

# Matilda Beauclerc

Pg 1/3



Born: 7 Feb 1102 Winchester, England, United Kingdom  
Married: 17 June 1128 Geoffrey V Count of Anjou  
Died: 10 Sep 1169 - Rouen, Seine-Maritime, Haute-Normandie, France  
Parents: King Henry I of England & Matilda of Scotland

**Empress Matilda**, also known as **Matilda of England** or **Maude** (c. 7 February 1102 – 10 September 1167) was the daughter and heir of King Henry I of England. Matilda and her younger brother, William Adelin, were the only legitimate children of King Henry. Her brother died young in the White ship disaster, leaving Matilda as the last heir from the paternal line of her grandfather William the Conqueror.

As a child, Matilda was betrothed and later married to Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor. From her marriage to Henry, she acquired the title *Empress*. The couple had no known children. When widowed, she was married to the much younger Geoffrey of Anjou, by whom she became the mother of three sons, the eldest of whom became King Henry II of England.

Early life

Matilda was the firstborn of two children to Henry I of England and his wife Matilda of Scotland (also known as Edith). Her maternal grandparents were Malcolm III of Scotland and Saint Margaret of Scotland. Margaret was daughter of Edward the Exile and granddaughter of Edmund II of England. (Most historians believe Matilda was born at Winchester, but one, John Fletcher (1990), argues for the possibility of the royal palace at Sutton Courtenay in Oxfordshire.)

First marriage: Holy Roman Empress

When she was seven years old, Matilda was betrothed to Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor; at nine, she was sent to Germany to begin training for the life of Empress consort. The royal couple were married at Worms on January 7, 1114, and Matilda accompanied her husband on tours to Rome and Tuscany. After time, the young wife of the Emperor was popularly accepted to act as regent in his absence<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>. Emperor Henry died in 1125. The imperial couple had no surviving offspring, but Herman of Tournai states that Matilda bore a son who lived only a short while.

Despite being popularly known by the title "Empress" from her first marriage, Matilda's right to the title was dubious. She was never crowned Holy Roman Empress by a legitimate Pope — which ceremony was normally required to achieve the title; indeed, in later years she encouraged chroniclers to believe she had been crowned by the Pope. Contemporarily, she was called German Queen by her husband's bishops, while her formal title was recorded as "Queen of the Romans". Still, "Empress" was arguably an appropriate courtesy title for the wife of an Emperor who had been crowned by the Pope.

In 1120 her brother William Adelin was drowned in the disastrous wreck of the White Ship, which left Matilda as the only legitimate child of her father King Henry. Like Matilda, her cousin Stephen of Blois was a grandchild of William (the Conqueror) of Normandy; but her paternal line made her senior in right of succession to his maternal line.

Second marriage: Countess of Anjou

Matilda returned to England a young widow, age 23, and dowager "Empress" — a status of considerable pride to her. There Henry named her his heir to both the English throne and his Duchy of Normandy. Henry saw to it that the Anglo-Norman barons (including Stephen of Blois) were sworn (several times) to accept Matilda as ruler if Henry died without a male heir.

Henry then arranged a second marriage for Matilda; as he aimed to achieve peace between the fractious barons of Normandy and Anjou. On 17 June 1128, the Empress Matilda, age 26, was married to Geoffrey of Anjou, a man eleven years her junior, who also was Count of Maine and heir apparent to (his father) the Count of Anjou — which title he soon acquired, and by which Matilda became Countess of Anjou. Geoffrey called himself "Plantagenet" from the broom flower (*planta genista*) he adopted as his personal emblem. So *Plantagenet* became the dynastic name of that powerful line of English kings who descended from Matilda and Geoffrey.

Matilda's marriage with Geoffrey was troubled; there were frequent long separations, but they had three sons and she survived him. The eldest son, Henry, was born on 5 March 1133. In 1134, she nearly died in childbirth, following the birth of her second son (Geoffrey, Count of Nantes). A third son (William X, Count of Poitou) was born in 1136.

