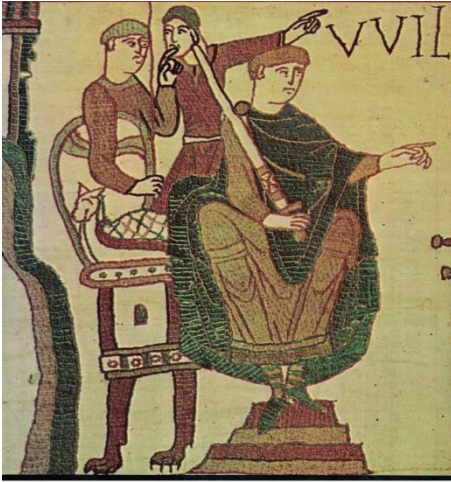


William the Conqueror's wolf cub

By Monica de Knecht



Duke William of Normandy - detail from the Bayeux Tapestry

William, Duke of Normandy, successfully fought, defeated and killed Harold Godwinson, England's short-lived King to claim England for the Normans on 14th October, 1066. His rule was harsh, arbitrary and cruel to the defeated Anglo-Saxons. But by fear, he successfully cemented his hold on the island. His reign was marked by his compilation of the *Domesday Book*, construction of castles, the settling of a new Norman nobility on the lands of the Saxons and a change in the composition of the English clergy. All to the detriment of the Anglo-Saxons he had conquered. It may be said that William turned the *status quo* upside down. The Normans immediately became the ruling aristocrats and the Anglo-Saxons little better than their slaves.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT

In some ways it was the fault of the ditherings of Edward the Confessor, the last Saxon King of England. King Edward had no children, so Duke William, being his first cousin, became the favoured claimant. In fact Edward promised William the throne and made the powerful English earl, Harold Godwinson, promise to swear fealty to William. However, on his deathbed the wavering king named Harold his heir in January 1066 and the Saxon was crowned Harold II.¹ Edward may have thought that as 'possession is 9 points of the law', Harold, once cemented and acknowledged by all the Saxons, would easily be able to hold off any other claimants, especially an alien monarch. He hadn't counted on the Norman's tenacity, fierceness and military skill.



William the Conqueror 1066 - 1087. A.R. Penny 1.15 gms. Bonnet type London. Moneyer AEIJSI. Crowned Bust facing.
REVERSE Cross voided with annulet in centre. North 842. BMC 109. Seaby 1251. Toned. Good. Very fine.
www.fremantles.com Sold for \$1450. October 2005.

However, William's final years were marked by difficulties in his continental domains, troubles with his eldest son, Robert Curthose and threatened invasions by the Danes. He died in September 1087, while leading a campaign in Northern France and was buried in Caen.²

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica

² William's tomb has been disturbed several times since 1087, the first time in 1522 when the grave was opened on orders from the papacy. The intact body was restored to the tomb at that time. In 1562, during the French Wars of Religion, the grave was again opened and the original tombstone of black marble, similar to that of Matilda in the Abbaye aux Dames, was destroyed. William's bones were scattered and lost, with the exception of



London Coins www.londoncoins.co.uk
 Penny Harold II Obverse. PAX. Type S.1186 North 836
 Moneyer CENTPINE ON PILT (Wilton). NVE/VF

Even though William Rufus was his younger son, William favoured him over his rebellious son Robert: Therefore William was left the Kingdom of England and the Dukedom of Normandy went to Robert. Henry, the youngest, got nothing, except a sum of money.³



London Coins www.londoncoins.co.uk
 Penny Harold II PAX. Type S.1186 North 836 Moneyer
 CENTPINE ON PILT (Wilton) Obverse lettering very weak.

