THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 66:
BROKEN PROMISES AND THE EVE OF CONQUEST

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 66: Broken Promises and the Eve of Conquest. In this episode, we're going to look at the life and times of William of Normandy – the man who conquered England. William's influence on the history of England is well-known and well-documented, but what often gets overlooked is his influence on the English language. For more than five centuries, the English language had been a heavily inflected Germanic language with a Germanic vocabulary. But William's conquest of England wiped away much of that old language. A new form of English would slowly emerge from the ashes. That means that William of Normandy is one of the most important figures in the overall history of English. And this is his story.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. And I am on twitter @englishhistpod.

So let's turn to this episode, and the life and times of William of Normandy, and let's begin where we left off last time in the year 1035. As I noted last time, that was the year in which William's father died while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His father was Robert, Duke of Normandy. And before leaving on that pilgrimage, Robert had designated his young illegitimate son William as his heir and successor. William was only about 7 or 8 years old at the time. And with such a young heir, it wasn't entirely clear if the nobles were on board. So Robert tried to bolster support for his son before he left. He had the Norman nobles pledge an oath of loyalty to William. And as we've seen before, this was very important in the feudal age. This established a feudal bond between William and the Norman nobles.

But when Robert died, reality sat in. The nobles were faced with the prospect of a young boy as their new leader. The fact is that William was too young to rule, so some of the nobles began to rebel, and infighting soon broke out between them. Unrest quickly spread throughout Normandy as William's rule was challenged. Some of the rebels sought to carve out their own independent province. They even attacked the regents who were looking after William. His tutor and his guardian were both killed.

One fascinating story which illustrates how dangerous the situation was for William is the story of his steward – named Osbern. Osbern was tasked with protecting young William. And to that end, he slept in the same room as William in case anyone tried to assassinated him. Well, one night assassins did break in, and Osbern was killed in bed. But William managed to hide and survive the night. So it was a bleak and dangerous time for the young duke.

The Anglo-Saxons had a word for that kind of peril. It was the Old English word ***pliht***. It meant 'danger,' and it was specifically the kind of danger that occurred when you exposed something to a risky or perilous situation. The Franks also had that same Germanic root word, and that word passed from the Franks into early French. Within French, that root word referred to the risk of loss that happened when you put property up as collateral or when you guaranteed a debt for someone. If there was a default, you risked losing your property. The resulting French word was

the word ***pledge***. Over time, the focus of the word shifted from the risk of loss associated with the transaction to the actual transaction itself. So it came to refer to the actual promise that the person made when they pledged property or guaranteed some action. And that produced the modern sense of the word ***pledge*** as a promise or guarantee.

Now that little bit of etymology is important because it shows that the original meaning of the word ***pledge*** meant 'risk of loss or danger.' And it is cognate with the Old English word ***pliht*** which also meant 'danger.' But from 'danger,' it came to mean a 'promise.' So there is a linguistic connection between ***pledge*** and 'danger.' And that connection is relevant to our story, because the danger which young William faced was ultimately the result of broken pledges.

The rebellious barons had pledged to support William if anything happened to his father. They had sworn oaths of loyalty. That made them vassals of young William. But now they were breaking their 'pledge' to support him. And that created much ***pliht*** or danger for William.

And this established a theme which would continue throughout William's life. Time and again, people broke their promises or pledges to him. And it probably shaped how he viewed the world around him.

Now the thing about danger is that it can work both ways. As a young, weak Duke, William faced a lot of danger from rebelling nobles. But the tables could also be turned. If William was able to survive and became a strong, established Duke, then those rebelling nobles would be the ones in danger. So danger is a product of power. When two sides are in conflict, the more powerful one becomes, the more dangerous it is for the other party. And I make that point, because that is ultimately how we got the word ***danger***.

Danger is derived from the same root which gave us the French word ***domain***. A wealthy lord or landowner was the master of his ***domain***, and he was called the ***dominus*** in Latin. When he exercised his authority over his domain, he was said to ***dominate*** it. So the word ***dominate*** comes from the same root. That power was called the ****dominarium***, and it became ***dangier*** in early French. That power – or ***dangier*** – meant that the people underneath the lord were subject to his authority and control. That often put them at risk. And over time, the power of the lord – the ***dangier*** – came to refer to the risk or peril experienced by the people under him. And ***dangier*** became ***danger*** in English.

By the way, I discuss the history of the word ***danger*** in much more detail in the most recent episode of the History of England Podcast. So check that out if you want a more complete history of the word.

Now I wanted to make the linguistic connection between ***danger*** and 'power' because it is relevant to the early history of William of Normandy. Early on, both William's reign and William's life were in peril. But as he solidified his support and become more powerful. That meant he became more dangerous.

