

THEBAYEUXTAPESTRY.COM

Scene-Spotting Guide

All 58 scenes of the Bayeux Tapestry

This book belongs to:



A free companion for the British Museum exhibition, 2026–2027

A Note for Teachers

This guide supports Key Stage 2 history topics on the Norman Conquest and the events of 1066, including a study of a significant turning point in British history. It can be used before a museum visit, during a classroom topic on the Bayeux Tapestry, or as a stand-alone activity. Free to copy and distribute within your school.

This booklet can also be downloaded, or shared with colleagues, at thebayeux Tapestry.com/booklet.

Who's Who

Harold Godwinson and King Edward



Harold Godwinson

Earl of Wessex, later King of England

Harold was the most powerful nobleman in England, and when King Edward died without an heir, the English nobles chose him as their new king. But years earlier, Harold had been shipwrecked in France and ended up swearing a solemn oath to Duke William, an oath the Normans said promised William the throne. When Harold took the crown anyway, William prepared to invade. Harold fought brilliantly at Stamford Bridge, crushing a Viking invasion in the north, only to face William at Hastings soon after. He was killed in the fighting on 14 October 1066, becoming the last Anglo-Saxon king of England.



King Edward

King of England, 1042–1066

Edward the Confessor ruled England for over twenty years, a deeply religious king remembered for building Westminster Abbey. He spent years in exile in Normandy as a young man, part of why the Normans believed he had promised the throne to Duke William. Edward and his wife had no children, and by the time he lay dying in January 1066, nobody knew for certain who should rule next. His final words, spoken to those gathered at his deathbed, were argued over for years afterward. English sources said he chose Harold; Norman sources insisted his promise to William still stood.

Who's Who

William, Duke of Normandy, and Bishop Odo



William

Duke of Normandy, later King of England

William became Duke of Normandy at around seven years old, after his father died on pilgrimage. His childhood was violent and dangerous, several of his guardians were murdered, and he grew into a tough, determined ruler. He believed Edward the Confessor had promised him the English throne, and that Harold's oath had confirmed it. When Harold took the crown instead, William spent months building an invasion fleet, crossed the Channel, and defeated Harold at the Battle of Hastings. He was crowned King of England on Christmas Day 1066, becoming known ever after as William the Conqueror.



Bishop Odo

Bishop of Bayeux, William's half-brother

Odo was William's younger half-brother, made Bishop of Bayeux while still a teenager. Despite being a churchman, he was also a skilled military leader, and fought at the Battle of Hastings, rallying panicked Norman soldiers when a rumour spread that William had been killed. Odo is almost certainly the person who commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry, which may explain why he appears in it far more prominently than his real importance at the battle would suggest, and why three obscure men connected to him are named in the embroidery alongside kings and dukes.

Scene-Spotting Guide

Tick each scene off as you spot it, at the exhibition or online

The Bayeux Tapestry has 58 scenes from start to finish. Use this guide to tick off every one you spot, jot a note if you like, and build your own record of the whole story.

✓	#	Scene	Notes & Observations
	1	King Edward Old King Edward on his throne, talks quietly with Harold, setting the whole story in motion.	
	2	Harold Rides to Bosham Harold rides for the coast, hawk perched on his wrist, hounds running on ahead.	
	3	Bosham Church Harold prays for safe passage, then feasts in the hall, before boarding his ship.	
	4	Harold Sets Sail Men wade out to the ships, tunics hitched up high, and set off for France.	
	5	Lands in Ponthieu Harold's ship goes off course, landing in the wrong territory, that of Count Guy.	
	6	Harold Ashore Harold steps onto the beach, still clutching his hawk. Armed men are waiting.	
	7	Guy Seizes Harold Count Guy takes his prisoner, England's most powerful earl, a remarkable stroke of luck.	
	8	Taken to Beaurain Guy leads Harold inland, to his own stronghold. A rider glances back.	
	9	Harold and Guy Talk The two men sit and talk, likely discussing a ransom. Guy holds his sword upright.	
	10	William's Messengers Arrive William's messengers reach Guy's court, demanding Harold's release. The mysterious Turolde holds their horses.	

