all the many fighting men under his personal command. All these troops advanced fearlessly. No sooner had the two armies caught sight of each other than uproar broke out and a huge howl went up. You would have heard many a bugle blaring, trumpets and horns ringing out. You would have seen knights shifting in their saddles, shields raised, lances at the ready. You would have seen bows being stretched, arrows threaded, some men poised to attack, others to defend. The English stood firm and the Normans kept advancing. With the arrival of the Normans, you would have seen the English shaking and quaking, troops in a state of agitation, the whole army growing restive, some turning red in the face, others white. Their grips tighten on their weapons, shields are raised. The brave spring forward, the cowards quiver. (8012)

Taillefer, that gifted singer of tales, rode out in front of the duke at a brisk pace, singing the song of Charlemagne, Roland, Oliver and the other heroes who died at Rencesvals. As the army approached and came up close to the English, Taillefer said: 'May it please your lord, I have been in your service for a long time now, and have not so far received any recompense for it. Today I would ask you, please, to reward me for everything I have done for you. I earnestly request you to allow me to strike the first blow in this battle – and may I do so successfully!' The duke replied: 'I hereby grant your request.' At this Taillefer spurred his horse forward menacingly, leaving the rest of the army behind him. He struck out at one particular Englishman and killed him. As Taillefer's lance sliced right through his stomach, he was sent crashing to the ground where he lay stretched out at the singer's feet. He then drew his sword and struck down another Englishman before shouting 'Come on! Come on! What are you waiting for? Hit them! Hit them!' As he struck a second time, the English closed in around him. (8040)

The noise and shouting suddenly increased on both sides as people worked themselves up into a frenzy. The Normans have their minds set on attacking the enemy, while the English are putting up a stout defence. People, some smiting, others lunging, lose all fear as they grow increasingly reckless. Battle was well and truly joined, and on such a scale that it is still spoken of today. You would have heard bugles blaring, lances shattering, cudgels smashing, swords clanging as they clashed together. At one moment the English were driven back, the next they rallied. The foreigners attacked in waves, advancing then retreating. The Normans' war-cry 'So help us God!' rang out, and the English replied with 'Out with you! Out!' You would have seen fierce exchanges and violent clashes between the Norman and English serving men and foot-soldiers, lances launched

and swords swung. A cheer goes up from the English when a Norman falls, they hurl insults at one another and keep goading each other on, though neither side understands what the other is saying. Because they cannot understand their language, the Normans say that the English are barking like dogs. (8069)

Some men flag, while others get a new lease of life, the bold hit out, the cowards dodge and weave as you do when you are fencing. The Normans are still intent on attacking, the English continue to put up a stout defence. Hauberks are split open, shields splintered, violent blows are taken, and violent blows given in return. One side advances, the other retreats. Each side tries different ways of testing the mettle of their opponents. (8078)

A ditch had been dug over the field, and it now lay to the rear of the Normans. They had not noticed it, having gone round the side of it when they advanced. Under concerted pressure from the English, the Normans were repelled and driven back with such force that they ended up falling into the ditch, leaving the horses and the men with their legs kicking in the air. You would have seen many a man falling in, some toppling on top of others, stumbling and collapsing flat on their faces, unable to get to their feet again. The Normans had dragged down a large number of Englishmen with them, and these lost their lives. People who saw the corpses said that there were more Normans who died in the ditch than were killed in the actual battle over the whole day. (8096)

The young lads in charge of protecting the equipment witnessed the losses suffered by the French as they saw them tumbling into the ditch, unable to get out again. They panicked and were ready to abandon the equipment they were there to look after. They were on the point of running away to safety, but did not know which way to turn. At that precise moment Odo, that fine monk and bishop of Bayeux, came galloping up. 'Stay where you are!' he said to them, 'stay there! Keep calm and don't run off! Don't be afraid! Please God, we are going to win this battle, that's certain.' (8112)

This reassured them, and they stayed where they were. Odo came hurrying back to where the battle was raging. That day he really showed what a valuable person he was. Over his white surplice he had put on a short hauberk. He was a broad-chested man, and the sleeves of his hauberk floated free. He rode an all-white horse, and was an easily recognisable figure. In his hand he held a wooden staff. He directed the knights to where they were most needed, and to where they were to stay and wait. He continually urged them to attack, and to hit the enemy hard. (8128)