Throughout his childhood, the Norman nobles continued to rebel, but William remained alive – often sheltered and protected by his guardians. While some nobles rebelled, others continued to recognize their feudal obligations to William. And there was another feudal obligation that was very important to William's survival. That was the feudal obligation between William and the King of France – Henri or 'Henry' – specifically Henry I. Remember that the Norman Duke was technically a vassal of the French king. So that meant that the duke and the king promised to support and defend each other. And to the extent that he could, King Henry honored his feudal obligation to William. Henry's support helped William to survive some of these early threats. Yet William continued to remained vulnerable.

All of this reached a head in the year 1046. A little more than a decade had passed since William became the Duke of Normandy. He was now in his late teens. He had managed to survive, but his position was still precarious. In that year, a noble named Guy of Burgundy was able to unify many of the Norman nobles who were opposed to William. This unified opposition was the greatest threat to William's reign so far. According to one story, they arranged an ambush against William's forces, but William was once again able to escape by riding through the darkness all night. He ultimately appealed to the French king Henry. He once again asked Henry to fulfill his feudal obligation to help his reclaim his duchy. Henry relented and the following year, William gathered some forces that were still loyal to him, and he met up with Henry's forces. The combined armies met the rebels at Val-es-Dunes in northwestern France. This turned out to be a decisive battle for the future of Normandy. William and Henry defeated the rebels and secured a decisive victory. Most of the rebels were deprived of their lands and sent into exile. That allowed William to restore order and consolidate his power. The victory permanently secured his position as Duke of Normandy.

Now this victory is important to our story for two reasons. First, it meant that William wasn't going anywhere. He was now firmly in control of Normandy. But is also leads our story back across the channel to England to Edward the Confessor. As we'll see, Edward was getting older and didn't have any children. And as William's position in Normandy became more stable, Edward increasingly looked to him as a possible successor to the English throne.

Remember that Edward grew up in Normandy in the Norman court. So he actually knew William as a child. There are even surviving charters from Normandy which were witnessed by both Edward and a young William. So Edward had a personal connection to his Norman cousin.

By the year 1051, Edward had been King of England for about nine years, and he was about 47 years old. Meanwhile, William was only about 23 years old. So he was considerably younger, and as Edward looked around for an heir, William appeared to be a good option.

Now I say William was a 'good' option, but that largely depends on your perspective. For many native Anglo-Saxons, the prospect of a Norman king wasn't a particularly good option. They had had Anglo-Saxon kings and Danish kings, but never a French king. But that wasn't a problem for Edward. Edward not only had a fondness for all things Norman, he actually seemed to prefer Norman culture over Anglo-Saxon culture.

Edward had spent much of his early life in Normandy. He spoke Norman French. He admired French culture. And when he arrived back in England as an adult, he came with a large group of Norman supporters. From the time he became king, Edward injected Norman influences into the English government. He appointed Normans to many high offices. He even appointed a Norman, Robert of Jumieges, as Archbishop of Canterbury. Normans were also appointed out in the country as shire reeves or 'sheriffs.' And in the royal court, Norman scribes were used to write official documents. And most of them could not even speak English.

As you might expect, resentment began to grow among the native Anglo-Saxons. Many Englishmen started to complain. They thought the only people who got their petitions heard in Edward's court were those who spoke Norman French. So the linguistic differences amplified the cultural differences between the two groups.

Now there isn't much evidence that the Norman dialect was influencing English during this period. The Normans were still relatively few in number, and it appears that they didn't really mix with the native Anglo-Saxons.

But as we saw last time, their Norman French dialect did ultimately influence English. And most of that influence came in after 1066 when more and more Normans arrived and the Normans took control of the country. So before we move on, I want to spend a little more time on that Norman French dialect.

Last time, I looked at how the Norman pronunciation of certain words was different from the standard French pronunciation in other parts of northern France. And some of those Norman pronunciations survived into Modern English.

Well in some cases, the Normans pronounced words just like the rest of northern French. But then the pronunciation started to change in places like Paris. So the Norman dialect actually held onto the original sound which was lost in standard French. And once again, these Norman French features passed into English. And the result is that French words which passed into English early on are often different from the versions which are found in later French. But in these cases, English actually captures the original form of the words.

One example of this is an 'S' sound which was once very common in many French words but was lost in the standard French dialect spoken around Paris. So if we look closely, we can find that English has sometimes preserved the original version with the 'S' sound, but it also has a similar word borrowed at a later date without the 'S' sound.

We can see distinction in words like ***hotel*** and ***hostel*** ('h-o-s-t-e-l'). ***Hostel*** reflects the original pronunciation of the Normans, as well as much of northern France at one time. Of course, ***hostel*** means an inn or lodgings. But that 'S' was lost in standard French, and English later borrowed the same word again as ***hotel*** without the 'S' sound.