When her father died in Normandy, on 1 December 1135, Matilda was with her husband, in Anjou; and, crucially, too far away from events rapidly unfolding in England and Normandy. Stephen of Blois rushed to England upon learning of Henry's death; in London he moved quickly to grasp the crown of England from its legally appointed heir. He usurped the legitimate power in England and was proceeding to do the same in Normandy.

But Matilda was game to contest Stephen in both realms; she and her husband Geoffrey entered Normandy and began military campaigns to claim her inheritance. Progress was uneven at first, but she persevered; even so, it was not until 1139 that Matilda felt secure enough in Normandy to turn her attentions to invading England and fighting Stephen directly.

In Normandy, Geoffrey secured all fiefdoms west and south of the Seine by 1143; in January 1144, he crossed the Seine and took Rouen without resistance. He assumed the title Duke of Normandy, and Matilda became Duchess of Normandy. Geoffrey and Matilda held the duchy conjointly until 1149, then ceded it to their son, Henry, which event was soon ratified by King Louis VII of France.

## Struggle for throne of England

On the death of her father, Henry I, in 1135, Matilda expected to succeed to the throne of England, but her cousin, Stephen of Blois, a nephew of Henry I, usurped the throne with the support of most of the barons, breaking the oath he had previously made to defend her rights. The civil war which followed was bitter and prolonged, with neither side gaining the ascendancy for long, but it was not until 1139 that Matilda could command the military strength necessary to challenge Stephen within his own realm. Stephen's wife, the Countess of Boulogne who was also named Matilda, was the Empress's maternal cousin. During the war, Matilda's most loyal and capable supporter was her illegitimate half-brother, Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester.

Matilda's greatest triumph came in April 1141, when her forces defeated and captured King Stephen at the Battle of Lincoln. He was made a prisoner and effectively deposed.

Her advantage lasted only a few months. When she marched on London, the city was ready to welcome her and support a coronation. However, she refused the citizens' request to have their taxes halved. On 24 June 1141, she found the gates of London shut and the civil war reignited. By November, Stephen was free, having been exchanged for the captured Robert of Gloucester, and a year later, the tables were turned when Matilda was besieged at Oxford but escaped to Wallingford, supposedly by fleeing across the snow-covered land in a white cape. In 1141 she had escaped Devizes in a similarly clever manner, by disguising herself as a corpse and being carried out for burial. In 1148, Matilda and Henry returned to Normandy, following the death of Robert of Gloucester, and the reconquest of that county by her husband. Upon their arrival, Geoffrey turned Normandy over to his son, and retired to his own county of Anjou.

## Later life

Matilda's first son, Henry, was showing signs of becoming a successful leader. Although the civil war had been decided in Stephen's favour, his reign was troubled. In 1153, the death of his son Eustace, combined with the arrival of a military expedition led by Henry, led him to acknowledge the latter as his heir by the Treaty of Wallingford.

Matilda retired to Rouen in Normandy during her last years, where she maintained her own court and presided over the government of the duchy in the absence of Henry. She intervened in the quarrels between her eldest son Henry and her second son Geoffrey, but peace between the brothers was brief. Geoffrey rebelled against Henry twice before his sudden death in 1158. Relations between Henry and his youngest brother, William X, Count of Poitou, were more cordial, and William was given vast estates in England. Archbishop Thomas Becket refused to allow William to marry the Countess of Surrey and the young man fled to Matilda's court at Rouen. William, who was his mother's favourite child, died there in January 1164, reportedly of disappointment and sorrow. She attempted to mediate in the quarrel between her son Henry and Becket, but was unsuccessful.

Although she gave up hope of being crowned in 1141, her name always preceded that of her son Henry, even after he became king. Matilda died at Notre Dame du Pré near Rouen and was buried in the Abbey church of Bec-Hellouin, Normandy. Her body was transferred to the Rouen Cathedral in 1847; her epitaph reads: "*Great by Birth, Greater by Marriage, Greatest in her Offspring: Here lies Matilda, the daughter, wife, and mother of Henry.*"