

Geoffrey Plantagenet



Born: 24 Aug 1113 FR

Married: Empress Matilda

Died: 7 Sep 1151 FR

Parents: Fulk V of Anjou & Eremburga of Maine

Geoffrey V (24 August 1113 – 7 September 1151), called **the Handsome** (French: *le Bel*) and **Plantagenet**, was the Count of Anjou, Touraine, and Maine by inheritance from 1129 and then Duke of Normandy by conquest from 1144. By his marriage to the Empress Matilda, daughter and heiress of Henry I of England, Geoffrey had a son, Henry Curtmantle, who succeeded to the English throne and founded the Plantagenet dynasty to which Geoffrey gave his nickname.

Geoffrey was the eldest son of Fulk V of Anjou and Eremburga of La Flèche, heiress of Elias I of Maine. Geoffrey received his nickname for the yellow sprig of broom blossom (*genêt* is the French name for the *genista*, or broom shrub) he wore in his hat as a badge. King Henry I of England, having heard good reports on Geoffrey's talents and prowess, sent his royal legates to Anjou to negotiate a marriage between Geoffrey and his own daughter, Matilda. Consent was obtained from both parties, and on 10 June 1128 the fifteen-year-old Geoffrey was knighted in Rouen by King Henry in preparation for the wedding. Interestingly, there was no opposition to the marriage from the Church, despite the fact that Geoffrey's sister was the widow of Matilda's brother (only son of King Henry) which fact had been used to annul the marriage of another of Geoffrey's sisters to the Norman pretender William Clito.

On 17 June 1128 Geoffrey married Empress Matilda, the daughter and heiress of King Henry I of England, by his first wife, Edith of Scotland and widow of Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor. The marriage was meant to seal a peace between England/Normandy and Anjou. She was eleven years older than Geoffrey, very proud of her status as an Empress (as opposed to being a mere Countess). Their marriage was a stormy one with frequent long separations, but she bore him three sons and survived him.

The year after the marriage Geoffrey's father left for Jerusalem (where he was to become king), leaving Geoffrey behind as count of Anjou. John of Marmoutier describes Geoffrey as handsome, red-headed, jovial, and a great warrior; however, Ralph of Diceto alleges that his charm concealed his cold and selfish character.

When King Henry I died in 1135, Matilda at once entered Normandy to claim her inheritance. The border districts submitted to her, but England chose her cousin Stephen of Blois for its king, and Normandy soon followed suit. The following year, Geoffrey gave Ambrières, Gorron, and Chatillon-sur-Colmont to Juhel de Mayenne, on condition that he help obtain the inheritance of Geoffrey's wife. In 1139 Matilda landed in England with 140 knights, where she was besieged at Arundel Castle by King Stephen. In the "Anarchy" which ensued, Stephen was captured at Lincoln in February, 1141, and imprisoned at Bristol. A legate council of the English church held at Winchester in April 1141 declared Stephen deposed and proclaimed Matilda "Lady of the English". Stephen was subsequently released from prison and had himself recrowned on the anniversary of his first coronation.

During 1142 and 1143, Geoffrey secured all of Normandy west and south of the Seine, and, on 14 January 1144, he crossed the Seine and entered Rouen. He assumed the title of Duke of Normandy in the summer of 1144. In 1144, he founded an Augustine priory at Chateau-l'Ermitage in Anjou. Geoffrey held the duchy until 1149, when he and Matilda conjointly ceded it to their son, Henry, which cession was formally ratified by King Louis VII of France the following year.

Geoffrey also put down three baronial rebellions in Anjou, in 1129, 1135, and 1145-1151. He was often at odds with his younger brother, Elias, whom he had imprisoned until 1151. The threat of rebellion slowed his progress in Normandy, and is one reason he could not intervene in England. In 1153, the Treaty of Westminster allowed Stephen should remain King of England for life and that Henry, the son of Geoffrey and Matilda should succeed him.

Geoffrey died suddenly on September 7, 1151. According to John of Marmoutier, Geoffrey was returning from a royal council when he was stricken with fever. He arrived at Château-du-Loir, collapsed on a couch, made bequests of gifts and charities, and died. He was buried at St. Julien's Cathedral in Le Mans France. Geoffrey and Matilda's children were:

1. Henry II of England (1133-1189)
2. Geoffrey, Count of Nantes (1 June 1134 Rouen- 26 July 1158 Nantes) died unmarried and was buried in Nantes
3. William, Count of Poitou (1136-1164) died unmarried

Geoffrey also had illegitimate children by an unknown mistress (or mistresses): Hamelin; Emme, who married Dafydd Ab Owain Gwynedd, Prince of North Wales; and Mary, who became a nun and Abbess of Shaftesbury and who may be the poetess Marie de France. Adelaide of Angers is sometimes sourced as being the mother of Hamelin.

The first reference to Norman heraldry was in 1128, when Henry I of England knighted his son-in-law Geoffrey and granted him a badge of gold lions (or leopards) on a blue background. (A gold lion may already have been Henry's own badge.) Henry II used two gold lions and two lions on a red background are still part of the arms of Normandy. Henry's son, Richard I, added a third lion to distinguish the arms of England.

References

- John of Marmoutier
- Jim Bradbury, "Geoffrey V of Anjou, Count and Knight", in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood III*
- Charles H. Haskins, "Normandy Under Geoffrey Plantagenet", *The English Historical Review*, volume 27 (July 1912), pp. 417-444