From mid morning, when the battle had started, until mid afternoon, it was not possible to say which side would emerge victorious and conquer the kingdom, as the advantage first went to one camp, then to the other. Both sides fought so resolutely and so tenaciously that it was impossible to foretell which would win. The Norman archers rained torrents of arrows down onto the English, but they took shelter under their shields and prevented them from reaching their target. However many arrows they shot, and however carefully they took aim, the Normans were unable to cause the English significant damage. (8144)

Then they took the decision to fire up into the air so that, when the arrows came down, they would fall directly on the heads of the English and wound them in the face. This is exactly what the archers did: by shooting high into the air, they made the arrows come down onto the Englishmen's heads, piercing their skulls or cutting into their faces. Many of them lost their eyes, with the result

that the men no longer dared keep their faces uncovered or their eyes open. Arrows came crashing down thicker and faster than sheets of rain lashed by the wind. They came in such thick clouds that the English called them gnats. It so happened that one of these arrows falling out of the sky struck Harold right in the eye and blinded him. Harold snapped it off as he snatched at it to pull it out. The pain in his head was so excruciating that he had to steady himself against his shield. The English were in the habit of telling the French – and they still do so to this day – that the arrow that struck Harold in the eye was a particularly well aimed one, and that the archer who put Harold's eye out really gave the Normans something to boast about. (8174)

The Normans saw that the English were putting up such a good defence that they could gain little advantage over them. They conferred among themselves and decided to prepare to move back from the English lines, thereby giving the impression that they were running away. This would invite the English to break ranks, set off in pursuit of them and scatter all over the surrounding countryside. If they managed to disperse them in this way, it would be easier to attack them. The English would lose much of their strength and would be easier to defeat. The Normans put their plan into action and, by pretending to run away, were able to attack the pursuing English army. (8192)

The Normans moved back progressively, and all the time the English continued to follow them. The English drew closer and closer to the Normans as they withdrew. The further the French retreated, the more the English were convinced that these troops from France were indeed fleeing and had no intention of returning to the battlefield. Not only were the English well and truly deceived by the feigned flight, but it was also to bring them huge misfortune. Had they stood firm and remained in position, they would have put up an excellent defence, and it would have been extremely difficult to defeat them. But they were foolish enough to break ranks, and foolishly set off in pursuit of the Normans. (8208)

What you would have seen, had you been there, was that the Normans' retreat was part of a very cunning plan. They retreated slowly enough to entice the English to come after them. As the Normans fled, so the English ran after them with outstretched lances and their axes raised aloft. As they scattered all over the field, they became bolder and bolder and started mocking and insulting the Normans. 'Cowards,' they said, 'you should never have come here and tried to take our lands. What fools you were to think you could come and take our land from us. You'll never reach Normandy now, you won't get there now that you really need to. There's no way for you to return home unless you can take off and fly there. You'll never see your sons and daughters again unless you manage to swallow all the water in the Channel!' (8228)

The Normans listened without reacting, not realising what the English were saying. They did not understand the language, and thought they were just yelping like dogs. Then they came to a halt and, turning the tables on the enemy, wheeled round to face them. You would have heard their barons loudly raising their war-cry 'So help us God!' once again. Recovering all their aggression, the Normans stood there staring the English in the face. Then you would then have seen them turn and hurl themselves at the English. (8240)

The two sides engage, some striking, others thrusting, some landing blows, others missing, some taking to their heels, others following in hot pursuit, some merely threatening, others dealing the death blow. The Normans take their stand against the English, prepared to strike with all their might. All over the place you would have seen people fleeing nimbly, others hotly pursuing. Fighting

is spread over a wide area, and the number of people involved is huge. In the thick of battle, combats are fierce. Both sides perform bravely as mighty blows are given and taken. (8252)

The Normans were still gaining ground when an Englishman came dashing up accompanied by a hundred armed men. He had several different weapons including a splendid Norse axe with a blade more than a foot long. In his own way he was a solidly armed fighter, tall, strong and with a bold bearing. Faster than a stag, he came leaping into the front line where the Normans were most closely packed together, and there he sent a large number of them tumbling to the ground. At the head of his men, the Englishman came up to one particular Norman who was fully armed and sitting on his charger. He aimed a blow at his helmet with his highly sharpened steel axe. However it was deflected to one side and glanced off the front of the Norman's saddle from where it sliced right through the horse's neck and, because of the weight of the blade, buried itself in the ground. Horse and rider were pitched forward onto the ground. I cannot say whether or not he struck him a second blow, but I do know that the Normans who saw this happen were absolutely terrified. (8280)