ROBERT 'CURTHOSE' – THE ETERNAL REBEL

The episode that ignited Robert's rebellions against his father was the result of a prank played by his brothers William Rufus and Henry, who thought it amusing to empty a full chamber-pot over his head from the upper gallery. The hot tempered Robert was further incited against his father, when William refused to punish his younger sons. The following day, Robert and his followers attempted to seize the Rouen Castle. The siege was a failure and the King ordered their arrest. Robert fled to Flanders, where he was given refuge by his uncle, Robert 1, Count of Flanders. He plundered the Norman Vexin, causing William to ally himself with King Philip 1 of France against his own son. Queen Matilda, who favoured Robert, secretly sent her son money.⁴ She engineered a truce between father and son, which lasted until her death in 1083. William had also dubbed his son 'Curthose', from the Norman-French *courtheuse* 'short stockings'. It was an insulting name and must have further alienated Robert from his father, for William had laughed at his son's short stature.⁵



ME65602 Billon Denier, cf. Roberts 4833, aF, clipped, scratches, Rouen or Bayeux mint, weight 0.600 g., maximum diameter. 18.6 mm.
 OBVERSE fonton with besant over cross, flanked on each side with a pellet over annulet.
 REVERSE NORMAN DVX, cross pattée, pellet in each quarter.
 Very rare. 1070-1080 circa.
 London Mint.

It must have rankled Henry, the youngest, that his father left him no lands, when Robert had been incessantly rebelling; while he, Henry, had always been faithful to his father. To add to his indignation, William Rufus, now King of England and Robert, Duke of Normandy, made an agreement to be each other's heir.

THE CONQUEROR'S BEQUEST – THE BARONS' NIGHTMARE

The division of the Conqueror's lands created political difficulties as most Norman lords held estates on both sides of the Channel. Odo of Bayeux commented: "How can we give proper service to two mutually

one thigh bone. This lone relic was reburied in 1642 with a new marker, which was replaced 100 years later with a more elaborate monument. This tomb was again destroyed during the [French Revolution](#), but was eventually replaced with the current early 19th century marker in white marble. (David Douglas, 1964, William the Conqueror, C.A. University of California Press.

³ Maurice Ashley and Introduction by Antonia Fraser, *The Life and Times of William 1*, George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited and Book Club Associates 1973.

⁴ www.englishmonarchs.co.uk

⁵ (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, chroniclers).



Robert Curthose
William the 1st's eldest son

hostile and distant lords? If we serve Duke Robert well we shall offend his brother William, and he will deprive us of our revenues and honours in England. On the other hand if we obey King William, Duke Robert will deprive us of our patrimonies in Normandy."⁶

The peace between William Rufus and Robert lasted less than a



William II known as William Rufus
King of England Reign 1087 - 1100

year, owing to Robert gaining support from his uncles; Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and Robert, Count of Mortain. They agreed to support their elder nephew against William, in the rebellion of 1088. However, Robert never appeared to help them. Rufus, in retaliation, invaded Normandy in 1091, taking large areas of the Dukedom.



William II Rufus (1087 - 1100). AR penny (20mm. 1.44 gm. 12h). Voided cross type (BMCii), Winchester (Winchester) Mint. Wigmund Moneyer. Struck circa 1092 - 1095 +PILLELM, crowned and draped facing bust, stars to left and right / REV: +PIMIND ON PIN(C). Voided cross potent with annulet at centre, all over cross annuletée in saltire. Harvey 1251 (dies A/a); SCBI-; BMC-; North 855, SCBC 1260. Good VF, toned. Rare. (Sold for \$5250) Ref: The Coin Shop 978937. Norman.

However they both decided to join together as their youngest brother, Henry; taking advantage of their feuding, had taken Maine and Cotentin. After a fifteen-day siege, Henry was forced to capitulate and surrender the Cotentin. Robert then embarked for the Holy Land on the First Crusade.⁷

WILLIAM II's REIGN William Rufus (meaning 'the Red') was not a popular King, either with the conquered Saxons, or his own

barons. He earned a reputation as a brutal and corrupt tyrant.⁸

William also faced hostility from Malcolm III, King of the Scots, to acknowledge his overlordship. Malcolm revolted in November, 1093, but William's forces crushed his army near Alnwick and Malcolm was



Great Seal of King William Rufus

⁶ Robert Curthose in spartacus-educational.com

⁷ ibid

⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica



Henry 1 King of England 1100 - 1135).

killed. After this William maintained the Scottish Kings as vassals.