We can also see this distinction in words like ***corpse*** ('c-o-r-p-s-e') and ***corps*** ('c-o-r-p-s'). Both words are still spelled with an S, but the pronunciation of the S was lost in ***corps***. Now the root of both words is the Latin word ***corpus***, which meant 'body.' And it later produced a French word meaning the same thing, but typically spelled ('c-o-r-s'). There was no letter P in the word originally. The word 'c-o-r-s' was pronounced /kors/, but gradually became /kor/ in the French dialect spoken around Paris as the 'S' sound was dropped in a lot of words. The Normans retained the pronunciation /kors/ with the 'S' sound and brought that version to England. But later on, English borrowed the word again from standard French. And this second time in came in as /kor/ without the 'S' sound. So English ended up with both versions – /kors/ and /kor/ – but neither word was spelled with the letter P.

In later Middle English, there was a desire to re-capture the original spelling of a lot of words which had derived from Latin. And since 'corpus' had a 'P' in it, the letter 'P' started to be added to the spelling of those words. But by this point, the words had become distinct in English. The standard French version ***cors*** (/kor/) got a new letter P, and it became 'c-o-r-p-s.' But both the P and the S remained silent, and they remain silent to this day just as in standard French. Of course, today this version of the word refers to a group of bodies like the 'marine corps' or 'army corps' or 'press corps.'

The other version of the word was ***cors*** (/kors/) which retained that original 'S' sound. But again, it also got a letter P in Middle English. And over time, people started to pronounce the P in this version of the word, even though it had been silent up to this point. The result was the word ***corpse*** ('c-o-r-p-s-e') meaning 'a dead body.' But again, ***corpse*** and ***corps*** both come from the word ***corpus***. One verison retains the 'S' sound and one has lost it. And we can probably thank the Normans for that modern distinction.

And in fact, that Norman influence still lingers in a lot of English words. English has ***feast*** where French has ***fête***. English has ***forest*** where French has ***forêt***. English has ***beast*** where French has ***bête***. English has ***August*** where French has ***Août***.

A similar development occurred with the suffixes ***-ary*** and ***-ory***. These were also standard French suffixes early on. And the Normans pronounced them the same way as everyone else. But within standard French, the suffix ***-ary*** became ***-aire***. So they stopped pronouncing the 'ree' part.

So we can still see this distinction in word like English ***contrary*** and French ***contraire*** as in 'au contraire.' We can also see it in ***solitary*** and ***solitaire***. ***Solitary*** is the older English version borrowed from the Normans, and ***solitaire*** was a later borrowing from standard French. So the '-ary' is a holdover from the Normans.

Now I should note here that many dialects in the UK have shortened or slurred this suffix over the past couple of centuries from '-ary' to just '-ree.' So ***secretary*** became 'secretree.' And this type of pronunciation can be found in other parts of the English-speaking word which as well. But American English has held onto that original '-ary.' So today, we have American English 'secre-tary,' British English 'secre-tree' and French ***secrétaire***.

Sometimes, the French '-aire' suffix has replaced and supplanted an original '-ary' suffix. Middle English has the word ***questionary***, which meant a list of questions. But in the twentieth century, the modern French word ***questionnaire*** replaced it. So the newer French ending kicked out the original Anglo-Norman ending. But for the most part, English prefers the Anglo-Norman '-ary' over the French '-aire.'

A similar development happened with the suffix '-ory.' That was a common French suffix early on, and the Normans brought it to England. And pretty much all English dialects have retained it. But it became '-oire' in the standard French dialect around Paris. So English has ***memory*** where later French gave us ***memoire***.

We can also hear that same distinction between English ***armory*** and the later French borrowing ***armoire***. And we also have English ***repertory*** and French ***répertoire***.

So again, the suffixes '-ary' and '-ory' still exist in Modern English because those were the suffixes used by the original Normans who settled in England. And some of those Normans were in place before 1066 during the reign of Edward the Confessor. So let's return to our historical narrative.

By the early 1050s, those French-speaking Normans in Edward's court were creating that divide which I mentioned earlier. It wasn't just a linguistic divide, but the language differences contributed to the problem. The Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to Danish nobles who spoke Old Norse, but Old Norse was relatively close to Old English, so close that the two groups could probably communicate with each other. And the Anglo-Saxons were well accustomed to Danish influences by this point.

They had had Danish kings like Swein Forkbeard, Canute and Harhtacanute. And the Danes had become largely integrated with the Anglo-Saxons in the former Danelaw region. But the French culture and the French language were very different, and therefore must have seemed very foreign. So it seems that the Anglo-Saxons accepted Danish influences in a way that they did not accept French influences.

We actually have evidence on the ground from this same time period which shows how much the Danes had integrated into English culture. In the town of Kirkdale in North Yorkshire there is a church called Saint Gregory's church which bears an inscription which has been dated to the 1050s. The church has a sundial embedded in the wall above the main door of the church, and the plate with the sundial also contains an inscription. And that inscription really shows how much the Danes had adopted the English language and culture.