They had given up the fight and were fleeing the scene when Roger de Montgomery came galloping up with lowered lance. Not even the Englishman's long-handled axe ready raised at his shoulder was enough to deter him. Roger struck him and saw him topple over and land flat on his face. He then shouted out: 'Hit out at them, you Frenchmen! The field is ours, and the English are beaten!' You would then have seen the fighting resume with many a blow from lance and sword. You would have seen the English forced onto the defensive: horses were killed and shields were split. (8294)

A mercenary from France, a knight with a particularly noble bearing, was sitting on a warhorse of truly impressive appearance. He caught sight of two very pretentious Englishmen riding closely together. Being knights of high repute, they thought that they should stay close to one another for mutual protection. They carried long broad pikes resting on their shoulders, and were wreaking havoc among the Normans, killing men and horses alike. The sight of these pikes made the Frenchman very wary, as he was afraid of losing his horse that was the best of all those he possessed. He would have preferred to turn away had this not given the impression that he was acting in a cowardly fashion. But he immediately chased this idea from his head. Releasing the reins, he spurred his horse forward, and off it shot. He pulled the straps to raise his shield to ward off the two pikes. He then struck one of the Englishmen directly on the upper chest with the lance he was holding, running its iron tip through to his spine. As the Englishman fell to the ground, the Frenchman's lance also fell and broke into pieces, so he seized the club attached to his right arm. With this he hit the second Englishman on the top of his head, crushing his skull and causing it to shatter. (8328)

[Robert de Vieilles], lord of Beaumont, launched an attack against the front line of the English army. This earned him an extraordinary reputation, as is clear from his descendants, all of whom are people of real standing. There are many cases of people who can be assumed to have had outstanding ancestors who must have enjoyed the favour of their lord and been rewarded with estates such as Robert's. Roger de Vieilles was the ancestor of the Meulan family. William Malet entered the fray fearlessly and, with flashing sword, engaged the English in ferocious duels. However they knocked holes in his shield and killed his horse under him. They would have gone on to kill him also had not the lord of Montfort and lord Guillaume de Vieux-Pont arrived on the scene. With great

daring they rescued William with the help of the large force they had with them, despite their suffering many losses. They lost no time in getting Malet up onto a fresh horse. (8352)

Among those who excelled themselves were the people from the Bessin and the Cotentin barons. Nigel de Saint-Sauveur was particularly energetic in the way he attacked the English. He tried extremely hard to earn the affection and goodwill of his lord. He knocked many a man off his feet that day by means of his horse's armoured breast-piece, and when they got to their feet again, you would have seen him nobly giving them a hand up with his sword. The lord of Fougères, with a large contingent of fierce Breton troops, earned himself a very good reputation, as did Henri lord of Ferrières and sometime castellan of Tillières, who had enlisted a large number of men with the assistance of his barons. They launched a concerted attack against the English which caused the ground to quake and shake, and anyone who did not manage to slip away was either taken prisoner or killed. (8370)

In the opposing camp there was an Englishman who was inflicting considerable damage on the French by attacking them fiercely with his well honed axe. He had a helmet constructed entirely from wood such that a blow to his head did him no harm at all. He had tied the straps around his neck and attached it to his clothing. A knight from Normandy witnessed how violently and how doggedly he was mistreating the Normans, so he spurred his horse forward. It was an exceptionally intrepid horse which would have crossed fire and water for its master. The Norman knight struck the Englishman on his helmet, jamming it down over his eyes so that it covered his face. The Englishman attempted to pull it up again with his hand to clear his face, but the Norman, with a blow of his sword, sliced off his right hand, sending his axe crashing to the ground. (8395)

Another Norman, who very much wanted the axe for himself, sprang forward and picked it up with both hands. He held it, however, only for a split second before having to pay the price. As he was bending to retrieve it, an Englishman appeared carrying a sort of hatchet attached to the end of a long handle. He struck the Norman with it in the middle of his back, crushing his rib-cage and laying bare his lungs, heart and intestines. The Norman knight with the fine horse, who was unharmed, was making his way back when he encountered an Englishman. He drove his horse straight at him, and it knocked him down where he stood, and trampled all over him. (8414)

