

Scroll down to highlighted text for explanation of Earle Bloomfield's name change and the title he claims: "Viscount of Saxmundham". Scroll to second page for Earl's business card.



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Historical Background

History of the Family Name de Blonville

The original family name of 'de Blonville' originates from the rural farming centre of Blonville, situated some three kilometres inland from the Normandy coast near Caen in Normandy, in the 10th century. The family de Blonville were originally Norse settlers or Vikings who as a group acquired the land west of the Seine - now known as Normandy - by the 911 treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte - between the Viking leader Rollo (Hrolf, later Robert) and the Charles III (The Simple) of France. The treaty conditions traded the land of Normandy - the land of the Norsemen - for an agreement to not sack the French capital of Paris.

Over the centuries, the name de Blonville accumulated many Anglicised variant spellings that included de Blomeville, deBlomevyle, Blondeville, Blomvyle, Le Blomvile, Blomfield, Bloomfield and Blomfyld. These variants reflect the peculiarities of official record-keeping by church wardens, not all of whom were fully literate, or who were obliged to transcribe names as they sounded. At play was a variety of local French and English dialects and the transition of Saxon England's unofficial language into formalised Norman French under William the Conqueror's sweeping administrative reforms. No standard English language appeared through the country until after the publication by William Caxton of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in 1476.

According to records kept at Notre-Dame de Dives, in Dives sur Mer, Normandy, the de Blonville family was numbered among Duke William's 345 Companions in Arms who sailed in 1066 for the Battle of Hastings. Later, in 1068, Charles de Blonville followed the post-conquest resettlement opportunities (free land and manors) and took up substantial landholdings (until the late 20th century it was called Clockhouse Farm) near Saxmundham in Suffolk, East Anglia, where they remained until the mid 1800's. Selling the landholdings, they moved into the brewing industry first in Manchester and later in Australia. The family is well represented in the Church of St John in Saxmundham and on monuments in the attached graveyard.

It was recently claimed by Peter Blomfield, family genealogist and businessman based in Sydney, that evidence has been discovered suggesting that Duke William of Normandy, the illegitimate heir to the Normandy title, was - through his mother, Herleve de Falaise, the daughter of a wealthy Breton tanner - actually a member of the de Blonville family.

The Vikings in Normandy

Introduction

After the death of the Emperor Charlemagne, at the beginning of the 9th century, Viking fleets (mainly Danish) made landings in the estuaries of the Frankish kingdom. Organised as small fleets, their raids on the River Seine, in Eastern Neustria, became more frequent, with the plundering of the wealthiest areas all the way to Paris.

On several occasions, the Frankish King Charles the Bald paid the Vikings Danegeld, to buy them off. Nevertheless, the colonisation by Danes of the Lower Seine was under way.

In AD 911, in the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, Charles the Simple left to the Viking chief Rollo (Hrolf, Rollon, later Robert), the territory now known as Normandy. Rollo thus became the first Jarl (or Duke) of Normandy. After two successful extensions into Western Neustria (colonised mainly by Norwegians), the Norman territory had almost achieved its present frontiers by AD 933.

The invasion of Frankia ceased, but the taste for foreign expeditions persisted in the Normans, who went on to found principalities in southern Italy and Sicily in the 11th-12th centuries, and conquered England after the Battle of Hastings in AD 1066.

William of Normandy Invades England

- by Paul Chrastina

Born in 1027, Duke William of Normandy was only seven years old when he inherited his father's realm, one of the wealthiest and most powerful provinces in France. Rival Norman barons promptly rebelled against the boy's authority, forcing him to live in hiding from numerous assassination attempts. William struck back when he reached the age of fourteen, and began leading armies against his enemies. By the time he turned twenty-four, William had consolidated his power over Normandy, with the help of the king of France, Henri I.

Duke William then took aim at a greater prize-the Kingdom of England. In 1051 he persuaded his distant cousin, the childless English King Edward the Confessor, to name him as heir to the English throne. Despite Edward's promise, Duke William discovered that his claim to the English crown was insecure. The English, who spoke Germanic Anglo-Saxon dialects, did not want to be ruled by a Frenchman. They wanted King Edward to be succeeded by his brother-in-law, a solid Saxon earl named Harold Godwinson.