The inscription is a dedication, and it states that the church or 'minster' was rebuilt at the direction of a man named 'Orm Gamalsson.' So that name literally means 'Orm who was the son of Gamal.' As we've seen before, this was a typical construction in Scandinavian names, and both Orm and Gamal are Norse names – not Anglo-Saxon names. So a local Danish man had directed that this church be rebuilt. Two other personal names also appear in that inscription – Hawarth and Brand. Both of those names are also Scandinavian names. Some of the work which

was done to church during that reconstruction still survives, and that reconstruction was done in a manner which combines Anglo-Saxon and Danish construction styles. From all of that evidence, modern scholars have concluded that most, if not all, of the congregation were Danes or people of Danish descent. But the inscription was written in Old English, which suggests that the people were speaking English, or they were at least bilingual.

Here is the beginning of the inscription:

Orm Gamalson bought Saint Gregory's minster
Orm Gamal suna bohte Sanctus Gregorius Minster

when it was all broken and fallen
ðonne hit wæs æl tobrocan and tofalan

and he had it made anew from the ground for Christ and St. Gregory
and he hit let macan newan from grunde Christe and Sanctus Gregorius

in Edward's days – the king – and Tostig's days – the earl.
in Eadward dagum cyning and in Tosti dagum eorl

The inscription on the sundial itself reads:

This is the day's sun marker
þis is dages sol merca.

Now I should note that even though the inscription is in Old English, it shows a breakdown of inflectional endings, which as we've seen before was common in the areas where Old English met Old Norse. Those endings were typically the biggest difference between the two languages. And it also shows the occasional use of a Norse word rather than an English word. So the word ***sundial*** is rendered as 'sol merca' – the 'sun marker.' This compound word isn't found anywhere else in Old English, but Old Norse did have that construction.

So this inscription is showing us how much the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons had become integrated by the middle 1050s. Churches, building styles, kings, rulers, language – it was common for English and Danish elements to mix together. But again, we don't see that same kind of mixing when it comes to the Norman French influences. And in fact, there was actually starting to be backlash against those some of those French influences which did exist, especially in Edward's court. And that resentment was probably at it's greatest among the Godwin family who were likely eyeing the English throne for themselves.

As we saw in earlier episodes, the most powerful earl in England was Godwin. He was the Earl of Wessex. His sons also held prominent positions. His son Swein had been given a small earldom in the southwest of England, and his son Harold had been designated as the Earl of East Anglia. Godwin had also married his daughter to the king, Edward the Confessor. So the Godwin

family was extremely powerful. And that power was resented by many of the Normans in Edward's court.

The royal court was located at Wincester, and Wincester was part of Wessex. So Godwin's Anglo-Saxon supporters and Edward's Norman supporters were living side-by-side in and around the royal court.

In one part of the royal court, the Godwins and their supporters spoke English, they had beards, and they wore English clothing. In the other part of the court, Edward's Norman supporters spoke French, they were clean-shaven, and they wore Norman French clothing. The Normans loved formality and ceremony. The Anglo-Saxons didn't. The Normans resented the way Godwin and his supporters treated Edward. They felt that the Godwins were crude and disrespectful. Meanwhile, the Godwins detested the foreigners in the court and in other positions of power. The two opposing groups became entrenched, and they started to resent each other.

All of this reached a head in the year 1051. In that year, Edward's brother-in-law – Count Eustace of Boulogne – came to the court from France. And it was a visit that nearly led to civil war in England. And one of the underlying causes of the conflict was the growing resentment of the French influences in England.

The events of this year were a major factor in the lead-up to the Norman Conquest, so I want to analyze what happened. And to do that, I want to return to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the original Old English of the Chronicle.

The story begins with the arrival of Eustace from France and his meeting with Edward. We don't know what the specific purpose of the visit was.

One version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records these events. This is from the version maintained at Peterborough – also known as the E Manuscript. According to this verison of the Chronicle:

Eustace came from beyond the sea
"com þa Eustatius fram geondan sæ"

And went to the king.
"7 gewende to ðam cynge."

And spoke with him of what he would.
"7 spæc wið hine þæt þæt he þa wolde."

And then turned homeward.
"7 gewende þa hamweard."

According to the Chronicle, Eustace and his men then traveled down to Canterbury and then proceeded to Dover on the coast. They planned to spend the night there before sailing home, but something went wrong in Dover. Apparently, Eustance's men were looking for accommodations for the night. According to the Chronicle, they decided to find lodging wherever it pleased them. The passage reads:

When they came, they would inn themselves where they liked.
Þa hi þider comon. þa woldon hi innian hi þær heom sylfan gelicode.

Note that the passage used the word ***innian*** as a verb meaning 'to find lodging.' It literally meant 'to find somewhere to stay inside.' And it is basically the verb form of the word '***inn***' ('i-n-n') meaning a dwelling or lodging. So that word ***inn*** for a type of hotel goes back to Old English. And it also had a verb form as well.

Now apparently, the people of Dover didn't really want to open their homes to the traveling Frenchmen. And a fight soon broke out between the Frenchmen and the townspeople.