The following, all of them people of great merit, all took part in the battle: the good citizens of Rouen, the young men of Caen, Falaise, Argentan, Anisy and Mathieu, the lord of Aumale, sir Guillaume de Roumare, the lord of Lithaire, the lord of Touques and the lord of La Mare, the lord of Néhou, a knight from [Pirou], Robert lord of Beaufour, the lord of Aunou, the chamberlain of Tancarville, the lord of Etouteville, Eustache d'Abbeville, the lord of Manneville, Guillaume Crispin, the lord of Saint-Martin, lord Guillaume de Moulins, and the lord of Le Pin. (8436)

A man from Grandmesnil had a very close encounter on that day, for he lost control of his horse and almost fell when jumping over a bush. The bridle broke as he pulled on the reins, at which the horse leapt forward and bolted in the direction of the English lines. When the English saw it, they ran towards it with their axes raised, but the horse took fright, turned round and ran back to where it had come from. (8448)

Also present at the battle were Geffroi de Mayenne and Humphrey de Bohun, both elderly lords, Onfroi Carteret, Malger, a newly dubbed knight, and Guillaume de Warenne – he wore a

particularly impressive helmet – the elderly Hugues de Gourney together with his men from Bray. All these people brought with them a large number of troops responsible for killing and slaughtering many Englishmen. Another knight present was Engeluf de Laigle. Lance in hand and shield hanging from his neck, he attacked the English with great ferocity and was very energetic in the duke's service. His zeal in serving William came from the promise of land that he had been made. The viscount of Thouars was a model of bravery. Richard d'Avranches was there also, together with the lord of Les Biards, the lord of Soligny, the ducal butler of Aubigny, the lords of Victrié and Lassy, and those of [Vaudry] and Tracy. These were all members of the same company who engaged the English at close quarters, fearlessly crossing palisade and ditch. Many a man they toppled that day, many a fine horse they killed, many an Englishmen they wounded. (8478)

Hugues lord of Montfort, the lords of Epinay, Port, Courcy and Jort also killed many men that day. The lord of Reviere had brought along a large number of knights with him, and they fought in the front line, their warhorses trampling the English underfoot. Old Guillaume de Moyon was there with many companions. Raoul Taisson from the Cinglais and old Roger Marmion fought in an exemplary fashion, for which they were subsequently richly rewarded. Next to Nigel [de Saint-Sauver]'s company rode Raoul de Gael, a Breton leading the Breton contingent, who was serving in respect of the small amount of land he had, having forfeited the rest, so it was said. Avenal des Biards was another of those present, as was Hubert Paynel of Les Moustiers, Robert Bertram who was disabled but an extremely forceful fighter on horseback. He came with a large number of troops and was personally responsible for many deaths. Along with the lord of Breteuil, the archers from Vaudreuil, a very dauntless band of men, blinded a great many Englishmen with the steel-tipped arrows they had brought with them. You would have seen the lords of Soules, Orval, Saint-Jean, Bréhal, Brix and Le Hommet, all ready and willing to strike, raising their shields over their heads to ward off the axe blows. They would have preferred to die on the battlefield rather than fail their rightful lord. The lords of Saint-Saens, Cailly, Sémilly were there, as was Martel de Bacqueville, next to whom was the lord of Presles and the lords of Gouvix, Cintheaux, Le Molay, Monceaux, Pacy, the steward of Courcy and a knight from Lassy. With these were the lords of Gacé, Ouilly, Sassy, Vassy, Tournebu, Perrières, Guillaume de Colombières, old Gilbert d'Asnières, the lords of Cahagnes and Cornières, the elderly Hugues de Bolbec, lords Richard d'Orbec, Bonnebosq, Le Sap, Glos and the then lord of Troisgots. (8539)

He made two Englishmen look like utter fools. One of them he knocked to the ground with his lance, the second's brains he dashed out with his sword. Then he spurred his horse and turned to leave without a single Englishman touching him. The lord of Montfiquet was there with a very large company of men. He was the ancestor of Hugh Bigot, and had lands in Maltôt, Loges and Canon. He was chief forester and served the duke as his household steward, a post he held by hereditary right. He was a man of great nobility. Despite being short in height, he was very brave indeed and an altogether admirable person. With the many troops at his disposal, he nonetheless battled fiercely with the English. (8558)

On the battlefield you would have heard uproar and much shouting. There was also much clashing of lances. The English kept up their resistance from behind their defensive barriers, and had splintered and smashed the Normans' lances with their pikes and axes. In response to this, the Normans drew their swords and simply demolished the barriers. The English, much to their annoyance, withdrew to where their standard was and where all the wounded and those with

serious injuries had been brought. It was at that moment that the lord of La Haie spurred his horse forward and attacked them. He had no pity and spared no one. Everyone he struck ended up dead, and none of the people he wounded survived. (8574)