William had very difficult relations with the Church. He kept bishoprics vacant to make use of their revenues and had numerous arguments with Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093. When Anselm left for Rome in 1097 to seek the advice of the Pope, William seized his estates.⁹

THE HUNTING ACCIDENT? On 2nd August, 1100, William died when he was shot by an arrow, while out hunting in the New Forest. It was accepted as an accident, but could have been an assassination. It was always suggested that his alleged slayer, Walter Tirel, was acting under orders from William's younger brother, Henry; as he didn't waste time by seizing the throne of England as Henry the 1st.¹⁰

The excuse was that a stag had been sighted and the King had been slain by mistake. After this, Rufus' body was placed 'on a cart and conveyed to the cathedral at Winchester....blood dripped from the body all the way. He was buried within the tower. The next year, the tower fell down. '..... "He was a man much pitied by the clergy... he had a soul which they could not save..... He was loved by his soldiers, but hated by the people because he caused them to be plundered."'¹¹

To some chroniclers, it seemed as if the evil King had met his end, through an "Act of God".

However.....the obvious suggestion that one of William's many enemies may have had a hand in this extraordinary event has been repeatedly made. Even chroniclers of the time point out that Walter was a brilliant bowman and unlikely to make such a hasty, errant shot. Henry took advantage straight away. His brother Robert was away at the Crusades and



Inscription on 3 sides reads. "Here stood the oak tree on which an arrow shot by Sir Walter Tyrell at a stag, glanced and struck King William the second surnamed Rufus on the breast of which he instantly died on the second day of August, 1100".

William had no issue. This led to the rumour that he was also a homosexual, which would also, at that time, add to his litany of crimes. Henry was also hot-headed, like his two brothers and once 'threw a man off a tower to his death.'¹² .On the other hand, fratricide "was

⁹ William II in bbc.co.uk

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ W.C. Hollister, The Strange Death of William Rufus, *Speculum Journal* 1973 48.4 637 -653.

¹²W.C. Hollister, *Henry 1* – Yale University, 2001, p.73



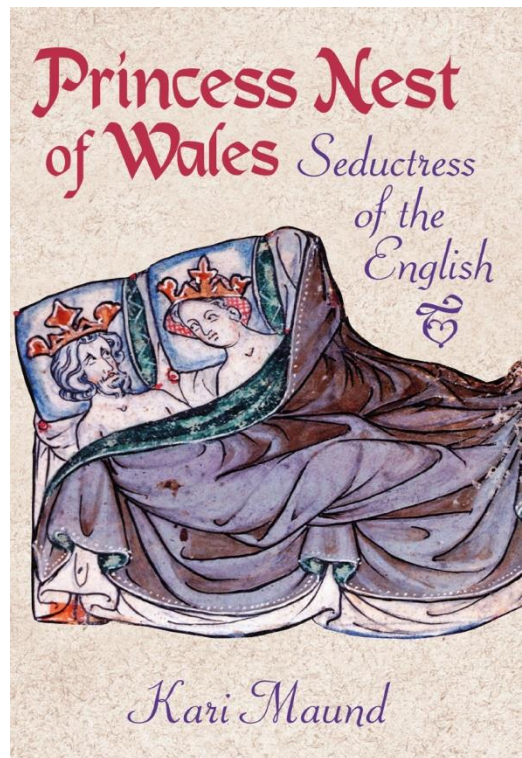
Henry the 1st , AR Penny, Colchester Mint; moneyer Aelfsig. Ca. 1102; Crowned bust left; trefoil tipped sceptre before head/REV. + IEFISI ON COLEC, cross fleurée, annulet in centre. North 858.SCBC 1263A

then regarded as a particularly horrible crime¹³
¹⁴Abbot Suger, another chronicler, was Tirel's friend and sheltered him in his French exile. (Henry must have exiled him, in punishment for the 'accident', to make out that he was horrified by his brother's death.) Curiously, the Abbot alleged that Tirel 'solemnly swore that on the day in question, he was not in the part of the forest where the King was hunting, nor ever saw him in the forest at all' The clues in this 'cold case' certainly point to another alleged killer. Is it possible that it was Henry, himself? Of course this historical murder case will probably never be solved.