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Viscount de Blonville of Saxmundham

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To the English people, Harold seemed a natural and desirable successor to Edward. While the aging king concentrated on his religious devotions, many of the important affairs of his kingdom were actually being managed by his Saxon brother-in-law.

William of Normandy regarded Harold as a serious competitor for the English crown. The Norman duke therefore acted quickly in the summer of 1064, when he learned that Harold had been captured and imprisoned by a count on the coast of France. Paying a visit to the French count, who was his subordinate, William took custody of his Saxon rival. Now that Harold was in his power, William courteously asked the Saxon earl to publicly support his promised inheritance of Edward's crown. Harold, aware that his safe return to England depended on compliance with William's requests, agreed to swear an oath of allegiance to the Norman.

Harold's vow to support William of Normandy's succession was taken in a ceremony witnessed by assembled Norman barons. After the oath was sworn, William dramatically revealed that he had secretly gathered "all the bones and the relics of the saints," from the Norman monasteries and churches and concealed them in two large chests, which had been placed in the council room in which they stood. According to the Norman chronicler, Wace, Harold was "sorely alarmed at the sight of the holy relics," before which he had pledged himself to honour William's royal ambition. Harold was then permitted to return to England. On January 5, 1066, Edward the Confessor, the King of England, died at the age of sixty-four. Just before his death, after receiving last rites from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward motioned to Harold, who stood with a few others at the king's deathbed. Bending down to hear Edward's last words,

Harold looked up and said "I name you all as witnesses that the king has just given me the crown and the whole kingdom of England." Harold's succession was immediately approved by both the Saxon legislature and the English Church, and his coronation took place in London on the next day.

The news of the royal succession traveled quickly across the narrow English Channel to be delivered to Duke William of Normandy. According to tradition, William was stringing his bow for a day's hunting when he was informed of Harold's seizure of the English crown. Infuriated, he called off the hunt and retired to his court to ponder his response. The crowning of Harold Godwinson was an affront, in William's mind, that could not be accepted or ignored. William immediately sent ambassadors to London and Rome, asserting that he was the only rightful candidate for kingship, and that Harold should immediately step down. The Norman ambassador to London failed to sway King Harold with his arguments, but the envoy sent to Rome enjoyed more success. Pope Alexander, when informed of the sacred oath sworn by Harold, was convinced in favour of William, and sent the duke a consecrated banner and a gold ring that conferred papal blessings on his efforts to claim the English throne.

By the end of March, 1066, William had also persuaded many of the barons of Normandy that his claim was just. Other leaders, including French King Henri I, now feared the duke's ambition and refused to support his plan. William, taking his future into his own hands, ordered the construction of a fleet of ships to sail across the English Channel and challenge Harold with armed force. When Harold learned of William's plans, he began to assemble a fleet and an army that were "greater than any King of England had ever made before."

As William had entire forests cut down to build ships on the coast of France, a strange sign was seen in the skies across Europe, first appearing as a star that grew brighter with each passing night. By the end of April, the "hairy star," which would much later be named Halley's comet, flamed overhead, with three long tails streaming towards the horizon. An English monk recorded a chilling prophecy that became associated with the comet's appearance, predicting "the tears of mothers and the overthrow of English rule." As word of this prophecy spread across Europe, mercenaries poured into Normandy to offer their services to William.

In May, William received a visit from Harold's younger brother, Tostig Godwinson. Tostig had been banished from England the year before, when his cruel acts as earl of northern England incited a popular uprising. Described as "scowling-browed and the most war-like of men," Tostig came to William thirsting for revenge against his brother Harold. William gave Tostig some ships and "as many mercenaries as he might gather," to harass the southern coast of England.