✓	#	Scene	Notes & Observations
	11	Messengers Ride Fast A dramatic flashback scene, messengers gallop at full speed, hair and trees streaming behind.	
	12	News Reaches William William hears of the capture, seated on his throne, his first appearance in the story.	
	13	Guy Delivers Harold to William Guy hands Harold over, pointing back at his prisoner, like passing over a parcel.	
	14	Arrival at the Palace William and Harold arrive together, at the ducal palace. Harold gestures as he speaks.	
	15	The Mysterious Ælfgýva A priest touches a woman's face, the caption trails off unexplained. Still a mystery today.	
	16	March to Mont-Saint-Michel William marches his army out, Harold rides along too, passing the famous island abbey.	
	17	Crossing the Quicksand Soldiers blunder into quicksand. Harold hauls two men free, a genuine moment of heroism.	
	18	Conan Flees Dol The Normans reach the town, Conan of Brittany flees, escaping down a rope.	
	19	Attack on Dinan Cavalry storm the castle, attackers hold flaming torches, to the timber walls.	
	20	Conan Surrenders the Keys Conan finally gives up, passing over the town's keys, on the tip of a lance.	
	21	William Arms Harold William presents Harold with arms, helmet, sword and armour, a gift that quietly binds him.	
	22	Arrival at Bayeux The company reaches Bayeux, Harold still travelling with William, Bishop Odo's own home city.	

✓	#	Scene	Notes & Observations
	23	Harold's Oath Harold swears a sacred oath, one hand on each relic box, the pivotal scene of the story.	
	24	Harold Returns to England Harold sails for home, released at last. A lookout watches from the cliff.	
	25	Harold Reports to Edward Harold stands before the king, Edward raises a lecturing finger. No words are recorded.	
	26	Edward's Funeral Procession The king's body is carried, towards the new abbey, a workman still finishing the roof.	
	27	Edward's Deathbed The dying king reaches out, touching the hand of Harold. His wife Edith weeps nearby.	
	28	The King Has Died Edward's body is prepared, shown just below his deathbed, a living king above, a dead one below.	
	29	Harold Offered the Crown Nobles offer Harold the crown, along with a royal axe. The coronation follows almost at once.	
	30	Harold Enthroned Harold sits crowned in majesty, orb and sceptre in hand, a king for just 282 days.	
	31	Archbishop Stigand The controversial archbishop stands by, excommunicated by five different popes, casting doubt on the coronation.	
	32	Halley's Comet A blazing comet streaks overhead, seen as a terrible omen, one of the earliest images of it.	
	33	Harold Told of the Comet A messenger brings the news, Harold twists nervously on his throne, ghostly ships float in the border.	
	34	English Ship Brings News A single ship crosses the sea, carrying news to Normandy. Harold has taken the crown.	

✓	#	Scene	Notes & Observations
	35	William Orders Ships Built William gives the order, to build an invasion fleet, Bishop Odo advising at his side.	
	36	Ships Hauled to Sea Finished ships are dragged, down to the water, using ropes and log rollers.	
	37	Loading Arms and Wine Men carry weapons to the ships, mail shirts slung on poles, and a huge barrel of wine.	
	38	The Fleet Sets Sail The invasion fleet crosses overnight, decks packed with men and horses, landing unopposed at Pevensey.	
	39	Horses Unloaded Warhorses leap from the ships, splashing ashore onto the beach, a difficult and risky undertaking.	
	40	Soldiers Seize Food Knights ride out to forage, stripping the local countryside, deliberately provoking Harold to march.	
	41	Here Is Wadard A named figure appears, supervising the foraging party, later traced in the Domesday Book.	
	42	Cooking the Feast An open-air camp kitchen, meat cooked over the flames, shields used as a makeshift table.	
	43	The Feast and Blessing Bishop Odo blesses the meal, seated at the table's centre, posed just like the Last Supper.	
	44	Odo, William and Robert The war council gathers, William flanked by two brothers, three sons of one mother.	
	45	Digging the Castle at Hastings Labourers pile up an earth mound, building a castle in days. Two workmen brawl with their shovels.	
	46	William Hears of Harold A scout brings urgent news, Harold's army is close, after a brutal forced march south.	

