



1. Who should be king?

- Harold Godwinson’s chance of succeeding the throne was excellent as he had the support required to be made King. Edgar had little chance of succeeding as he was too young and the threat of invasion meant a stronger ruler would be more suitable. Harald’s chance of succeeding was good as he had the resources to launch an invasion and William of Normandy had quite a good chance of succeeding as the Normans were Europe’s strongest warriors, but the invasion would be risky and would not be easy to gather then men needed to make it successful.
- In Anglo-Saxon England, the King could not simply announce his successor as the Witan played a role in appointing the successor. It was unlikely that the Witan would have chosen William in January 1066 – Edward’s attempt to bring Normans into senior positions earlier in his reign had been opposed very strongly by all the leading earls, many of whom were still in the Witan.
- Harold Godwinson’s coronation took place the same day as Edward was buried (6th January 1066) – this was very quick. Edward had waited at least 6 months before being crowned. Everything about the way Harold became King shows how he seized the opportunity before any of his other likely successors could have laid a claim to the throne of England.
- The Witan met on day that Edward died to elect Harold as King. They suspected that William would act on his claim and it was probably the need to make preparations for England’s defence that made the Witan willing to elect Harold II as quickly as possible. When news of the coronation reached William, he reacted furiously.

2. How successful was Harold Godwinson as King of England?

- Harold faced many problems from other powerful Anglo-Saxon Earls, he faced difficulty in the North on whether they would accept him as King, Tostig posed a threat as he was an ally of Hardrada and there were reports that William was building an invasion fleet ready to invade England and lay his claim to the throne.
- Harold went to York after his coronation to meet with other members of the Witan to ensure they supported him. He also gathered a very large army and positioned them along the south coast of England to defend against invasion. He also stationed a large fleet on the south coast. Tostig had support in Flanders (gained through marriage) and so sailed to England in May 1066. When he learned of the strength of Harold’s army, he sailed round the coast to Lincoln and began plotting with Hardrada instead. Harold’s army guarded the southern coast all summer. He kept his army and fleet provisioned which was very expensive and complicated. The expected Normans did not come and so by September it was time to stand down and refit the fleet.

3. Why were the battles of Gate Fulford and Stamford Bridge significant?

Key Dates:

- **20th September 1066 – Battle of Gate Fulford**
- **25th September 1066 – Battle of Stamford Bridge**
- In September 1066, Harald Hardrada and Tostig launched their attack. Hardrada had 200-300 warships carrying near 10,000 Vikings. They marched to York which had been the capital of a Viking state. Their way was blocked by an army led by Morcar and his elder brother Edwin, the earls of Northumbria and Mercia. The brothers decided on open battle to defend York rather than staying behind the security of the city’s heavy fortifications.
- **Gate Fulford** – It was a defeat for Edwin and Morcar. Hardrada and Tostig were thought to have larger armies. Hardrada and his Housecarls were battle-hardened fighters and were very skilled in battle. Edwin and Morcar also stationed their armies with marshlands at their backs which meant troops could go nowhere. The English army broke and tried to run away, but they got stuck and were cut down. The Norwegians boasted that many Englishmen had died. Harold took his Housecarls north, travelling 185 miles in five days. Leaving the South coast was a bad decision for Harold, but he thought that William would not cross the Channel at that time of the year. Some of the September storms had wrecked some of Harold’s own fleet and also possibly drove William back from an initial invasion. The wind prevented William from crossing the channel. Harold’s five day march was an outstanding military achievement. At the battle of Gate Fulford Hardrada and Tostig had exchanged hostages with the city of York, which had surrendered to them without a fight. They had also demanded more hostages. Hardrada and Tostig were informed that the extra hostages would be handed over to them at Stamford Bridge. On the 25th September, they were at Stamford Bridge, awaiting their hostages, when Harold launched a surprise attack.
- **Stamford Bridge** – King Harold had probably learned of the hostage deal as he travelled towards York. There was a small hill overlooking Stamford Bridge which meant his army could approach undetected. The battle was a success for Harold. Hardrada and Tostig were both killed and thousands of other men. It is thought that only 24 out of the 200 longships returned. Harold secured a victory because the Vikings had left their armour on the ships with a third of their men, Hardrada’s army had fought a battle five days before and were tired and Harold’s Housecarls broke the Viking shield wall.

Both battles were significant because...	However...
Hardrada and Tostig’s invasion meant Harold could not prevent William’s invasion	Harold had already disbanded the southern fyrd in September
Edwin and Morcar made strategic errors	Harold was already on his way north before Gate Fulford
Edwin and Morcar survived Gate Fulford but unable to fight with Harold at Hastings	Edwin and Morcar are not mentioned in sources about the Battle of Hastings
Harold’s march south again made his remaining Housecarls less battle ready	Harold and his Housecarls had just won a victory and morale was high