The Normans

remained unchanged, there was an entirely new and alien ruling class; the language barrier only served to widen the gulf between it and the peasantry.

After 1071 William's hold on England was fairly secure and he came to regard it chiefly as a source of revenue. The extensive royal estates and the sophisticated English financial machinery brought in huge sums. The Welsh and the Scots gave him little trouble. Scandinavian rulers continued to look greedily towards England but the ever-present threat of another Viking invasion never quite materialised. From 1071 to 1084 most of William's attention was taken up by war and diplomacy on the continent. Normandy was his homeland and far more vulnerable to sudden attack than was his island kingdom. Moreover the King of France and the Counts of Anjou and Flanders were alarmed by William's newly acquired power and took every opportunity to diminish it. Their best opportunities were provided by William's eldest son Robert (born 1054). Recognised as the heir to Normandy as long ago as 1066 he had never been permitted to enjoy either money or power and from 1078 onwards he became involved in a series of intrigues, a tool in the hands of William's enemies. In one skirmish William was actually wounded by his son.

Then in 1085 William returned to England with a huge army of mercenaries ready to counter the invasion planned by King Swein of Denmark. The administrative effort involved in catering for this army seems to have persuaded William that he ought to have more precise information about the distribution of wealth among his barons. So in 1086 commissaries were sent from shire to shire and the results of their inquiries are now enshrined in the Domesday Book. It listed the major landholders in each county and provided William with a remarkably full description of their sources of revenue. But although the book has been of great value to historians, it seems unlikely that William was able to make much use of it. Before the end of the year he had been recalled to Normandy. Once again he found himself campaigning against the King of France and, as usual, the war was concentrated in the Vexin, a disputed territory lying between Rouen and Paris. In July 1089 William launched a surprise attack on Manse and took it, but during the sack of the town he received the injury from which, on 9 September, he died. His body was carried to the church of St Stephen at Caen for burial. Unfortunately during the last few years he had grown very fat. King Philip of France used to say that he looked like a pregnant woman. When the attendants tried to force a body into the stone sarcophagus it burst and filled the church with a foul smell. It was an unpleasant ending, but unlike many kings he had unquestionably lived more successfully than he died. Few kings can have enjoyed so much luck as William the Bastard, but few took such full advantage of their good fortune as William the Conqueror, founder of a new royal dynasty.

WILLIAM II

r. 1087–1100

William, the third son of William of Normandy and Matilda, was born about 1075. Almost nothing is known of his youth, but it is at least clear that the time he spent in the household of Archbishop Lanfranc made little impression upon him. He was deeply attached to his father and while Robert rebelled, William never wavered in his loyalty. When Richard, the second son, died in a hunting accident in the New Forest it seemed possible that William might take Robert's place as chief heir. William, moreover, was at the bedside of the dying King to hear his last wishes while Robert remained at the court of his father's enemy, Philip of France. But the custom which gave the ancestral lands, the patrimony, to the first-born son proved too strong. Robert succeeded to Normandy. To William, however, the old King gave his newly conquered land, England. Following the instructions of the old King's will, Lanfranc crowned William at Westminster on 26 September 1087. Like his father, William was inclined to sternness. He had fair hair, piercing eyes, a red face (thus his nickname Rufus) and a tendency to sler whet when excited.

The division of the Conqueror's lands created political difficulties. Many Norman lords held estates on both sides of the Channel. Their dilemma was summed up by the greatest of them, the new King's uncle, Odo of Bayeux. 'How can we give proper service to two mutually hostile and distant lords? If we serve Duke Robert well we shall offend his brother William, and he will deprive us of our revenues and honours in England. On the other hand if we obey King William, Duke Robert will deprive us of our patrimonies in Normandy.' By 1088 it was already plain that some barons, inspired by Odo, would prefer to have Robert as their lord on both sides of the sea. But Robert failed to appear in England, William acted firmly and the revolt soon collapsed. Now it was the younger brother's turn. In 1089 he laid claim to Normandy. With English silver he was able to buy support in Normandy. Gradually

The opening of a surviving manuscript of the Book of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, in whose honour William Rufus spent some of his youth and who crowned him.