✓	#	Scene	Notes & Observations
	47	A House Set on Fire A house is put to the torch, a mother flees with her child, the tapestry's only civilian scene.	
	48	Riding Out to Battle Norman knights ride out, lances raised, gathering speed. Harold is still called king here.	
	49	William Asks Vital for News William questions a scout, asking if he has seen Harold. A third mystery cameo appears.	
	50	Harold Warned of William An English scout reports back, matching news for King Harold. Both sides know the fight is close.	
	51	William Addresses His Troops William gives his famous speech, telling his men to fight, bravely and wisely, he says.	
	52	Death of Leofwine and Gyrth Harold's own brothers fall, fighting with axe and spear, three brothers lost in one day.	
	53	English and French Fall Together Chaos grips the battle, horses tumble into a ditch. Both sides fall together, says the text.	
	54	Odo Rallies the Troops A rumour spreads that William is dead. Bishop Odo charges forward, rallying the wavering young soldiers.	
	55	William Lifts His Helmet William proves he still lives, tipping back his helmet, showing his bare face to the army.	
	56	Count Eustace and the Banner Count Eustace points to William, holding aloft a banner, possibly blessed by the pope himself.	
	57	Death of Harold The most famous image in English history, an arrow, a sword, one king. Exactly what happened is still debated.	
	58	The English Flee The English army breaks and scatters, pursued into the gathering dusk. And here the tapestry simply stops.	

The Missing Scene 59

What happened to the ending?

The Bayeux Tapestry, as it survives today, ends abruptly. The last scene shows the English army breaking and fleeing after the Battle of Hastings, and then the linen simply stops, its story cut short. For an embroidery that otherwise tells its tale so completely, this has puzzled historians for centuries.

Nobody knows for certain why the ending is missing. It may have been damaged and lost through ordinary wear over the centuries, the outer edges of old textiles are usually the first parts to suffer. It may have been deliberately cut away at some point in its long history, though no record survives of when or why. What we do know is that the tapestry was probably always meant to be longer. By comparing the surviving length with the pacing of the story so far, and with the way the tapestry opens, historians estimate that somewhere between one and six metres are missing from the end.

