

The size and composition of the Norman and Saxon armies before the Battle of Hastings is difficult for historians to work out. Primary sources have tended to exaggerate the numbers on both sides. Below is an historian's best guess at who fought in the battle.

Harold's Saxon army

Housecarls: 3,000 men

These were the well-trained, experienced full-time fighters of the Saxon army. They wore armour of a chain-mail coat made of iron rings. They also carried a kite-shaped shield and wore iron helmets. They were armed with a mighty battle-axe – capable of killing a horse! They also carried swords, spears or a small throwing axe.

The Fyrd: 5,500 men

These were mostly local, untrained peasant farmers with a duty to defend the country. Only the leaders (the local landowners), would be armed like the Housecarls. The rest had no armour. Some had round, homemade wooden shields and leather helmets. Their weapons varied. Some had axes, but others had only farm tools and anything they could find.

William's Norman army

Infantry: 3,000 men

These were well trained, experienced full-time fighters. They wore armour including chain-mail coats of iron rings, kite-shaped shields and an iron helmets. They were armed with a sword, a spear or an axe.

Cavalry: 2,000 men

These were the best soldiers in the army. They were highly trained full-time fighters. On flat ground, infantry could not stand up to the power of a knight. They wore armour including a chain-mail coat of iron rings, a kite-shaped shield and an iron helmet. The carried a sword, spear or axe. Blunt instruments such as the battle mace were also used. They rode large trained warhorses.

Archers: 800 men

These were highly trained men. They didn't normally wear armour as they needed to be able to move freely, though some did wear leather or iron helmets. Their carried their bow and a quiver of arrows (with a range of up to 100m). Many also carried a small knife or sword.

Key words

Infantry: Soldiers who fight on foot (not on horses!).

Cavalry: Soldiers who fight on horseback.

Fyrd: The old Saxon term for the peasant farmers called up to fight for the king.

Housecarl: The personal bodyguard of a Saxon king.

Tasks

- ❖ Read the information about each group of soldiers carefully. Highlight five key words/phrases about each type of soldier.
- ❖ Use the information to complete this table.

	Harold's Saxon army	William's Norman Army	Who had the advantage?
How many trained , experienced soldiers?			
How many soldiers with armour ?			
How many cavalry ?			
What weapons did soldiers have?			

1. Look at the information in the table. Who do you think had the stronger army? Explain why.

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2. Can you think of any other reasons that gave William or Harold an advantage before the battle started?

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3. Look carefully at the section of the Bayeux tapestry in Source 1 (in the picture pack). Draw arrows to show:

- the Norman and the Saxon armies
- all the different types of weapon being used.

4. Draw your own version of one of the soldiers in either William's or Harold's army. You should label your picture with key features of the soldier's armour and weapons.