

1. Was Bishop Odo a hindrance or a help to William's campaign?

- Odo was William's half-brother (they had the same mother). In 1049 William made Odo Bishop of Bayeux. Odo was a major supporter of William's invasion, contributing 100 ships to the fleet and fought at the Battle of Hastings. Odo was rewarded with the Earldom of Kent and he also gained control of many other estates to become the second largest landholder in England after the king. The Domesday Book records him holding land in 22 counties.
- Odo was co-regent in 1067. Chronicles suggest that Odo and Earl William FitzOsbern built many castles. Norman chronicles suggest that Odo had greater authority than other Earls. He is known to have settled disputes himself and dispense justice like a second King.
- In 1079 William sent Odo to Northumberland, following attacks from Scotland and the murder of the bishop of Durham. Odo is also thought to have pillaged cathedral treasures and robbed and extorted all that he could.
- In 1082 Odo fell out of favour with William and was imprisoned. He was released in 1087 after William, on his deathbed was convinced to pardon him. William had freed other prisoners such as Morcar and Wulfnoth, the brother of Harold, without needing any persuasion.
- Historians believe Odo might have got into so much trouble because of his corrupt behaviour or an attempt to claim the throne for himself. Most think it was because Odo tried to take some of William's knights out of England with him for a journey to Rome (Odo saw an opportunity to get himself made Pope). Knight service meant that knights obeyed the King. They were not the personal troops of their tenant-in-chief.
- In 1088 Odo led many barons in revolt against William II. His willingness to act against his king suggested an ambition for power and this was the cause of his fallout with William I.

2. How should we remember King William?

- He was a religious King and a devoted husband, He was extremely religious, and although he was interested in what the church could do for him, he also promoted Church reform with Lanfranc and founded abbeys. He recognised that his life had been brutal and is thought to have repented on his deathbed. He took the English throne by force, but was always very concerned to be accepted as the legitimate heir of Edward the Confessor. William was also very devoted to his wife, Matilda. When she died in 1083, it is thought that he cried for days. He trusted her so much that she served as regent when William was often away in Normandy.
- William and Matilda had three children – the eldest was called Robert – nicknamed 'Robert Curthose'. The relationship between father and son was difficult. William did not think that Robert was ready to take control of Normandy even though he was a good and skilled fighter.
- In 1077, following a prank in which his younger brothers dumped water on his head, Robert started a real fight and William had to break it up. Robert was angry that his father did not punish his brothers – this caused him, along with men to try and take control of Rouen castle, then fled from William, who wanted them arrested. Robert fled to Flanders. The King Phillip of France, William's enemy gave Robert a castle on Normandy's borders, from which Robert launched many raids, forcing William to raise an army against him. Matilda had been sending money to Robert without William knowing. At a battle in 1079 Robert and William fought against each other and Robert knocked William off his horse and wounded him. Matilda organised a reconciliation between William and Robert in 1080 and William restored Robert as his chosen heir to Normandy.

3. Why was there a disputed succession after William's death?

- In July 1087 William led a raid into France, burning down the castle and town of Mantes. William had grown fat, and when his horse stumbled, he was thrown heavily off, he suffered internal injuries. He returned to Rouen in pain. Doctors did not think William would survive. He suffered for many weeks before he died on the 9th September. Panic broke out and his barons rushed to secure their castles and belongings. At William's funeral, as the attendants attempted to squeeze William's body into its stone tomb, his bloated corpse burst open.
- Because of the drawn out death, William had time to think about the succession and dukedom of Normandy. William decided Robert should have Normandy. In 1066 all Norman barons swore allegiance to Robert as William's heir. William wanted his favourite son, William Rufus to be the next King of England, but said he would let God choose the next King of England.
- William Rufus left for England before his father's death. He took with him a letter to Lanfranc from his father, recommending him as King. Lanfranc supported William Rufus' claim and he was crowned William II in September 1087. Lanfranc had so much power that no council, not even the Witan was required to authorize the succession.
- William II faced opposition to his rule. Robert Curthose (William I's eldest) also wanted England as well as Normandy. It was normal for the eldest to inherit. The barons would have preferred just one lord for both Normandy and England.
- In 1087 Bishop Odo was freed from imprisonment. In 1088 led a rebellion against William II, in support of Robert's claim to the English throne. Odo's brother, Robert Mortain joined Odo in revolt. Other revolts broke out alongside the main revolt. Small rebellions by Roger Bigod in Norwich and the sheriff of Leicester, raids in Somerset and Wiltshire and in Gloucestershire. Smaller rebellions in the West, led by Marcher Earls were put down by force. The majority of Norman aristocrats, bishops and the English population were against Odo's rebellion. Odo and Robert Mortain took refuge in Pevensey Castle. William II attacked the castle for 6 weeks, preventing supplies from entering the castle. His tactics worked and he captured both his uncles, though Odo managed to escape to Rochester Castle. Odo held out here, hoping Robert Curthose would come and help. Help never arrived and he was forced to surrender as he ran out of food and there is disease in the castle. Odo was stripped of his titles and exiled.
- William II was wildly popular after the defeat of Odo and wanted to win the support of the English – he promised lower taxes, and end to the forest laws and restoration of Edward the Confessor's laws. Unfortunately for the English people, William II went back on all of his promises and he continued to be resented by the English.