The Chronicle says that one of the residents refused to let the Frenchmen enter his home. It says that the French soldier retaliated and 'wounded the house dweller' – "gewundode þone husbundon." Notice that the chronicle refers to the resident with the term ***husbundon*** – the original form of the word ***husband***, but here it was used in its original sense as a 'house dweller' or home owner.

The Chronicle says that the man or ***husbundon*** fought back and killed the Frenchman. It reads:

The husband – or house-dweller – slew the other man.
"se husbunda ofsloh þone oðerne"

With the death of one of their comrades, Eustace's men retaliated and killed the home owner. But they weren't done. They went throughout the town and killed more people. The Chronicle says that they went 'within and without' – "wiðinnan ge wiðutan" – and killed twenty men.

But then the townspeople fought back. In turn, they killed nineteen of the Frenchmen. The Chronicle says:

The men of the burg slew nineteen men of the other half.
"þa burhmen ofslogon nigon-tene menn on oðre healfe"

After the melée, Eustace and his men fled back to Edward's court where they complained about their treatment in Dover. Eustace told the king that the townspeople were at fault, and his men were innocent. According to the Chronicle:

Eustace had made it known to the king
"Eustatius hæfde gecydd þam cynge"

that it should be more the guilt of the men of the burh than his
“þet hit sceolde beon mare gylt þære burhwaru þonne his.”

Then the Chronicle entry concludes:

But it was not so.
“Ac hit næs na swa.”

So the Chronicle implies that the Frenchmen were just as much at fault, if not more so.

Since Edward only got one side of the story, he was outraged by what had happened, and he felt embarrassed that his guest had been treated so poorly. Dover was part of Wessex. So Edward ordered Godwin the Earl of Wessex to harry or plunder the town. That was a common punishment at the time.

But by this point, Godwin was apparently getting a different version of the story. He was being told that Eustance’s men had started the fight down in Dover. And we have to keep in mind Godwin’s increasing resentment of the French influence in the royal court.

And now, Godwin was being order to go and plunder his follow Anglo-Saxons because a French noble and his armed forces had forced their way into town and stated a mini-riot. All of this was too much for Godwin, so he flat out refused Edward’s order to attack the town.

This refusal was tantamount to rebellion, and it looked like the country was about to erupt into a actual full-scale rebellion. Godwin assembled an army and demanded that Edward surrender Eustace and to him. But by this point, the earls from northern England had arrived. Those northern earls resented Godwin’s power, and they resented his defiance of the king’s orders.

With the support of the northern earls, Edward was actually able to match Godwin’s army. It was a classic stand-off. The Chronicle tells us that Edward called for a meeting of the Witan to resolve the matter. The Chronicle says,

Then the king sent after all his witan
“Ða sende se cyng æfter eallon his witan.”

The nobles and church officials who made up the Witan arrived, and they promptly sided with Edward. At this point, Godwin saw the writing on the wall and consented to defeat. Edward, the Witan and the northern earls all aligned themselves against Godwin and his sons. The Godwins were all given five days to leave the country. The Chronicle says:

Earl Harold went to west to Ireland.
“Harold eorl gewende west to Yrlande”

As far as the other Godwins, they 'went beyond the sea' – "gewendon heom begeondan sæ."

Specifically, they went to Flanders for the winter.

So things were looking up for Edward the Confessor. He had stood up to the Godwins and forced them out of England. And he had the support of the Witan and the northern earls. Meanwhile, things were also looking up for his young cousin William across the channel. As we saw earlier, William had also stood up to the rebels in Normandy, and he had finally secured his position as Duke. So the two cousins dominated their respective sides of the English Channel. And it was at this point that Edward apparently decided that his young cousin in Normandy would make a worthy successor to the English throne. According to some sources, Edward reached out to William and promised William the throne, but this is the subject of much dispute. So let's consider the sources.

Let me begin by noting that this is really where the Norman version of events starts to diverge from the Anglo-Saxon version. And as we consider the Norman sources, we have to keep in mind that most of these sources were written down after 1066. That means that there may have been some revisionist history at work to justify the conquest which had just occurred. So we have to treat the sources with some scepticism.

At any rate, two different Norman historians, William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers, both wrote about a supposed promise from Edward to William. They reported that Edward the Confessor sent an emissary to William around this time in the year 1051 or 1052. This would have been shortly after the Godwins had been forced out of England. The emissary was the Archbishop of Canterbury – the Norman who Edward who had been appointed to that position about a year before. For the Normans, this trip was very important, because it justified William's claim to the English throne. But again, even though these two Norman historians wrote about the promise, most of the Anglo-Saxon sources make no mention of these events at all.

However, there is one short entry in one version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which might provide some evidence to support the Norman claims.

This particular copy of the Chronicle maintained at Worcester says that William made a trip to England in the year 1052. So again, it doesn't mention an emissary being sent to Normandy. It says the opposite. It says William came to England. But either way, it implies some type of meeting or arrangement between the two leaders.