HENRY 1 IMPRISONMENT OF ROBERT AND REIGN

At this time, Robert Curthose was journeying home from the Crusades. When he came home, he immediately claimed that he should be King of England, on the basis of the agreement with Rufus of 1087. In 1101, he crossed the Channel with an army and landed at Portsmouth in July. Robert headed towards London, but was intercepted by Henry at Alton in Hampshire. Robert was persuaded to renounce his claim to England, in return for a pension of 3000 marks a year and the abandonment of any claim on Henry's part, to the Dukedom of Normandy.¹⁵

Henry was known as 'Henry Beauclerc', meaning fine scholar; as Henry, being the youngest son, had been educated in latin and the liberal arts, which pointed to the premise that William may have possibly meant him to be a "Prince of the Church" – a cardinal or even a Pope, since it was not envisaged that he could ever be King of England, with two brothers in the way. Henry married Matilda of Scotland by whom he had two children, William and Matilda. However, he had a large number of mistresses; at least six of whom we know by name; Gieva de Tracy, Ansfride, Edith FitzForne, Princess Nest ferch Rhys of Wales and Isabel de Beaumont.¹⁶



¹³ C. Brooke, From Alfred to Henry II, 1961, Sphere Edition, p. 167.

¹⁴ The Rufus Stone was erected by William Sturgess Bourne, Warden, but it replaced an earlier stone put up by John Lord Delaware in 1745. It is a very simple monument, a slender pillar with three sides. Despite its name, it is not a stone, but is made of cast iron. We can only assume that the original 18th century Rufus Stone was indeed made of stone that deteriorated so badly it had to be replaced, and sensibly the replacement was made of more durable iron. Britainexpress.com

¹⁵ Henry 1 in bbc.co.uk

¹⁶ Kari Maund, 'Princess Nest of Wales', History Press, 2007

These were the women by whom he had numerous illegitimate children, who were completely barred from the line of succession.

Again, the peace between the brothers was short-lived and Henry invaded the Duchy of Normandy in 1105 and 1106, finally defeating Robert at the battle of Tinchebray. To make sure that Robert never rebelled again, Henry kept him imprisoned for the rest of his life. He was first imprisoned in Devizes Castle for twenty years, before being moved to Cardiff. He died on 3rd February, 1134. He was buried in the abbey church of St. Peter in Gloucester, which subsequently became Gloucester Cathedral.



Henry 1 Cut AR halfpenny. Ca 1107 AD moneyer Sawulf at Salisbury mint. 0.62 gr. +HEN[RIC REX], crowned bust three quarters right with sceptre and three stars in field/ REV. +SAP{ }SAL, cross pattee over saltire with annulets at the end of each limb and star in angles. The moneyer apparently unrecorded for Salisbury. S. 1267

HENRY – A SINGULAR BUSINESSMAN

Henry, as King was considered to be harsh but effective. He cunningly manipulated the barons in England and Normandy. In England, he drew on the existing Anglo-Saxon system of justice, local government and taxation, but also strengthened it with additional institutions, including the Royal Exchequer and itinerant justices. Normandy was also governed through a growing system of justices and an exchequer. Many of the officials who ran



Seal of Matilda of Scotland Queen Consort of Henry 1 of England

Henry's system were 'new

men' of obscure backgrounds rather than families of high status. These men rose through the ranks as administrators. Possibly Henry felt they would be more loyal than some of his barons.