The lords of Vitry, Ivry, Montbray and Sai were there also, and the lord of Ferté laid low many an Englishman. These men inflicted grave damage on the enemy, though not without incurring serious losses themselves. Botevilain and Trussebut were not afraid to press forward and strike, and in the cut and thrust of battle that day they made themselves objects of hate. Guillaume Patric of La Lande went around urgently seeking out king Harold, saying that he was ready to accuse him of perjury if he could catch sight of him. He had previously seen him in La Lande where Harold had spent the night on his way to visiting the duke in Avranches as William headed towards Brittany. It was at Avranches that the duke had made Guillaume de La Lande a knight, conferring arms and equipment on him and his companions before taking them along with him to fight the Bretons. Patric rode to war at the duke's side, and was on very friendly terms with him. There were also a great many troops from the Pays de Caux who took part in the fighting against the English. (8602)

Jousting and fighting on horseback was not something the English were familiar with. Instead they fought with pikes and axes. Someone preparing to strike with an axe needs to hold it in both hands, and cannot therefore contemplate defending himself if he is to hit with all his strength. My opinion is that attack and self-defence are not actions that it is possible to carry out simultaneously. (8612)

The English made their stand at the top of the slope, obliging the Normans to attack them from the lower ground. This they did with great bravery on horseback as well as on foot. [Raoul] de Mortemer led the attack in the company of the lords of Auvilliers, Les Oubeaux and Saint-Clair, and they sent many Englishmen crashing to the ground. Robert fitz Erneis seized his shield, lowered his lance and spurred his horse towards the English standard. With his sharpened spear he struck an Englishman standing in his way, killing him on the spot. He then immediately drew his sword and rained down blow after blow on the Englishmen. He headed straight for the standard with the intention of cutting it down, only to find himself surrounded. The English killed him with their pikes, and after the battle he was found there dead and lifeless next to the English standard. (8634)

Count Robert de Mortain, the duke's half-brother on his mother's side, kept close to William and gave him great support. The lord of Harcourt, spurring on his fleet-footed charger, did all he possibly could to help his lord, while the lords of Crèvecoeur, Drucourt and Brucourt acted as escorts to the duke wherever he went. The lords of Combray, Aulnay, Fontanay, Rubercy and Le Molay spent their time searching out king Harold. They said to the English: 'Hey you, stop! Where's your lord and king, the one who broke his word to duke William? If we can find him, he's a dead man.' (8652)

There were a large number of other barons there that I have not yet named. No one person could list each individual or give an account of what they each did. Nor can I recount all the blows they dealt without writing an extremely lengthy story. I do not know all the forenames or patronyms of the Norman and Breton barons who were there in the duke's service. There were, in addition, many men from Maine and Anjou, Thouars and Poitou, Ponthieu and Boulogne. The army was huge, and the task facing it a formidable one. There were mercenaries from many different countries, some seeking monetary reward, others land. (8668)

Duke William plays his part in the fighting, dashing headlong into the fray, knocking many Englishmen to the ground where they lie beyond the reach of help. He is clearly winning the day. The duke's standard-bearer, that brave knight of renown, born in Le Bec-en-Cauchois near Fécamp and called Turstin fitz Rou le Blanc, rides at William's side everywhere he goes. When the duke turns, so does Turstin, and when he stops, so does the standard-bearer. The duke enters the fray where it is at its thickest, and wherever he can see the largest number of English. The Normans fell them, slaughter them, and kill them. A large number of Norman vavassors were there in the duke's service. They would willingly have themselves taken the blows aimed at their lord in order to protect him. (8688)

Alan [Rufus] count of Brittany was at the head of a large contingent of Bretons, a fierce and cruel people intent on taking whatever they can lay their hands on. Alan killed or maimed many Englishmen, and no one he struck stayed on his feet. This brave and valiant knight fought at the head of the Breton contingent and inflicted serious losses on the English. The lord of Saint-Valéry and the count of Eu dealt fine blows, and Roger de Montgomery and sir Aimery de Thouars fought with great courage, and the people they hit found themselves in truly dire straits. (8704)