This particular entry reads:

Then soon came Earl William from beyond the sea with a great retinue of Frenchmen,
"Ða sone com Willelm eorl fram geondan sæ mid mycclum werode Frencisra manna"

Note that the entry describes William as 'earl' – not duke. The entry then says:

the King received him with as many companions as were convenient to him, and let him go again.
"se cyning hine underfeng, 7 swa feola his geferan swa him to onhagode 7 let hine eft ongean"

And that's it. It doesn't provide any other details and it doesn't specifically say what the visit was for. But for the later supporters of William, it was enough for them to find confirmation that a promise had indeed been made to William. And the supposed purpose of the visit was to confirm that promise in a face-to-face meeting.

But the sceptics remain skeptical. This entry only appears in the Worcester version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. No other English document mentions this trip by William. And none of them mention a promise being made to William. Sceptics also note that the throne wasn't something that Edward could promise to someone else anyway. The King of England was actually selected by the Witan. But the counter-argument is that Edward himself had been promised the throne by his predecessor Harthacanute. And when Harthacanute died, the Witan deferred to that appointment and named Edward as king. So maybe Edward was trying to make the same kind of arrangement with William.

Again, this debate rages on and may never be resolved. But there is reason to believe that some type of promise or assurance was given to William. And the reason I say that is not just the Norman sources or William's purported visit to England, it is also because Edward had shown such a strong inclination towards his fellow Normans. And I say 'fellow Normans' even though he was technically half-English and half-Norman. But it really appears that he saw himself as more Norman than English.

As we've seen, he surrounded himself with Normans in the English court. And he appointed Normans to positions of authority throughout England, even appointing one as Archbishop of Canterbury. So it is seems very plausible that he favored his Norman cousin over any other claimants to the English throne.

And whether or not overtures were actually made to William, it seems that many people in England thought and suspected that overtures were being made. And that was a great concern for many Anglo-Saxons. Edward's support among the Witan and the earls quickly deteriorated. And there was another problem for Edward. The Godwin family may have been exiled, but there was always a chance they could come back at any time. And that's exactly what they did in the year after their exile – the year 1052.

Early in that year, they returned with their own troops, and they settled on the southeastern coast. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle suggests that they met some resistence, but they also found support. They began to raise more troops, and they soon made their way to London where they confronted Edward's forces for a second time. In the prior year, Edward enjoyed the support of the Witan and northern earls, but that didn't happen this time. This second stand-off is recorded in two different copies of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – the Abingdon version (known as the C Chronicle) and the Peterborough version (known as the E Chronicle). They tell the same basic story, but with slightly different details.

Both versions tell us that Godwin's forces made their way up-river to London where they were met by Edward's forces and the forces of the other earls. But then both Chronicles report that there was a refusal to fight. The Peterborough Chronicle implies that the earls were unhappy with Edward, and that there was a mutiny. It says that the earls had been deprived of many things by the king, and they demanded that those things be returned. It reads:

The earls then sent to the king
"Þa sendon þa eorlas to þam cynge."

and demanded that they be given back all the things which they had been un-rightly taken from them.
"7 gerndon to him þæt hi moston beon wurðe ælc þæra þinga þe heom mid unrihte ofgenumen wæs."

The king delayed for some time though,
"Ða wiðlæg se cyng sume hwile þeah"

so long that the folk with the earl were strongly stirred against the king.
"swa lange oð þet folc þe mid þam eorle wes wearð swiðe astyred ongean þone cyng."

So in essence, the earls and their men had demanded the return of certain things from the king, but the king's delay cause them to revolt. Now we aren't told what had been taken from the men. But the implication is that it was power, titles and/or land which had been given over to the Normans.

The Abingdon Chronicle gives us a slightly different take. It says of Edward's men:

they were most of them loathe to fight with their own kinsmen
"hit wæs heom mæst eallon lað þæt hig sceoldon fohtan wið heora agenes cynnes mannum"

for there was little else of any great importance but Englishmen on either half – or either side
"for þan þar wæs lytelles þe aht mycel myhton buton Englisce men on ægþer healfe"

It then states that Edward's Anglo-Saxon forces didn't want to kill their fellow kinsmen and expose the country to 'outlandish people' – "utlendiscum þeodum." This is literally 'people from outside the land,' in other words, 'foreign people.' So once again, if we read between the lines, we see this concern with foreigners in the English court. It could be concern over Danish or Viking invaders, but many scholars think the implication here is fear of a Norman invasion. Edward's English army may have been concerned that if they fought each other in a civil war, they would become so weakened that they would be vulnerable to attack by Edward's cousin across the channel. And if we read these provisions in conjunction with the entry in the Worcester Chronicle that William had made a trip to England earlier in the year, we start to see these various pieces coming together.

