The Norman Yoke...

- conquest
- castles
- war & waste
- forest law
- rebels & outlaws
- merrie England
Hastings, 13 October 1066

The day England acquired a new royal dynasty, a new aristocracy, a new Church, a new language, a new ...
Dover burnt

Harold killed
The Conqueror’s footprints

Plotted by the destruction recorded in Domesday Book
Castles of the Conquest

The castle was introduced into England by the Normans, who built them:

‘far and wide throughout the country, and oppressed the wretched people’

(Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)

It has been estimated that possibly 500 castles were built by the end of the eleventh century, an enormous capital investment; but fewer than 100 can be securely documented.
Castles of the Conquest

Domesday Book names the majority of those castles known to have existed by 1086.
Castles of the Conquest

Hastings

Chepstow

Ludlow

Shrewsbury
Genocide in Yorkshire

The Conquest, the rebellions which followed the Conqueror's coronation, and the ferocity with which some were suppressed, laid waste large areas of England.

The infamous ‘harrying of the north’ between 1069 and 1070 was an act of genocide which left much of northern England uninhabited for a generation.

One chronicler, Ordericus Vitalis, wrote of this ‘harrying’:
Genocide in Yorkshire

‘He [the Conqueror] harried the land and burnt homes to ashes. Nowhere else had William shown such cruelty. In his anger he commanded that all crops and herds, chattels and food of every kind, should be brought together and burned to ashes with consuming fire, so that the whole region north of the Humber might be stripped of all means of sustenance.

In consequence, so serious a scarcity was felt in England, and so terrible a famine fell upon the humble and defenceless populace, that more than 100,000 Christian folk of both sexes, young and old, perished of hunger’
The same writer says that this act haunted the Conqueror to his dying day. On his death-bed, he repented:

‘I ... caused the death of thousands by starvation and war, especially in Yorkshire. In a mad fury, I descended on the English of the north like a raging lion, and ordered that all their homes and crops, and all their equipment and furnishings, should be burnt at once; and their great flocks and herds of sheep and cattle slaughtered everywhere. So I chastised a great multitude of men and women with the lash of starvation and, alas, was the cruel murderer of many thousands’
Genocide in Yorkshire

On the basis of recorded waste in Domesday Book, it has been calculated that 15 years after the ‘harrying’ Yorkshire still had only 25% of the men and ploughs there had been on the day in 1066 ‘when King Edward was alive and dead’
Forest Law

Forest law was another oppressive feature of Norman rule. One chronicler, half-Norman himself, described the death of two of the Conqueror's sons in hunting accidents in the New Forest as a just punishment for his excesses committed in the name of the royal sport of hunting:

‘Now, reader, let me explain why the forest ... is called 'new'. That part of the country had been populous in earlier days ... But after William I conquered the realm of England, so great was his love of woods that he laid waste more than 60 parishes, forced the peasants to move to other places, and replaced the men with beasts of the forest so that he might hunt to his heart's content. There he lost two sons, Richard and William Rufus, and his grandson Richard ... by which the Lord plainly showed his anger’ (Ordericus Vitalis).
Domesday Book shows many depopulated areas in what is now the New Forest, where the ploughs and peasants of King Edward's days had been replaced with royal forest by 1086.
Rebels and outlaws
Small wonder then that the forest features largely in myths of the Norman Yoke from the days of Hereward the Wake and Edric the Wild to Robin Hood.
These and other disinherited native nobles fought back against Norman tyranny from the shelter of the forests the Normans had created.
Rebels and outlaws

Edric the Wild - or Edric of the Woods - was, like Robin Hood after him, a disinherited nobleman who took to the forest to fight Norman tyranny.

Edric the Wild features in many Domesday entries.
Rebels and outlaws

The origins of the legend of Robin Hood are unknown; but the Norman Conquest would provide the perfect setting.
Unsurprisingly, nostalgia for the Good Old Days can be detected in Domesday as in this custom which made the Lady of the Manor ‘happy’
one of two jesters named in Domesday (whose quips may have had a bitter edge)
Domesday Book

All this, and much more, is recorded in Domesday Book, the single most valuable source for early medieval history.
Domesday Book

Domesday Book is a major source for the disciplines of:

- Archaeology
- Geography
- Genealogy
- Law
- Linguistics
- Onomastics
- Palaeography
- Philology
- Prosopography
- Topography
Domesday Book

Domesday Book is known and studied worldwide. Scholars from the following countries have published significant work on Domesday Book:

- Australia
- Belgium
- Canada
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Holland
- Japan
- Norway
- Russia
- Sweden
- U.S.A.
- as well as the U.K.

A complete bibliography of Domesday Book would probably number 10,000 publications.
Thank you for watching.