For the first time, proper records of money paid and received were kept. Henry was also mighty interested and concerned for the state of the coinage. In about 1108, he ordered that all new coins should be cut or 'snicked' on the edge to show that they were not silver plated forgeries, but indeed solid silver; as people had been bending and breaking coins to detect forgeries. At about the same time round half pennies were issued for the 1st time since the 10th century, to end the practice of cutting pennies in half to make half pennies.



COIN OF TOTNES MINT MADE AND 'SNICKED' ABOUT 1110

At Christmas 1124, all of the English moneyers were summoned to Winchester, where most of them were castrated and had their right hand amputated, on Henry the 1st orders. He seems to have suspected some of malpractice and acted with typical ruthlessness. Some of the moneyers escaped this harsh punishment by paying enormous fines.¹⁷

Many recent finds of hoards of coins of Henry 1 are cut halfpennies, showing

¹⁷ Fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk on the chapters about the Norman 3.3

they were common in everyday use.¹⁸

Henry encouraged ecclesiastical reform, but became embroiled in a serious dispute in 1101 with Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, which was resolved by compromise on both sides, in 1105. He supported the Cluniac Order and played a major role in the selection of the senior clergy in England and Normandy.¹⁹

THE 'WHITE SHIP' TRAGEDY AND THE DEATH OF HENRY.

In November 1120, Henry's only legitimate male heir, William died by drowning in the *White Ship*. It is said that during the remaining fifteen years of Henry's life, he never smiled again. Possibly an overstatement. However,

as the parent of a beloved tragically deceased child, any joyful occasion or merry moment in Henry's life may well have been overshadowed by profound grief and the bitterness of regret.²⁰



LAMPREY PIE



**Henry the 1st (1100 - 35).
OBVERSE. Silver Pax
Penny, crowned and draped,
bust facing, annulet &
trefoil to left and right
North 859.**

Now he only had a legal daughter Matilda, to hold the 'fort', as it were, against a horde of barons, both in England and Normandy. Therefore as his first wife had died, he married a second time, Adeliza of Louvain, in desperate hope of siring another son; but their marriage was childless. He therefore declared his daughter, Empress Matilda, his heir and married



**Henry the 1st (1100 - 35)
REVERSE. PAX between
two lines, pairs of annulets
above and below, all in
circle. North 859**

her to Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou. But the relationship between the couple and the King became very strained and fighting broke out along the border with Anjou. Henry died on 1st December 1135, after a week of illness, after eating his favourite lamprey pie.²¹ The chroniclers blamed it on his greediness for overeating; but most historians believe it was food poisoning

.Despite his plans for Matilda, the King was succeeded by his nephew, Stephen of Blois, as Matilda's son, Henry, was only a toddler. This resulted in a period of civil war, known as the *Anarchy*, where England suffered and bled; after which Matilda and Geoffrey's son, Henry II succeeded to the throne in 1154 and started the long reign of the Plantagenets.

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ wikipedia

²⁰ The Angevin World site on The King who never smiled again.

²¹ A sea lamprey is a long scale-less river fish which looks very much like an eel.



Stephen and Matilda Images from the *Archaeology Journal* July/August 2018 *The civil war that divided England for 20 years.*

So there we have it, William, Duke of Normandy, known as the Conqueror created a dynasty that only lasted from 1066 to 1135. It was a violent, fierce and punishing time, where egos predominated from every side of this Norman family. Although William ruled the Saxons with an iron fist, he could not control his own sons, especially Robert. When he

died, brother turned against brother and the barons took sides. It is ironic that when Henry II became King in 1154, he too, had to battle against his own sons, Henry, Geoffrey, Richard and John and his Queen Eleanor. When they died, the fight between the surviving brothers, Richard the Lionheart and “Bad King John” became legendary in the myths of Robin Hood. The fighting continued throughout the whole reign of the Plantagenets, culminating in the Wars of the Roses between the Red Rose (House of Lancaster) and the White Rose (House of York). It’s amazing that with all this rebellion and civil strife, the House of Plantagenet lasted over 400 years.

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