The implication is that Edward had so favored his Norman relatives and supporters during Godwin's absence, that the Anglo-Saxons had started to see the writing on the wall. When Edward died, William was likely to claim the throne. And that was unacceptable to many of them. So in the midst of this military stand-off, they were once again forced to choose sides. This time, the Anglo-Saxon earls broke with Edward, and they sided with Godwin.

We're told that a quick truce was arranged, and the Witan was once again called to assemble to outside of London. When the Witan met, they exonerated Godwin and his sons. All of the Godwins were returned to their original positions. But more importantly, most of the Normans were kicked out, including the Robert of Jumieges – the Norman who had been appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Peterborough Chronicle reads:

Archbishop Robert was declared an utter outlaw, with all the Frenchmen, because they caused most of the discord between earl Godwin and the king.

"cweð man utlaga Rotberd arcebiscop fullice, 7 ealle þa Frencisce menn. forðan þe hi macodon mæst þet unseht betweonan Godwine eorle 7 þam cynge."

The Abingdon version of the Chronicle renders an even harsher judgment. It reads:

Then they outlawed all Frenchmen
"and geutlageden þa ealle Frencisce men"

who before rendered unjust laws and exercised bad judgments,
"þe ær unlage rærdon 7 undom demdon"

and brought bad counsels into this earth
"7 unræd ræddon into ðissum earde"

The Chronicle then states that a few Frenchmen who were loyal to the country remained in Edward's service, but the rest were exiled

Edward had lost. He lost his influence and much of his power. And he lost many of his Norman supporters as well. The only thing he retained was the title of king, but from this point on, he was merely a figure-head. He was humiliated and he largely removed himself from public life. In fact, for the last decade of his reign, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle barely mentions his name at all.

Godwin was once again Earl of Wessex. His son Harold returned to his position as Earl of East Anglia. And when the Northumbrian earl Siward died a short time later, Godwin's son Tostig was appointed as the new Earl of Northumbria, even though he had no natural connection to the region.

Despite having engineered one of the greatest political comebacks in English history, Godwin didn't enjoy his success for very long. A year after returning to England, he died in April of 1053. His son, Harold, succeeded him as Earl of Wessex. And his son Tostig remained as Earl of Northumbria. As the new Earl of Wessex, Harold Godwinson was really the most powerful man in England going forward. Technically, the king was above him on the totem pole, but that was just a formality. For all practical purposes, Harold was the de facto ruler of the country.

Edward was an aging king without an heir and without any real power at this point. And as people looked to his eventual passing, it now appeared likely that Harold would step into his shoes and fill that vacuum. And a new English royal family would emerge – the Godwin family.

But there was that issue of that earlier promise made to William in Normandy. What was to become of that? For the answer to that question, we have to turn our attention back across the channel to Normandy. And we have to return to our original theme of broken promises.

William may very well have had an expectation that he would be offered the English throne at Edward's death. But for now, in the middle 1050s, he had more pressing concerns. To the southwest of Normandy was the region known as Anjou. The leader of that region was Geoffrey Martel – the Count of Anjou. He was a very powerful leader, and he had been expanding toward the disputed border with Normandy. So William sent his forces to the region and defeated Geoffrey's forces. But then William experienced another broken promise.

For several generations the Norman dukes had been loyal vassals of the French king. And the French king had even come to William's defense as a young duke. But now the French king Henry began to see William as a rival. Normandy was increasingly powerful. And maybe Henry had also gotten word that William was eyeing the English throne. If that happened, William would be a king in his own right, and his power would eclipse Henry's. Whatever the specific reason, Henry decided to abandon William and throw his support to Geoffrey in Anjou. The two formed an alliance and sought to take William down. But Henry miscalculated. As Henry's forces entered Normandy, they were routed by William's forces. The defeat was so overwhelming that both Henry and Geoffrey retreated.

They would soon return. But over the next few years, William continued to defend Normandy. Ultimately, the hostilities didn't end until the year 1060. In that year, both Henry and Geoffrey died. So William outlived his southern enemies.

The big point to take from these developments is the fact that William was once again the victim of a broken promise. The king had broken his feudal promise to protect and defend William as his vassal. But William overcame that broken promise through self-reliance and military might.

With the death of William's rivals to the south, Normandy's southern borders were secure. But then the northwestern border with Brittany became an issue. The Breton Duke was named Conan – specifically Conan II. You might remember from the last episode that Brittany had been largely under Normandy's control since the time of William's grandfather. The Bretons had tried to break free during the time of William's father, but William's father had suppressed that earlier

revolt. Now the Bretons were trying to rebel again. So William decided to launch an expedition into Brittany to bring the region under control in the year 1064. His aim was to support the Breton vassals there that were still loyal to Normandy.

But this is where events in England once again intersected with events in Normandy, at least according to the Norman sources. Just as William was preparing that expedition into Brittany, who should show up in Normandy one day but one Harold Godwinsson, the Earl of Wessex and arguably the de facto ruler of England. And this visit is extremely important to the history of the Norman Conquest because supposedly Harold arrived with a message for William. And that message was that William was still Edward's chosen successor in England. But once again, this story comes from the Norman side, not the Anglo-Saxon side. So let's look at the sources.

