

Who Should Be King in 1066?

Harold Godwineson

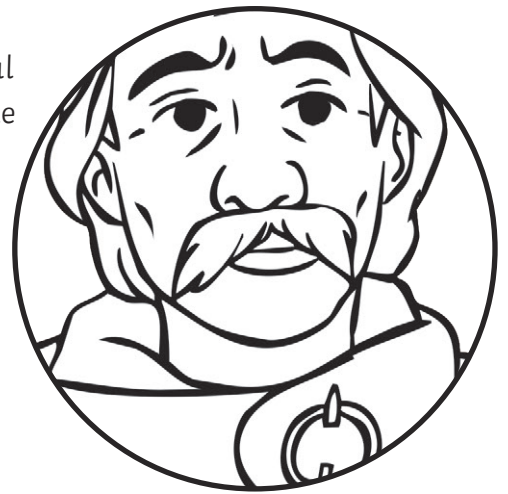
Harold Godwineson was one of five brothers from the most powerful family in England. Between the brothers, they controlled most of the land in England and their sister, Edith, was married to the King, Edward the Confessor.

Although he didn't have royal blood, he was rich and well supported by soldiers. He had links to other royal families in Europe and had experience of fighting Vikings and other foreign threats.

Harold was anti-Norman. He wanted England to remain under the influence and control of the Anglo Saxons.

King Edward made Harold his heir on his deathbed, making any other promise or oath void.

The Normans believed Harold had sworn an oath on a holy relic to support the claim of William of Normandy, however English law at the time believed that a deathbed declaration overrode any other promise that had been made. So, if Harold had sworn to support William as king, King Edward's deathbed declaration cancelled his oath.



William of Normandy

William was Duke of Normandy, a very powerful area of Northern France. William was illegitimate when he was born and was known as 'William the Bastard'. Despite this attitude in Norman times, William's father, the Duke of Normandy, made William his heir; William inherited his title, the Duke of Normandy, when he was very young. William had the support of the French King and his powerful uncle, an Archbishop. Despite this, he was forced to fight for his title and lands from a young age, learning the craft of Medieval leadership. By the age of nineteen, William was in full control of Normandy. This made William an experienced leader.

King Edward the Confessor had very close links to Normandy and had spent most his young life there whilst the Danish Kings were on the throne from 1016-1042. Edward was protected at the Norman Court and enjoyed a good relationship with William's father and William. William believed he had been promised the throne in 1051 on a visit to England. Most of the Courts of Western Europe expected William to be made the heir after Edward died. William was the son of King Edward's cousin, so had royal blood.



In 1064, William's men captured Harold Godwineson in Normandy and thus he made Harold swear an oath on holy bones to support William's claim to the throne when King Edward died. William knew he would need to gain the support of English Earls to become a powerful king and intended to reward them once he was king.

Harald Hardrada

Harald was a Viking King of Norway and many consider him to be one of the last great Viking kings. His name in translation means 'Hard Ruler', and he was a brilliant warrior. Harald had been King of Norway since 1046 so had experience of royal rule.

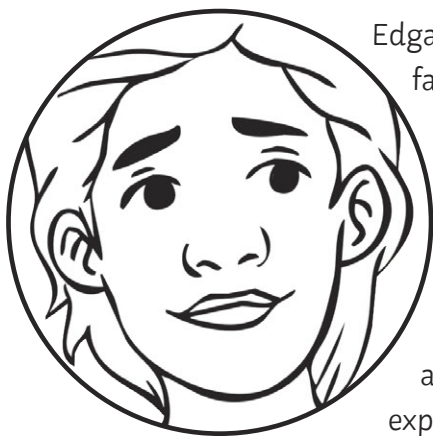
Before Edward the Confessor took the throne in 1042, the English throne had been held by the Viking descendants of King Cnut. Cnut had defeated Edward the Confessor's father on the battlefield and Edward the Confessor was forced into exile. Edward had to flee to France and stayed there from 1016-42. It was only with Edward the Confessor becoming King in 1042 that the line of Viking kings had been stopped, therefore Hardrada was the right heir.

Harald also had the support of Tostig, Harold Godwineson's brother. Tostig and Harold had fallen out a few years before when Tostig was the Earl of Northumberland, a large area who were descended mainly from Viking settlers. Other Earls had staged a rebellion against Tostig and Harold Godwineson sided with the rebellious earls rather than his brother to hold on to his own power. Many saw Harold Godwineson as a traitor, especially Tostig, who encouraged Hardrada to try and gain the English throne.



Edgar Atheling

Edgar was King Edward the Confessor's great nephew and the only surviving blood relation of the King. Edgar was only a young boy when the King died, only twelve or thirteen years old. This made him a weaker choice for the throne than if he had been older. However, children becoming king was not unheard of in these times, so long as they had the right support.



Edgar had been brought to England in 1056 as long lost family. Edgar's father was forced to exile England when King Cnut's forces killed King Edmund Ironside in battle in 1016. King Edmund Ironside was Edgar's grandfather. Edgar and King Edward the Confessor were from this royal line which had only been disrupted due to the Vikings.

Edgar and his parents were protected and lived in the royal court from 1056, although Edgar's father, Edward the Exile, died a few months after arriving. Edgar had spent ten years in England and in the Courts so could expect some support from powerful men there.