

King Henry I of England



Born: Sep 1068 Yourkshire, ENG

Married: Matilda Atheling

Died: 1 Dec 1135 FRA

Parents: William I the Conqueror & Matilda of Scotland

Henry I (c. 1068/1069 – 1 December 1135) was the fifth son of William I the Conqueror and the first born in England after the Norman Conquest of 1066. He succeeded his elder brother William II as King of England in 1100 and defeated his eldest brother, Robert Curthose, to become Duke of Normandy in 1106. He was called **Beauclerc** for his scholarly interests and **Lion of Justice** for refinements which he brought about in the rudimentary administrative and legislative machinery of the time.

Henry's reign is noted for its political opportunism. His succession was confirmed while his brother Robert was away on the First Crusade and the beginning of his reign was occupied by wars with Robert for control of England and Normandy. He successfully reunited the two realms again after their separation on his father's death in 1087. Upon his succession he granted the baronage a Charter of Liberties, which formed a basis for subsequent challenges to rights of kings and presaged the Magna Carta, which subjected the King to law.

The rest of Henry's reign was filled with judicial and financial reforms. He established the biannual Exchequer to reform the treasury. He used itinerant officials to curb abuses of power at the local and regional level, garnering the praise of the people. The differences between the English and Norman populations began to break down during his reign and he himself married a daughter of the old English royal house. He made peace with the church after the disputes of his brother's reign, but he could not smooth out his succession after the disastrous loss of his eldest son William in the wreck of the White Ship. His will stipulated that he was to be succeeded by his daughter, the Empress Matilda, but his stern rule was followed by a period of civil war known as the Anarchy.

Early life

Henry was born between May 1068 and May 1069, probably in Selby, Yorkshire in the north east of England. His mother, Queen Matilda, was descended from Alfred the Great (but not through the main West Saxon Royal line). Queen Matilda named the infant Prince Henry, after her uncle, Henry I of France. As the youngest son of the family, he was almost certainly expected to become a Bishop and was given rather more extensive schooling than was usual for a young nobleman of that time. The Chronicler William of Malmesbury asserts that Henry once remarked that an illiterate King was a crowned ass. He was certainly the first Norman ruler to be fluent in the English language.

William I's third son Richard had pre-deceased his father by being killed in an hunting accident in the New Forest so, upon his death in 1087, William bequeathed his dominions to his three surviving sons in the following manner:

- Robert received the Duchy of Normandy and became Duke Robert II
- William Rufus received the Kingdom of England and became King William II

- Henry Beauclerc received 5,000 pounds of silver

The Chronicler Orderic Vitalis reports that the old King had declared to Henry: "*You in your own time will have all the dominions I have acquired and be greater than both your brothers in wealth and power.*"

Henry tried to play his brothers off against each other but eventually, wary of his devious manoeuvring, they acted together and signed an Accession Treaty. This sought to bar Prince Henry from both Thrones by stipulating that if either King William or Duke Robert died without an heir, the two dominions of their father would be reunited under the surviving brother.

Seizing the throne of England **English Royalty House of Normandy Henry I** Matilda, Countess of Anjou William Adelin Robert, Earl of Gloucester

When, on 2 August 1100, William II was killed by an arrow in yet another hunting accident in the New Forest, Duke Robert had not yet returned from the First Crusade. His absence, along with his poor reputation among the Norman nobles, allowed Prince Henry to seize the Royal Treasury at Winchester, Hampshire, where he buried his dead brother. Henry was accepted as King by the leading Barons and was crowned three days later on 5 August at Westminster Abbey. He secured his position among the nobles by an act of political appeasement: he issued a Charter of Liberties which is considered a forerunner of the Magna Carta.

First marriage

On 11 November 1100 Henry married Edith, daughter of King Malcolm III of Scotland. Since Edith was also the niece of Edgar Atheling and the great-granddaughter of Edward the Confessor's paternal half-brother Edmund Ironside, the marriage united the Norman line with the old English line of Kings. The marriage greatly displeased the Norman Barons, however, and as a concession to their sensibilities Edith changed her name to Matilda upon becoming Queen. The other side of this coin, however, was that Henry, by dint of his marriage, became far more acceptable to the Anglo-Saxon populace.

