THE FEUDAL SYSTEM — A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Creating law and order and making sure that a society's resources are used are important goals for the rulers of any society. In medieval Europe, the system for organising how land would be used and for controlling people was called the **feudal system** or **feudalism**. The leader Charlemagne introduced this system in the eighth century to help him control large areas of land in Gaul (France). Feudalism gradually spread throughout Europe.

Source 6.2.1 explains how the feudal system worked. This system of organisation and control helped countries become stronger and provided people with a sense of protection. It also placed many restrictions and controls on the ways people lived their lives.

FEUDALISM IN ENGLAND

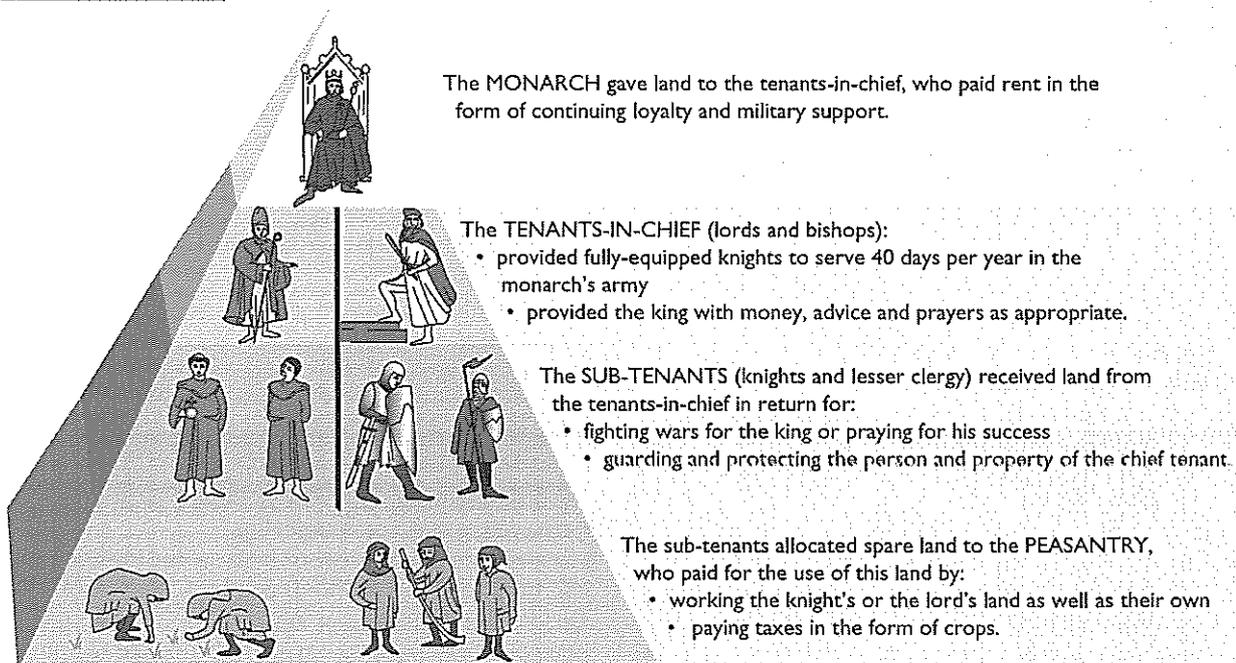Feudalism was introduced into England by William of Normandy (later known as William the Conqueror). He became king after invading England and fighting a major battle to gain the throne in 1066. In keeping with the feudal system, William claimed all of England's land as his own and then divided it up to reward those who had been loyal to him and gain promises of their future support.

William's actions provide a good example of how invasion and a new system of government could change the lives of people already living in that country.
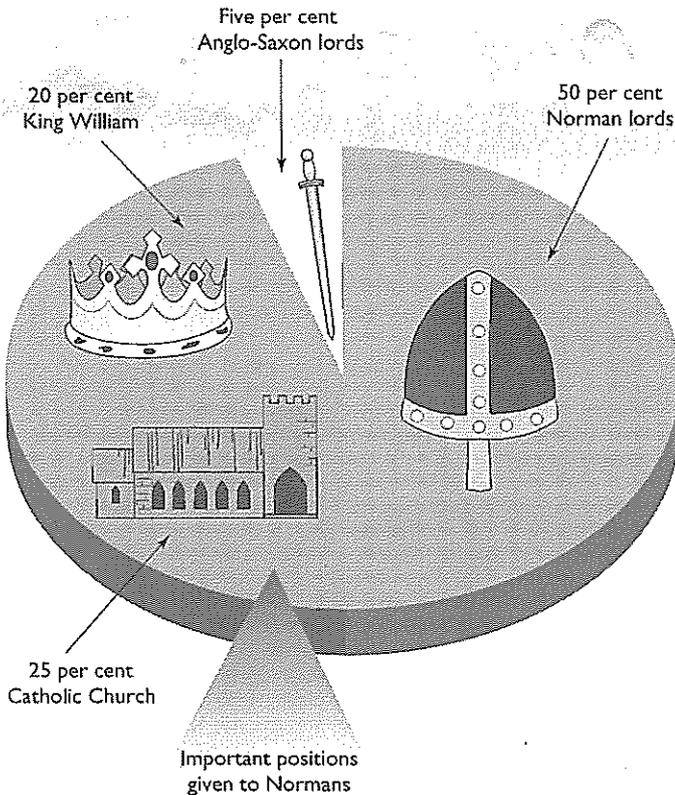
RETROfile

- William of Normandy's native language was French. After he became king of England, French became the official language of England for the next 300 years.
- William's invasion of England is often referred to as the Norman Conquest, as William came from Normandy in France.