Let's begin by emphasizing that there is no mention at all of this visit in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or any other Anglo-Saxon records. But this supposed visit is mentioned in several Norman sources. And the best source of this story is the famous Bayeux Tapestry.

So let me tell you a little bit about that tapestry. A few years after the Norman Conquest, a large tapestry was embroidered by seamstresses, probably in England. It's a massive tapestry over about 230 feet long and about 20 inches wide. And it was created by William's supporters.

So why did they create it? Well, the best guess is that it was a brilliant piece of propaganda. It tells the story of the Norman Conquest from the Norman perspective. But it tells the story in pictures – not words. So it was clearly designed for an audience who couldn't read. And most of the common people were still illiterate. So it appears to be aimed at the general public. By the way, the tapestry is still on display in Bayeux in Normandy, which is why it is called the Bayeux Tapestry today.

Now again, the exact date of the tapestry is unknown. But it is believed to have been created shortly after the Norman Conquest. And the first third or so of the tapestry is designed to show that William had the right to invade England. And the first part focuses on this supposed visit to Normandy by Harold Godwinson – the Earl of Wessex.

The tapestry shows Harold landing on the Norman coast and being detained by one of William's vassals. The reason for the visit is not stated. Maybe it was an official visit. Maybe he was blown off course and was shipwrecked. Again, the tapestry is open to interpretation.

The tapestry then shows Harold being presented to William and being taken back to William's court at Rouen. The tapestry then shows a military campaign. It was William's military campaign in Brittany in 1064. The tapestry indicates that Harold accompanied William on that campaign. It then shows two of William's men being trapped in quicksand, and Harold actually rescuing them. Ultimately, the campaign was successful. William was able to put down the rebellion in Brittany.

The tapestry then returns the scene to William's court. And this is the most important segment for our story. At this point, Harold is shown making an oath to William. It doesn't specifically

say what the oath was for, and that's probably because the tapestry was prepared after the Conquest and everyone knew what the oath was (or was supposed to be).

In case there was any doubt about that oath, we also have the accounts of those early Norman historians which I mentioned earlier – William of Jumieges and William of Poitiers. William of Jumieges wrote that Harold took 'many oaths' in support of William. William of Poitiers provided a similar account. He wrote that Harold swore fealty to William and agreed to become a vassal of William. He added that Harold promised William possession of England when Edward died. And until then, Harold agreed to be William's representative at the Edward's court.

But here is the other important thing about that oath. According to William of Poitiers and the Bayeux Tapestry, Harold's oath to William was sworn over holy relics. The tapestry suggests that the relics were concealed, so it isn't clear if Harold was aware that he was actually swearing over holy relics. But those relics added extra force to the oath, at least in the minds of the Normans.

So according to the Norman perspective, we have two separate promises to William. Edward the Confessor had made a promise to William back in the year 1052. Now in the year 1064, Harold Godwinson, the Earl of Wessex, had made a separate oath to affirm that earlier promise. So the two most powerful men in England – the King and the Earl of Wessex – had both promised the throne to William.

But again, the Anglo-Saxon sources are silent about all of this. From the English perspective, this was all Norman propaganda. Harold was the most powerful man in England, certainly the most powerful man after the king. And he was in the best position to succeed Edward. So why would he just give away any claim he would have to the throne? And it wasn't even his decision to give away. It was ultimately the decision of the Witan.

Whatever the real story is, the tapestry definitely goes out of its way to depict Harold as an oath breaker and a usurper. And that's because Edward the Confessor died a few months later. And according to the Anglo-Saxon sources, on his death bed, Edward designated Harold as his chosen successor. So if true, he broke that earlier promise to William, assuming he actually made such a promise. And shortly after Edward's death, the Witan confirmed Harold Godwinson as the new king of England. So by accepting that position, Harold also broke his promise to William. We'll look at some of these details in the next episode. But the bigger point here is that William was once again the victim of broken promises.

As a young child, his father's vassals had broken their promise to support him as Duke. They had rebelled, but William was eventually able put down the rebellion by force. Years later, Henry the King of France broke his feudal oath to support and defend William. But once again, William stood up to the oath-breaker and defeated him.

And now in the year 1066, William was once again the victim of broken promises. William had always overcome those broken promises with cunning and force. And now, William sought to do what he always done – take what he had been promised, by military force if necessary.

Next time, we'll complete our look at the Norman Conquest by focusing on the year 1066. It was one of the most eventful and important years in English history. And it was arguably the most important year in the history of the English language. It was a year which England was ruled by three different kings. And it was a year in which the competing claims of the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans and the Vikings were finally resolved once and for all. Next time, we'll follow that history by tracing the language of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. And that will give us one last look at Old English before major changes started to set in.

So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.