The chronicler William of Malmesbury described Henry thus: "*He was of middle stature, greater than the small, but exceeded by the very tall; his hair was black and set back upon the forehead; his eyes mildly bright; his chest brawny; his body fleshy.*"

Conquest of Normandy

In the following year, 1101, Robert Curthose attempted to seize the crown by invading England. In the Treaty of Alton, Robert agreed to recognise his brother Henry as King of England and return peacefully to Normandy, upon receipt of an annual sum of 2000 silver marks, which Henry proceeded to pay.

In 1105, to eliminate the continuing threat from Robert Curthose and the drain on his fiscal resources from the annual payment, Henry led an expeditionary force across the English Channel.

Battle of Tinchebray

On the morning of the 28 September 1106, exactly 40 years after William had landed in England, the decisive battle between his two sons, Robert Curthose and Henry Beauclerc, took place in the small village of Tinchebray. This combat was totally unexpected and unprepared. Henry and his army were marching south from Barfleur on their way to Domfront and Robert was marching with his army from Falaise on their way to Mortain. They met at the crossroads at Tinchebray and the running battle which ensued was spread out over several kilometres. The site where most of the fighting took place is the village playing field today. Towards evening Robert tried to retreat but was captured by Henry's men at a place three kilometres (just under two miles) north of

Tinchebray where a farm named "Prise" (taken) stands today on the D22 road. The tombstones of three knights are nearby on the same road.

King of England and Ruler of Normandy

After Henry had defeated his brother's Norman army at Tinchebray he imprisoned Robert, initially in the Tower of London, subsequently at Devizes Castle and later at Cardiff. One day whilst out riding Robert attempted to escape from Cardiff but his horse was bogged down in a swamp and he was recaptured. To prevent further escapes Henry had Robert's eyes burnt out. Henry appropriated the Duchy of Normandy as a possession of the Kingdom of England and reunited his father's dominions. Even after taking control of the Duchy of Normandy he doesn't take the title of Duke, he chooses to control it as the King of England.

In 1113, he attempted to reduce difficulties in Normandy by betrothing his eldest son, William Adelin, to the daughter of Fulk of Jerusalem (also known as Fulk V), Count of Anjou, then a serious enemy. They were married in 1119. Eight years later, after William's untimely death, a much more momentous union was made between Henry's daughter, (the former Empress) Matilda and Fulk's son Geoffrey Plantagenet, which eventually resulted in the union of the two Realms under the Plantagenet Kings.

Activities as a King

Henry's need for finance to consolidate his position led to an increase in the activities of centralized government. As King, Henry carried out social and judicial reforms, including:

- issuing the Charter of Liberties
- restoring the laws of Edward the Confessor.

Between 1103 and 1107 Henry was involved in a dispute with Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Paschal II in the investiture controversy which was settled in the Concordat of London in 1107. It was a compromise. In England, a distinction was made in the King's chancery between the secular and ecclesiastical powers of the prelates. Employing the distinction, Henry gave up his right to invest his bishops and abbots, but reserved the custom of requiring them to come and do homage for the "temporalities" (the landed properties tied to the episcopate), directly from his hand, after the bishop had sworn homage and feudal vassalage in the ceremony called *commendatio*, the commendation ceremony, like any secular vassal.

Henry was also known for some brutal acts. He once threw a traitorous burgher named Conan Pilatus from the tower of Rouen; the tower was known from then on as "Conan's Leap". In another instance that took place in 1119, Henry's son-in-law, Eustace de Pacy, and Ralph Harnec, the constable of Ivry, exchanged their children as hostages. When Eustace blinded Harnec's son, Harnec demanded vengeance. King Henry allowed Harnec to blind and mutilate Eustace's two daughters, who were also Henry's own grandchildren. Eustace and his wife, Juliane, were outraged and threatened to rebel. Henry arranged to meet his daughter at a parley at Breteuil, only for Juliane to draw a crossbow and attempt to assassinate her father. She was captured and confined to the castle, but escaped by leaping from a window into the moat below. Some years later Henry was reconciled with his daughter and son-in-law.

Legitimate children

He had two children by Matilda (Edith), who died on 1 May 1118 at the palace of Westminster. She was buried in Westminster Abbey.

1. Matilda. (c. February 1102 – 10 September 1167). She married firstly Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor, and secondly, Geoffrey V, Count of Anjou, having issue by the second.
2. William Adelin, (5 August 1103 – 25 November 1120). He married Matilda (d.1154), daughter of Fulk V, Count of Anjou.