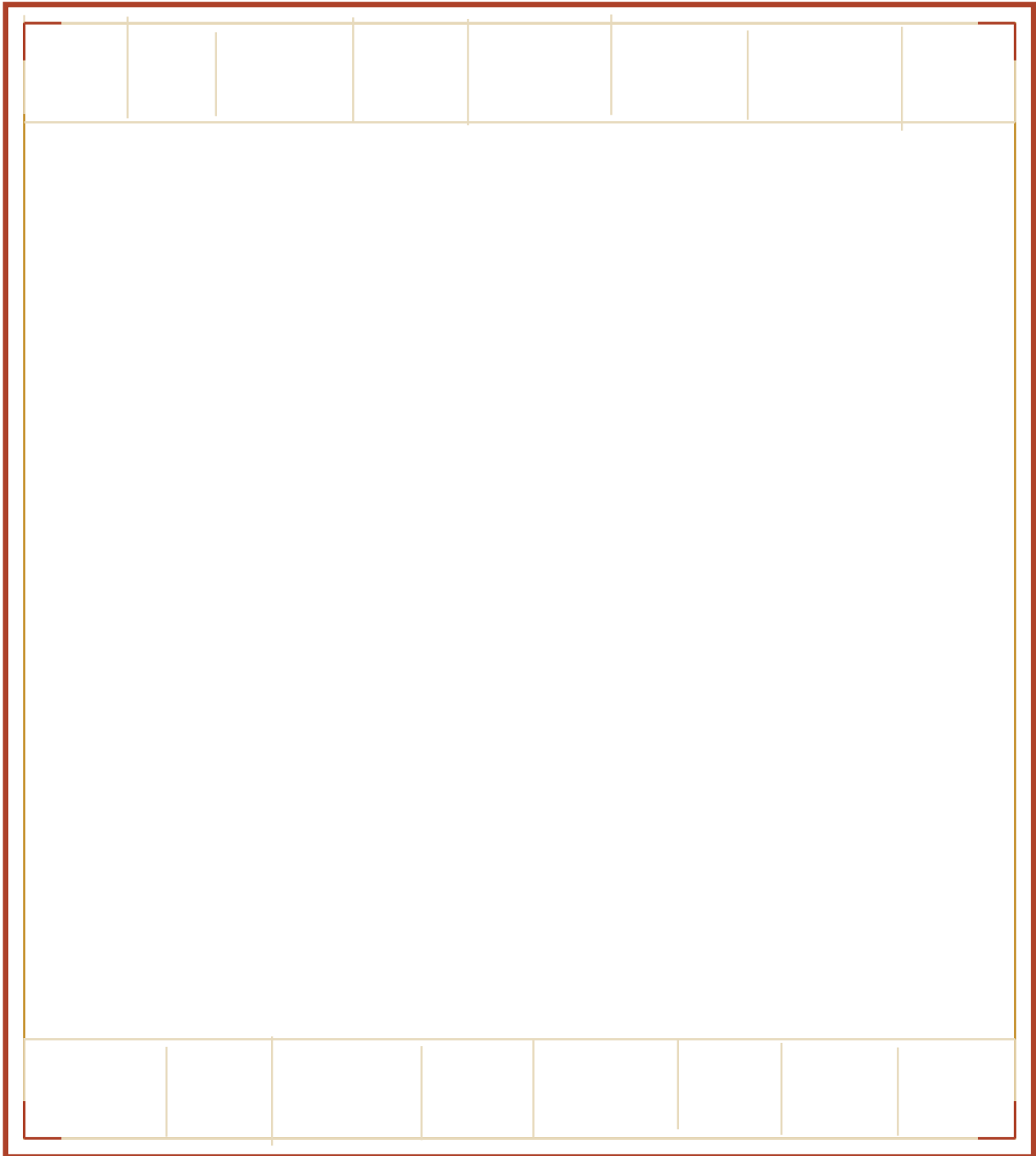
So what would it have shown? Most historians agree on the leading theory: the coronation of William as King of England, crowned in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066. This would create a satisfying mirror with the very first scene of the tapestry, which shows the old King Edward enthroned. Ending with William enthroned in his place would complete the story exactly as it began, one king replaced by another. It is only a theory, but it is the one most experts find the most convincing.

Historians estimate the missing length by working out roughly how much linen each scene takes up on average, then asking how many more scenes a satisfying ending would need. A coronation scene alone would likely need several metres, room for the abbey itself, the assembled nobles, and Archbishop Ealdred performing the ceremony, all in the tapestry's usual unhurried style. Not everyone agrees it stops at the coronation, though. A handful of historians have suggested the original ending went further still, showing William beginning to reward his followers with English land, the process that would reshape the whole country in the years that followed.

There is one more twist. The final caption visible today, reading roughly "and the English turned in flight", is not original at all. Early copies of the tapestry from the 1730s show no such caption in that spot, and it was most likely embroidered on by restorers around 1814, centuries after the tapestry was made. Even the ending we can see has been altered. Whatever the real final scene once showed, it has been gone for a very long time, and unless a lost fragment is ever discovered somewhere, we may never know for certain.

Design Your Own Scene 59

What do you think the missing ending really showed? Draw it here.



Fill the borders above and below with your own creatures and patterns, just like the real tapestry.

The Journey South

The story historians have told for over a century

It's one of the most famous details of 1066. Harold Godwinson destroyed a Viking army at Stamford Bridge, near York, on 25 September. Just two days later, William's fleet landed on the Sussex coast, roughly 250 miles to the south. According to the traditional story, Harold turned his battered army around on the spot and marched them the length of England on foot, roughly 250 miles in around ten days, arriving at Hastings on 14 October with almost no rest at all. This exhausting march has long been used to help explain why Harold lost the battle that followed, a king forced into a rushed, desperate fight against an enemy who had rested and prepared while his own men could barely stand.