After staging a series of brutal hit-and-run raids on the English seaside, the renegade Saxon sailed for Norway, where he persuaded a Norwegian king named Sigurdsson to contest Harold's claim to the throne. William was unaware of this development, which created yet another rival for the English crown. On September 12, the armada of Duke William was ready to cross the 100-mile wide stretch of the English channel that separates Normandy from England. Somewhere in the middle of the channel, William's transport ships encountered a fleet of Saxon longboats set in place by Harold to guard the coast. This unexpected encounter ended with the retreat of the Norman fleet during a violent storm. Returning to Normandy, William "rallied those who were yielding to fear and restored spirit to the faint-hearted."

At the same time that the Normans were suffering this setback in the English Channel, Tostig and Sigurdsson, leading an army of about 9,000 warriors, set sail from Norway for England. The Norwegians landed unopposed on the English coast, then moved inland to defeat the armies of northern England. Learning of the invasion, King Harold moved northward from London with his full army, force-marching his troops nearly two hundred miles in eight days.

On September 25, Harold's army came upon the Viking forces at Stamford Bridge, Yorkshire. Taken by surprise, the invading army was almost completely destroyed. Tostig and Sigurdson were both killed. The fierce battle took a heavy toll on Harold's victorious army, which lost many of its best fighting men.

While the surviving English soldiers were celebrating their rout of the northern invaders, William of Normandy set sail once again into the English Channel. Leaving port on the evening of September 27, the Norman fleet crossed the sea by night, landing early the next morning on the English beach of Pevensey.

At the portentous moment when William of Normandy stepped off his ship and onto English soil, he slipped and fell in the surf, catching himself with his two outstretched hands. Aware that the eyes of his army were upon him, William stood up and confidently held out his two fists full of English sand to his followers, exclaiming "See, my lords, by the Splendour of God! I have taken possession of England with both my hands. It is now mine, and what is mine is yours!"

The Norman army immediately began to attack and destroy the fishing and farming villages along the southern coast of England, burning, looting and killing. William dispatched a messenger to give Harold one last chance to surrender the crown.

From York, Harold marched his tired and battered army south, traveling without a break for seven days until he reached London. There, he took five days to resupply his troops and recruit new soldiers. It proved difficult for Harold to replace the seasoned fighting men who had died fighting the Vikings at Stamford Bridge. When the call went out from London for more militiamen, some arrived with only pruning hooks for weapons and shields made from sturdy Saxon window shutters. Marching southwest from London, Harold moved his army to a hill about seven miles north of the village of Hastings.

The Battle of Hastings began on the morning of October 14, 1066, when William's army arrived at the base of the hill where Harold's forces were arrayed. William began the battle by deploying his archers, whose arrows had little effect when fired uphill at the overlapping shields of the Saxon defensive line. Next, the Norman infantry charged up the hill. As soon as they came within range, the French troops were met by a barrage of "javelins and all kinds of darts, the most murderous axes, and stones fixed to pieces of wood" flung from the Saxon ranks. Reaching the shield-wall, the Norman troops were repeatedly forced back by the slashing strokes of Saxon battle axes and a bristling hedge of long-bladed spears.

After several hours of pitched fighting, William redeployed his archers and readied his cavalymen to intensify the attack. He gave an order to his archers, "not to aim their arrows straight at the enemy, but to shoot them in the air, so that their cloud might spread darkness over the enemy ranks." One of these arrows, shot toward the sky, came down and struck Harold over his right eye. The Saxon king pulled the arrow from the wound and flung it away, "and the pain to his head was so great that he leaned upon his shield" as the Norman cavalry pounded at the ranks of the English warriors that surrounded him.

The evenly matched armies fought viciously through the day, until a Norman retreat drew some of the undisciplined English militiamen down from their secure hilltop position into the valley below. There, William's cavalry closed in on them, and the tide of the battle turned in favour of the invading Normans. Finally, four of William's knights fought their way to the wounded King Harold and killed him.

That night, Duke William took his evening meal on the spot where Harold had died, while the Norman cavalry hunted down the scattered remnants of the Saxon army.

William was crowned "the Conqueror" on Christmas Day, 1066, and ruled England until his death in 1087.