Second marriage

On 29 January 1121 he married Adeliza, daughter of Godfrey I of Leuven, Duke of Lower Lotharingia and Landgrave of Brabant, but there were no children from this marriage. Left without male heirs, Henry took the unprecedented step of making his barons swear to accept his daughter Empress Matilda, widow of Henry V, the Holy Roman Emperor, as his heir.

Death and legacy

Henry visited Normandy in 1135 to see his young grandsons, the children of Matilda and Geoffrey. He took great delight in his grandchildren, but soon quarrelled with his daughter and son-in-law and these disputes led him to tarry in Normandy far longer than he originally planned.

Henry died on 1 December 1135 of food poisoning from eating "a surfeit of lampreys" (of which he was excessively fond) at Saint-Denis-en-Lyons (now Lyons-la-Forêt) in Normandy. His remains were sewn into the hide of a bull to preserve them on the journey, and then taken back to England and were buried at Reading Abbey, which he had founded fourteen years before. The Abbey was destroyed during the Protestant Reformation. No trace of his tomb has survived, the probable site being covered by St James' School. Nearby is a small plaque and a large memorial cross stands in the adjoining Forbury Gardens.

Although Henry's barons had sworn allegiance to his daughter as their Queen, her gender and her remarriage into the House of Anjou, an enemy of the Normans, allowed Henry's nephew Stephen of Blois, to come to England and claim the throne with popular support.

The struggle between the former Empress and Stephen resulted in a long civil war known as the Anarchy. The dispute was eventually settled by Stephen's naming of Matilda's son, Henry Plantagenet, as his heir in 1153

Illegitimate children

King Henry is famed for holding the record for the largest number of acknowledged illegitimate children born to any English king, with the number being around 20 or 25. He had many mistresses, and identifying which mistress is the mother of which child is difficult. His illegitimate offspring for whom there is documentation are:

1. Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester. Often, probably incorrectly, said to have been a son of Sybil Corbet. His mother may have been a member of the Gai/Gay/Gayt family.
2. Maud FitzRoy, married Conan III, Duke of Brittany
3. Constance FitzRoy, married Richard de Beaumont
4. Mabel FitzRoy, married William III Gouet
5. Aline FitzRoy, married Matthieu I of Montmorency
6. Gilbert FitzRoy, died after 1142. His mother may have been a sister of Walter de Gand.
7. Emma, born c. 1138; married Gui de Laval, Lord Laval. [Uncertain, born 2 years after Henry died.]

Information from online research at: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)

HENRY I

1100-1135

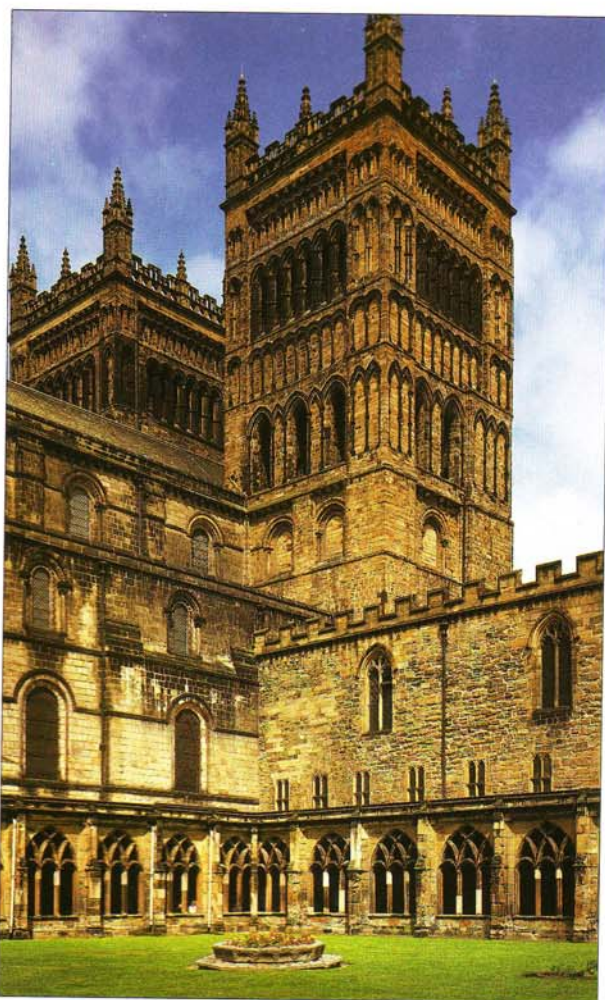


THE COAT OF ARMS
OF HENRY I

IMMEDIATELY ON THE DEATH of his brother, William II, on 2 August 1100, Henry rode to Winchester, seized the royal treasure and went straight to London, where he was crowned on 5 August. Such indecent haste might indicate that he knew more about William's death in a hunting "accident" than he let on. Certainly, Henry was no fool when it came to placating a predominantly Saxon population. He immediately promised good governance and introduced a number of important reforms, developing the *Curia Regis* (King's Council) to settle disputes between the Crown and its tenants and expanding the system of travelling justices throughout the shires.

👑 HENRY I

- ◆ **Born** Selby, Yorkshire, Sept 1068, fourth son of William I and Matilda.
- ◆ **Acceded** 2 Aug 1100.
- ◆ **Crowned** Westminster Abbey, 5 Aug 1100.
- ◆ **Married** Edith of Scotland, 11 Nov 1100, 4 children; Adela of Louvain, 29 Jan 1121.
- ◆ **Died** Rouen, Normandy, 1/2 Dec 1135, aged 67.

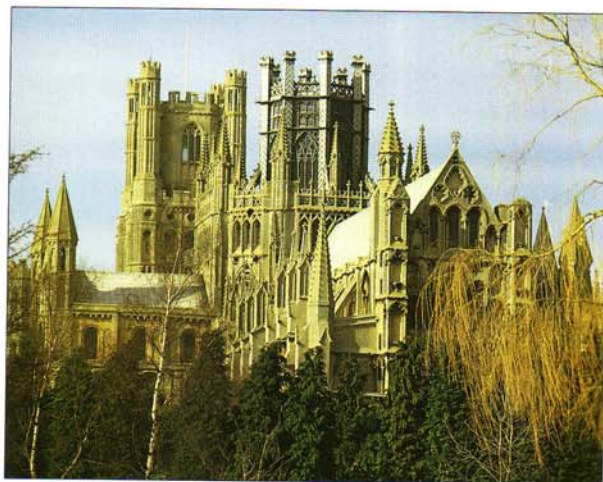


NORMAN CATHEDRALS

The Normans built on a grand scale, whether in Normandy, England or Sicily (another one of their conquests). Their stone cathedrals and castles were nearly always constructed in the most imposing positions in order to dominate the surrounding countryside, and many were designed in a distinctive variant of the Romanesque style, loosely called Norman Romanesque.

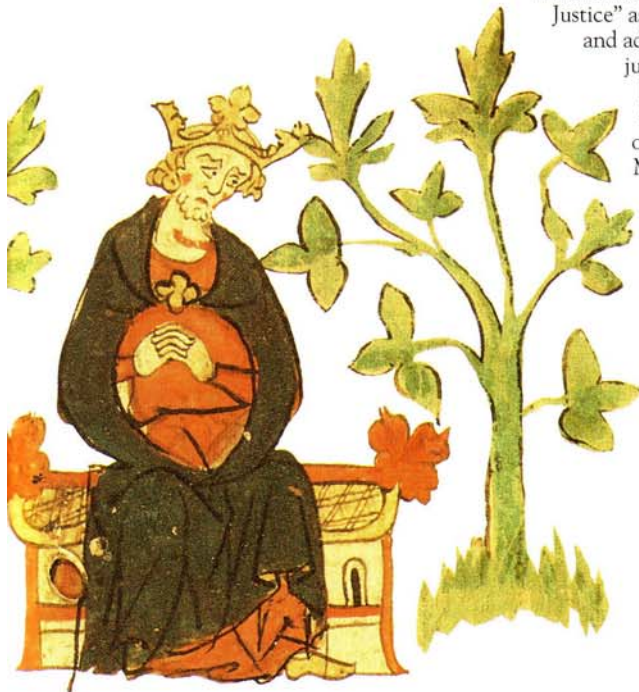
DURHAM AND ELY

Two of the most notable Norman cathedrals in England are Durham (left), largely completed by 1133, and Ely (below), which was not completed until the 14th century.