Straining every muscle, duke William shatters his lance in his onslaught against the English. Together with the large force he has with him, he makes every effort to reach the standard and to find Harold, the prime cause of this entire war. The Normans stay very close to William in order to protect him. They rain blows down onto the enemy who put up stiff resistance. The English defend themselves strenuously, and give as good as they receive. (8716)

There is one particular Englishman who is exceptionally strong and is said to be an expert wrestler. With his axe he has been causing havoc among our Norman troops, killing large numbers of them and instilling fear in everyone around. The duke spurs his horse forward to attack him, but the Englishman sidesteps his charge and makes William miss. With an enormous leap the Englishman jumps to one side, his axe raised at head height ready to strike. When, in his anxiety to avoid the axe, the duke ducks, his adversary takes aim and, using all his strength, lands a mighty blow on the duke's head. William's helmet is heavily dented, but he himself is not injured significantly. He comes close to falling off his horse, however, but manages to steady himself by means of the stirrups and quickly regains his balance. As the duke moves in to take revenge and kill the scoundrel, the Englishman, fearing he is about to be hit, avoids William's blow by taking a step backwards. He then comes bounding back into the English lines, but this fails to give him any protection. Some Normans who have seen what has happened pursue and catch up with him. They run him through with their iron-tipped lances and send him crashing to the ground, dead. (8746)

In the thick of battle the men of Kent and Essex are putting up a magnificent fight. They are pushing the Normans back and forcing them to retreat, but without being able to cause them much damage. The duke sees his troops withdrawing and the English taking encouragement from it, so he seizes his shield by the straps, settles himself with great determination in the saddle, takes a lance from a squire and brandishes it in the air. The duke sees that he is standing next to his standard, and that he has more than a thousand armed around him, ensuring his protection and following his every move. (8762)

In close formation, as the situation required, they set off towards the English lines. Thanks to the strength of their fine war-horses and the skilful way in which the knights fought, they succeeded

in breaking right through the fray and in forcing a clear path through the throng of Englishmen. With the good duke at the head of his troops, they forced large numbers of the enemy to scatter, with just as many deciding to run away. You would have seen the English falling all over the place, lying with their feet in the air. Those not able to get to their feet again were trampled under the horses' hooves. You would have seen countless brains splattered around, intestines littering the ground. Many of the most powerful and prominent men fell in this attack. In some places the English huddled together in groups, and the Normans killed those among them that they could reach. They spared no effort in cutting men down and slaughtering horses. One of the English caught sight of the duke whom he had set his heart on killing. His intention had been to strike him with a lance he was carrying, but this proved impossible when the duke hit him first and cut him down. (8788)

The din of the battle is immense, as is the number of those slaughtered. Many a soul is separated from its body, and the living have to clamber over the dead. In both camps men are exhausted by the fighting. Whoever has strength enough to spring a surprise attack does so, and those too weak even to hit simply lunge. Those with staying power fight among themselves; some die, some survive. The brave press on, the cowards cower. Anyone falling over in the struggle is in deep trouble, trembling in fear as he waits to get to his feet. Many fall never to get up again. The sheer weight of people tears them limb from limb. (8802)

The Norman advance has brought them within striking distance of the English standard. Harold himself is standing next to it and doing his best to defend himself, but he is sorely hampered by his eye which has been gouged out. As he labours under the great pain he is feeling from the wound to his eye, one of the enemy emerges from the thick of battle and strikes him a blow on his helmet. This knocks him to the ground, and as he tries to get to his feet again, a knight rides up and fells him for a second time with a wound to the thigh that goes right through the flesh to the bone. Gyrth sees that the English defence is crumbling and that their situation is irretrievable. His own family is facing defeat, and he himself has no hope of saving his life. His impulse is to run away, but this is not possible as the crowd around him is growing denser all the time. At that moment duke William comes riding up to where Gyrth is standing and strikes him a violent blow. I cannot say whether or not this was the blow that killed him, but it was reported that Gyrth remained lying there for a long time. The standard is cut down, the golden pennon captured, and king Harold and the finest of his companions killed. The press around Harold had been so dense that it is not possible for me to say who actually killed him. (8834)

Great was the grief that the English felt at the loss of king Harold, and duke William's victory over him and the cutting down of their standard only added to their distress. They continued, however, to put up a defence and kept fighting for a long time until at long last dusk began to fall. It was then that people became aware of the fact that their standard was no longer flying, and that news began to spread that Harold was well and truly dead. They realised that their situation was hopeless, so they stopped fighting, and those who were still able to flee did so. As to the person who struck down king Harold, and the weapon used to wound him, I am not able to say, so say nothing. I was not present, did not see what happened, and have heard no authoritative statement about these matters. Harold was found dead among all the other corpses. All the efforts he had made could not save him from death. (8858)