Source 6.2.1

The MONARCH gave land to the tenants-in-chief, who paid rent in the form of continuing loyalty and military support.

The TENANTS-IN-CHIEF (lords and bishops):
- provided fully-equipped knights to serve 40 days per year in the monarch's army
- provided the king with money, advice and prayers as appropriate.

The SUB-TENANTS (knights and lesser clergy) received land from the tenants-in-chief in return for:
- fighting wars for the king or praying for his success
- guarding and protecting the person and property of the chief tenant.

The sub-tenants allocated spare land to the PEASANTRY, who paid for the use of this land by:
- working the knight's or the lord's land as well as their own
- paying taxes in the form of crops.

A diagram showing the organisation of medieval society under feudalism

Source 6.2.2

Five per cent
Anglo-Saxon lords

20 per cent
King William

50 per cent
Norman lords

25 per cent
Catholic Church

Important positions
given to Normans

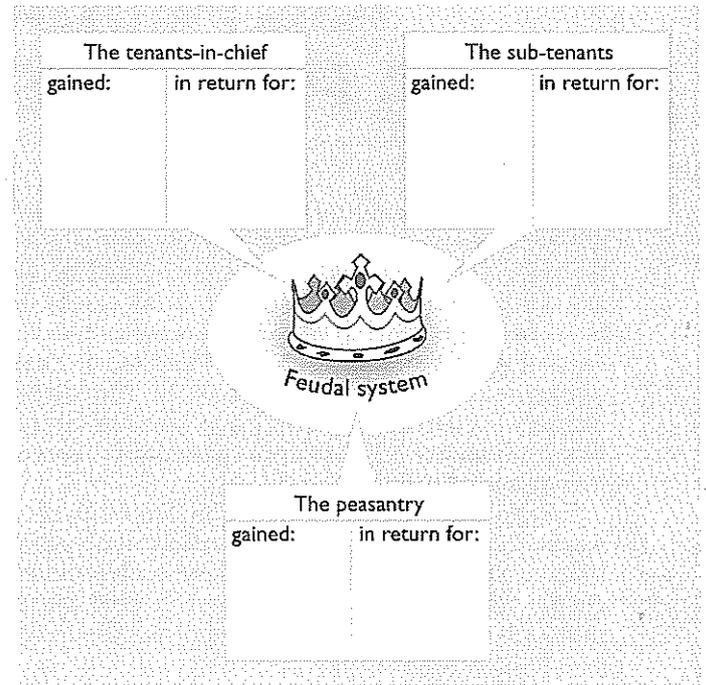A diagram showing how William divided up England after he invaded in 1066

In the medieval period, the amount of land someone owned was the main sign of his or her power and influence. When feudalism was introduced, William's half-brother, Bishop Odo de Conteville, was granted 400 estates. He then divided many of these among other knights who had fought with William. Most of the Anglo-Saxon lords defeated by William's armies lost control of their land.

Activities

Check your understanding

1. (a) What two names are used for the medieval system of organising society?
   (b) Who introduced this system into Europe and England?
   (c) In what centuries did each of these events occur?
   (d) What were the advantages of this system?
2. Complete the following mind map to create your own summary of the feudal system. The key headings are given. Use words and pictures to fill in the details.

Mind map for activity 2

The tenants-in-chief		The sub-tenants	
gained:	in return for:	gained:	in return for:

Feudal system

The peasantry
gained: in return for:

3. What did most groups have in common under the feudal system?

Using sources

1. Use source 6.2.1 to explain how the feudal system helped a king like William to:
   (a) increase his wealth
   (b) increase his military strength.
2. Using the information in the text and sources 6.2.1 and 6.2.2, complete the following table. Write one sentence in each space to show how the introduction of feudalism in England affected each of the groups. Decide for yourself how each group probably felt about William.

Group	Gains	Losses	Attitude to William
The Church			
William's Norman followers			
The Anglo-Saxons			

3. What complaints would you make if you were a peasant living under feudalism and who would you complain to? Give reasons for your answer.

Researching and communicating

Use the 'W' questions (who? what? when? where? why? and how?) to help you find out more about either the Emperor Charlemagne or William the Conqueror. Record your information in a 10–15 line paragraph that provides a brief summary of his life and achievements.