The Feudal System

Introduction

• After winning at Hastings, William had two problems:
1. He needed to bring all the country under his control
2. He needed to get money out of the country

• He solved the first problem with the Feudal System.
• He solved the second problem with the Domesday Book.

Background to the problem: The Harrying of the North

A. Orderic Vitalis was half Norman, half Saxon. He wrote:
"And so the English groaned aloud for their lost liberty and plotted ceaselessly… Some supported Prince Edgar, the young nephew of Edward the Confessor. Some went to Swegn, King of Denmark, and urged him to invade the kingdom of England".

B. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written by Saxon monks. They wrote:
"William gave Northumberland to Earl Robert but the people of Durham massacred him and 900 soldiers. Prince Edgar and the rebels came to York, where William surprised them and drove them out of the city. Then the Danes came with 240 ships and seized the town again, killed hundreds of Normans and burned the castle".

C. Orderic Vitalis continues:
"William came to York only to learn that the Danes had fled. The King repaired the castles, and stopped at nothing to hunt down the rebels. Nowhere had William shown such cruelty. His fury was blind and he punished the innocent along with the guilty. He ordered that all crops, herds and food be burned so that the whole region north of the Humber had nothing to live on. William fell on the English of Yorkshire like a lion…thousands of children, old people, and young men and women died of hunger…I have often praised William in this book, but I can say nothing good about this brutal slaughter. God will punish him".

D. Simeon of Durham was an Anglo-Saxon monk. He wrote:
"There was so great a famine that men ate human flesh and horses, dogs and cats. Some sold themselves into slavery whilst others died on the roads. Corpses rotted in the streets because there was no-one to bury them".

E. William of Malmesbury was an Anglo-Saxon monk: He wrote:
"At times the King was quite severe with the English, because they were so disloyal. This angered him and he took from them first their wealth, then their land and finally, in some cases, their lives".

Tasks:

1. Do you think that the "Harrying of the North" suggests that William was a good King, or a bad King? Explain your answer.
2. Which witness do you think is the most reliable? Consider the arguments for and against each one to help you reach a verdict.

	Reasons why we might trust them*	**Reasons why we might <u>not</u> trust them***
Orderic Vitalis		
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle		
Simeon of Durham		
William of Malmesbury		

***Who** are they? **Why** are they writing? **What** do they say?

The Feudal System

After defeating the Northern rebels, William set up a strict system of government for the whole country called the Feudal System. Elements of this system – with Kings, Lords and Commoners – still remain in place to this very day!

Your teacher will start with a PowerPoint Presentation. You should then use this page to sketch out your own diagram of the Feudal System. For homework, produce a neat, coloured, labelled version on clean paper.

Discussion Point

Does the Feudal system suggest that William was a good or a bad King? Try to see things from two sides!

Extension Task

• How is society organised today? See if you can produce another diagram including yourself, teachers, parents, Prime Minister / President / King / Queen / God etc!

• From this, what has changed since the Norman period? What has stayed the same? Should we keep the monarchy? Why has it lasted so long?

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A PRIMARY SOURCE FROM MEDIEVAL ENGLAND – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1. DESCRIBE in as much detail as you can what is going on in the source.

2. Using your knowledge of the feudal system to help you, EXPLAIN what you think the meaning of the source is.

Add further points from class discussion here: