It was changes in landholding that did most to secure Norman control of England. How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

You may wish to use the following in your answer:

* Tenants-in-chief
* Forfeiture

On the one hand, changes in landholdings were central to helping William secure his control of England after 1066. After being crowned King of England, William sought to ensure that no tenant-in-chief had too much power. He oversaw a revolution which would see the Norman aristocracy almost completely replaced by Normans – of his 190 tenants-in-chief, only two were Anglo-Saxon. This would help him secure England, as it would mean that only those loyal to William had power, so would prevent any future Anglo-Saxon resistance. In addition, he changed the very layout of the Anglo-Saxon earldoms to ensure that even his closest followers did not have the power to challenge him. By 1086, the large earldoms like Mercia, Wessex and Northumbria had been completely dismantled and replaced by smaller landholdings. Normans who held land, like Montgomery’s, were separated throughout the Kingdom to prevent power bases resembling earldom. William even disagreed with Ralph de Gael marrying the sister of Roger de Breteuil as it would have meant two families joining. This would have helped him secure England as it would mean that effectively, his followers were divided and weakened – therefore could not directly challenge the king. This would prevent rebellions on the scale of 1069 and made future rebellions easier to crush such as in 1075 as the rebels would be divided across the kingdom.

However; although changes in landholdings may have helped William secure his kingdom they also caused Anglo-Saxon rebellions which threatened this security. In 1068, Morcar and Edwin had risen up against William due to resentment at their landholdinfs becoming smaller; for example Northumbria had been split in two and given to Copsi. Hereward the Wake waged guerrilla war against the Normans as his land had been seized by Normans in 1069.

Another change which helped the Normans maintain control was the use of foresigeture. Anyone who rebelled against the king, including those who had fought with him at Hastings, had to give up their right to land. The same was true for the under tenants of tenants-in-chief: if they acted against their tenants-in-chief, they could their land too. This helped secure England as it meant that control was passed down the feudal hierarchy - at every level there was a deterrent against acting against the king. The threat of losing land and therefore prestige and power was enough to prevent many from rebelling against the king.

In addition; the castles that the Normans introduced to England helped the dominate, Norman elite maintain control of their land. Motte and bailey castles; with their high mottes, wooden palisades and dry moats allowed the Normans to dominate areas of England and to create secure bases. These would have helped the Normans to secure England as not only could they protect them, but they were a symbol that the Normans were here to stay and it is unlikely that the Normans could have kept control without their defensive castles.

Overall – I agree with the statement that land holdings did the most to secure Norman control of England. Although resentment against the changes sparked Anglo-Saxon resentment; William responded to rebellions by intensifying his landholding changes; replacing more Anglo-Saxons with Normans through forfeiture. Castles were very important, but they were garrisoned by troops provided by the tenants-in-chief through knight service – the result of changes in landholding. Land was the key to wealth and power and therefore securing England.

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* Tenants-in-chief
* Forfeiture

On the one hand, changes in landholdings were central to helping William secure his control of England after 1066. He took land off Anglo-Saxons and gave it to his Norman followers. Of 190 tenants-in-chief, only two were Saxons. This would help him secure England, as it would mean that only those loyal to William had power, so would prevent any future Anglo-Saxon resistance. Also, he made earldoms much smaller to stop anyone having more power than him. By 1086, the large earldoms like Mercia, Wessex and Northumbria had been completely dismantled. Normans were separated throughout the Kingdom to prevent power bases resembling earldom. This would have helped him secure England as it would mean that with no land or money there could be no rebellions.

Another change which helped the Normans maintain control was the use of forfeiture. Anyone who rebelled against the king, including those who had fought with him at Hastings, had to give up their right to land. The same was true for the under tenants of tenants-in-chief: if they acted against their tenants-in-chief, they could their land too. This helped secure England as it meant that everyone did as William said. The threat of losing land was enough to stop people rebelling.

Another change was the introduction of knights. Lords had to provide knights for William in return for him letting them use his land. That way, William had lots of knights to use in controlling the English population.

So, overall, I agree with this statement because the changes in landholding were so important in securing Norman control. Forfeiture was only introduced as a result of changes in land, and the knights that helped secure the kingdom were provided through the feudal system which itself was a change in landholdings.