The traditional route: Harold's march overland from Stamford Bridge to Hastings, alongside William's crossing from Normandy to Pevensey Bay.

A New Theory Emerges

A 2026 reassessment challenges the old story

In 2026, historian Professor Tom Licence presented research suggesting this famous march may never have happened, at least not entirely on foot. No medieval source actually describes a forced march, the detail seems to trace back to a mistake made by a Victorian historian, long after the battle itself. Licence argues Harold's fleet was still available that autumn, and that part of his army may have sailed south from the Humber estuary around the coast towards the Thames, rather than marching the whole way, giving his men genuine time to rest. The theory goes further still: this fleet may then have pressed on towards Hastings, attempting to come up behind William's own ships and trap the Norman army in a coordinated attack by land and by sea.



The proposed new route: a fleet sailing from the Humber estuary towards the Thames, then on to try to outflank William's ships near Hastings.

Even now, in 2026, nearly a thousand years after the Battle of Hastings, well-established scholars are still uncovering new ways to understand this story. That matters more than it might first seem. History is not just a fixed list of dates and facts to be memorised, it is built, tested, and sometimes rewritten by people willing to look at old evidence with new questions. In today's world, new historical discoveries are being made all the time, a forgotten word in an old chronicle, a fresh comparison with other historical evidence, a source finally read the right way, and each one can quietly reshape what we thought we knew. We may never know the full truth of exactly how Harold's army reached Hastings, on foot, by ship, or some combination of both, and that is precisely why careful research matters so much. Somewhere in an old manuscript, or in a familiar source read with fresh curiosity, there may still be more of this story waiting to be found. The historians who find it are, right now, sitting in classrooms just like yours.

Glossary

Useful words for exploring the tapestry

Housecarl	A professional, highly trained soldier who fought for the English king.
Fyrd	The English part-time army, made up of ordinary landholders called up to fight when needed.
Mail	Armour made of thousands of interlocking metal rings, worn as a knee-length shirt by knights and housecarls alike.
Shield wall	A defensive line of soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder, shields overlapped, the backbone of English infantry.
Kite shield	The long, pointed shield carried by Norman cavalry, protecting the leg while riding, a shield built for mobility.
Round shield	The smaller, sturdier shield carried by English foot soldiers, built to interlock tightly and hold the shield wall firm.
Boss	The raised metal dome at the centre of a round shield, protecting the fist and doubling as a weapon to punch an opponent off balance.
Motte and bailey	A type of early castle: a mound of earth (motte) topped with a tower, next to a walled yard (bailey).
Relic	An object, often a bone, believed to have belonged to a saint. Oaths sworn on relics were considered unbreakable.
Oath	A solemn promise, often sworn on holy relics. Breaking one was considered one of the worst things a person could do.
Earl	A powerful English nobleman who governed a large region on the king's behalf. Harold was Earl of Wessex before he became king.
Duke	A powerful nobleman who ruled a duchy on behalf of a king. William was Duke of Normandy before he became King of England too.
Coronation	The ceremony crowning a new king. Both Harold and William were crowned in Westminster Abbey, less than a year apart.
Embroidery	Stitching a design onto existing cloth. The Bayeux Tapestry is technically an embroidery, not a woven tapestry.
Titulus	The short Latin caption stitched above each scene of the tapestry, naming who is who and explaining what is happening.

Notes

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About This Guide

This scene-spotting guide was created by thebayeuxtapestry.com, an independent guide to the Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Conquest of 1066, built ahead of the tapestry's historic loan to the British Museum.

For the full scene-by-scene guide, with Latin captions and translations for every scene, articles on Harold, William, and the Battle of Hastings, and visitor information for the exhibition, visit us online.

This booklet can also be downloaded at thebayeuxtapestry.com/booklet

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Scan for the full scene-by-scene guide

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