Fearing that the Normans were hot on their heels, the English who had escaped from the battlefield headed straight for London. A huge crowd of people attempted to cross over the deep river at London Bridge. The bridge gave way beneath their weight, and many of them were pitched into the water. (8866)

Duke William himself had fought a fine battle. He made many a charge into the throng, dealt and received many a blow, and killed many a man by his own hand. He had two horses killed from under him, and was obliged to mount a third to avoid him ending up on the ground and his blood being shed. Irrespective of how well particular individuals performed, and whether or not they survived or died, the fact is that William emerged victorious. Many Englishmen fled the fighting and many died in every part of the battlefield. William gave thanks to God for his victory. In a gesture of military pride, duke William ordered his own banner to be taken to the place where the Englishmen's standard had been and to have it raised there. This symbolised both his victory and the downfall of the English standard. He had his pavilion erected among the dead bodies. He gave orders for his camp to be set up there and for his food to be brought and his evening meal prepared. (8890)

Then out of nowhere Walter Giffard rode up at great speed. 'My lord,' he said, 'whatever are you doing? It is not appropriate for you to be in a place like this surrounded by dead bodies. There is many an Englishman who, with blood smeared all over him, whether or not he has actually been wounded, is deliberately lurking there among the dead, waiting for night to fall before climbing to his feet again and making his escape. Before such people do so, they intend to take their revenge and make us pay a heavy price. They consider us Normans to have wronged them, and as long as they manage to kill some of us, they will not care whether they die as a result or who it is that kills them. You should have set up your camp somewhere else, and placed it under heavy guard. Your guard this night should consist of one or two thousand of your most trustworthy troops. We have no idea of how many of the enemy are lying in wait for us. We have had a day of fierce fighting, but the outcome is a very pleasing one for me, and it makes me extremely happy.' 'Giffard,' the duke replied, 'thanks be to God, we have been very successful thus far, and will be in the future also if the Lord so permits and if it is God's will. Let us place ourselves under God's protection in everything we do!' (8920)

At this, Giffard rode off, and William began to remove his armour. You would then have seen many a baron and knight, young nobleman and squire crowd in to watch William disarming: off comes the shield strap from around his neck, the helmet is removed from his head, the hauberk pulled off over his back. Those present witnessed the huge dents on his shield and his much battered helmet. Everyone was amazed at what they saw, and said: 'No one was ever braver in galloping straight at the enemy, in striking the blows he struck, in enduring the exhaustion that comes from armed combat. Since Roland and Oliver there has been no knight in the whole world to match him.' They held him in the highest esteem and lavished great praise on him. Everything they saw caused them to rejoice, and the loss of their friends that had fallen in the battle was their only source of grief. (8940)

A fine figure of a man, a man of stature, William stood there surrounded by his men. He gave thanks to the King of Glory for the victory he had been granted. He also thanked the knights while never ceasing to mourn all those who had died. He spent the night out in the open, and ate

and drank among the dead. The following day was Sunday. Those who had spent the night outside and those who had – much to their discomfort – stayed on guard in the countryside around – all rose at first light and went out to see to the burial of those of their friends whose bodies they could find. Noble wives went in search of their husbands, others look for their fathers, yet others for their sons or their brothers. They had them taken back to the towns they came from and buried them there in the churches. Local clerics and priests, at the request of the friends of the dead, took charge of those bodies that had been found, and constructed vaults to house their remains. King Harold was taken to Waltham where he was buried. I am not able to say who was responsible for taking him there, and do not know who it was who actually buried him. Many men made their escape in the course of the night, leaving many others dead on the battlefield. (8972)

The bishops consulted among themselves, then met together in London. They were joined there by the barons, and a grand formal council was called. With general agreement and the full approval of the clergy, and with the barons recognising that there was no other candidate to elect, they had the duke crowned king and they swore fealty to him. William accepted their fealty and the homage they did him, and he restored to them the lands that they had inherited. It was in the year one thousand and sixty-six since the birth of Christ – if the learned clerics have calculated correctly – that William assumed the crown, and he was to reign, as king and duke, for twenty-one and a half years thereafter. (8990)

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