HENRY I

This contemporary drawing of Henry I shows a sombre and sad man, for it illustrates a manuscript describing the loss of his only legitimate son, William, who was drowned in 1120.

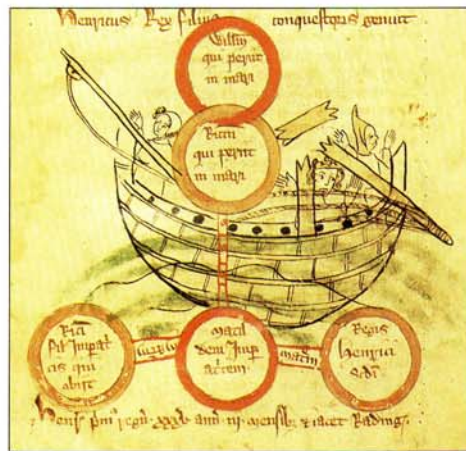
**“BEAUCLERC”**

Henry I was a well-built man, of average height and more placid and sober of temperament than his brother William Rufus or his father, the Conqueror. However, he was capable of great cruelty and could be ruthless and unforgiving: he once pushed a man to his death from the top of Rouen Castle for breaking an oath of allegiance to the royal family. Well-educated, able to read and write Latin and English, Henry was

nicknamed “Beauclerc” and the “Lion of Justice” as he was a lover of legal reform and administrative work. An excellent judge of a man’s abilities, he also knew how to generate loyalty among his followers and keep on good terms with his wife Matilda, despite the fact that he had numerous mistresses and illegitimate children by them throughout his 18-year marriage to her.

THE WHITE SHIP

This contemporary illustration (below) depicts the White Ship running aground before sinking while on a voyage from Normandy to England in 1120. Henry’s son and heir, William, drowned in the accident.

**DEATH OF AN HEIR**

Henry’s only legitimate son and heir, William – whom he had made Duke of Normandy after Robert (Henry’s eldest brother) had been imprisoned for life in 1106 – drowned in November 1120. Returning from Normandy to England aboard the White Ship, William lost his life when the inebriated pilot steered the vessel onto a rock, where it quickly filled with water. Henry’s second wife Adela, whom he had married in 1121 after the death of Matilda in 1118, failed to produce another heir, and Henry had to persuade the barons to accept his daughter, Matilda, as heir to the throne.

**EVENTS OF THE REIGN
1100 – 1135**

- ♦ 1100 Henry I succeeds his brother, William II.
- ♦ 1100 Henry issues a Charter of Liberties, promising the people good governance.
- ♦ 1100 Ranulf Flambard, Bishop of Durham and chief adviser to William II, is imprisoned by Henry in the Tower of London but escapes the following year. Archbishop Anselm is recalled from exile.
- ♦ 1100 Henry marries Edith, daughter of Malcolm III of Scotland and great-grand-daughter of Edmund Ironside. She adopts the extra name of Matilda, which is more acceptable to the Norman barons.
- ♦ 1101 Robert of Normandy invades England in an attempt to wrest the throne from his brother, Henry. However, after failing, he signs the Treaty of Alton, which confirms Henry as King of England and Robert as Duke of Normandy.
- ♦ 1101 Henry appoints Roger Salisbury as Chancellor. Salisbury founds the Court of the Exchequer to administer Crown finances and institutes administrative reforms.
- ♦ 1106 War breaks out between Henry and Robert of Normandy. Henry defeats Robert at the Battle of Tinchebrai, imprisons him in Cardiff Castle for the rest of his life and takes control of Normandy.
- ♦ 1109 Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, dies.
- ♦ 1110 Pipe Rolls, Exchequer records of the accounts of the sheriffs and other royal officials in each county, are introduced. They remain in force until 1834, and are the longest series of English public records.
- ♦ 1118 Death of Matilda.
- ♦ 1120 Henry’s 17-year-old son and heir, William, is drowned when the White Ship sinks returning from France. Henry’s daughter, Matilda, becomes heir to the throne.
- ♦ 1121 Henry marries Adela of Louvain.
- ♦ 1123 St Bartholomew’s Hospital is founded in London.
- ♦ 1126 Henry persuades the barons to accept Matilda as heir to the throne.
- ♦ 1128 Matilda marries Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou.
- ♦ 1135 Henry I dies of food poisoning near Rouen, in France.