

# William's changes to the government assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

William I changed little in the government and administration of England'.

How far do you agree? To control his new, and very different country. No drastic changes are evident, as it would appear that William was able to use the basis of the pre-existing Anglo-Saxon government. S. B. Crane's opinion of William's changes to government agrees with this, saying that the early Norman government was an "elaboration rather than innovation".

William was able to employ many different forms of the existing Anglo-Saxon English government and use them differently to his advantage.

William was able to utilize the predominantly Norman royal household (remaining from Edward the Confessor's reign), which was already the centre of government and develop this further by rewarding any Norman who had advised or helped during his conquest of England, therefore increasing the number of people from Norman origin in his court.

By doing this William was able to surround himself with trusted advisors. This itself was not a complete turnaround as there had already been a strong influence of Norman culture in the royal household of Edward the Confessor, who himself had been born in Normandy. The royal household at this time contained the entire king's government, the central governing body of which was called the Curia Regis. The Curia Regis was not a new concept in England; its roots can be found in the Anglo-Saxon Witan.

It would appear that William's Curia Regis emerged from the foundation concepts of the Witan and showed no real administrative difference, and like the household generally, the people in government and high positions were deposed to be replaced by more Normans as William once

again rewarded those who had helped him, placing people he knew within the major roles around him. William also adapted the Anglo-Saxon earldoms which, after the rebellions in 1067-70 proved to be too dangerous and a major threat to William's power, were moved towards cities and became smaller. These new Anglo-Norman earldoms were run predominantly by Normans, with a surviving Anglo-Saxon structure beneath them. A separate part of the king's household was the Scriptorium - the king's writing office which later developed into the Chancery. The Scriptorium originated in the Anglo-Saxon period, from brief research it appears that there was no real change to the structure of the Scriptorium, but it did become a much more organized institution through William's reign as it was used more often due to the documents necessary to ensure Norman propaganda was circulated to rouse support for the new king.

One reason that the Scriptorium came into more use at this time was William's increased use of Writs. Writs were legal documents that originated in the Anglo-Saxon period as official notifications of land grants. William was able to use writs to their full extent, using them not only for land grant but also as notifications of his wishes and proclamations. Slowly they were converted from Anglo-Saxon English to Latin, but the format of them was essentially kept the same as it had in the pre-conquest years.

William's extended use of writs could be seen as a change, but needed to extend their use to gain complete control over his new government. The largest change that William brought to England was that of feudalism, the social structure that relied on men taking oaths, with military service and land ownership at the base and centre of the system. The feudal system

placed the king at the top of the hierarchical structure, with all his vassals (nobles, knights and tenants) directly below him, these vassals held land of the king in return for an oath sworn to the king, promising military service. The vassal was responsible for providing the king with military service supplied from within his fiefdom (plot of land). Feudalism allowed William to efficiently govern his country; without feudalism the Domesday Book would not have been possible to create. Feudalism was able to be maintained and controlled by the building of castles as power bases to control the English population, the whole structure was also headed by an educated, strong and powerful ruler; William which enabled this new social structure to operate functionally throughout England.

Another Norman change William brought to England was the rise of the Chancellor. Originally the chancellor's role was to protect the King's seal used to authenticate all his official documents, but, by the end of William I's reign, this role had increased in importance to become one of the most important members of the king's household. This rise is mostly credited to the fact that during William's there was increased amounts of royal documents created, therefore the chancellor would be more needed to authenticate the king's documents, increasing his workload and importance to the king.

Again the chancellor's role wasn't an innovation of William's as its basic form had existed in Edward's reign, luckily the foundations had already been there for the Norman and William to build upon. One new idea that did appear in William's central government was the role of the Justiciar. The Justiciar was the king's representative while he was in Normandy, essentially ruling

<https://assignbuster.com/williams-changes-to-the-government-assignment/>

England on the king's behalf as a regent. The Justices was a man whom the king could rely upon ND trust, during Williams reign Landfall of Via was mainly appointed as Justices, to ensure the country was still run effectively and smoothly while the king was away.

This was a new role within the English government as England had never needed such a role. This UN-permanent role used only while the king was away in Normandy, did nothing particularly new the Justices appeared only to be to advise the king upon his return (provided there were no national crises) while keeping a watchful eye on the country in the Kings absence. In the Anglo-Saxon period the government had elided upon local governments to run the country as the royal household had been a moving one. Therefore when William conquered England there was already quite a strong network of local governments which William made little changes to.

The main of change appears to be in the role of the sheriff who acted under the tenant of the king. The sheriff had originated from the Shire reeve in the early eleventh century, and his role was to preside over the courts of his shire. This role was the central government's major contact with the localities and was relied upon to keep peace within the smaller communities. The Normal's adapted the role, so that the sheriff was able to collect the taxes within their areas. This helped the Norman to effectively collect taxes while they were developing their control of the country.

Also a significance change was, much like in the central government, the sheriff role came to this was a deliberate attempt to place the country under complete Norman control or were simply awarded to the lower landowners

who had fought in 1066, is difficult to tell, but it does show that the Normans were able to spread their influences out, not only in the central government but also into the localities. This again appears to be William utilizing the already existing Anglo-Saxon governmental structure, and adapting it to suit his own reign.

It seems that William made very few changes to the government of England, but what is evident is he tried to build on the basic structure of the Anglo-Saxons, to keep continuity between his and Edward the Confessor's reign, but unlike the previous Kings William organized them into a structured formal government. Although there were no drastic changes, William was able to fundamentally bring a totally different set of social values which ultimately altered the composition of English society.