

Why was Edward the Confessor's death so problematic?

Task 1

Read the timeline below and answer the questions that follow.

1002 – King Ethelred II of England married Emma the sister of Richard, the Duke of Normandy.
1015 – King Sweyn of Denmark and his son Cnut began a campaign to take control of England. Emma sent her son Edward to Normandy to keep him safe.
1016 – King Ethelred and his son Edmund Ironside died. Cnut already King of Denmark became King of England too.
1042 – Edward the son of Ethelred II and Emma of Normandy became King of England after the deaths of Cnut and his sons.
1043 – Edward married Edith the daughter of Earl Godwin and sister of Harold Godwinson
1051 – Edward invited William Duke of Normandy to his court. Edward and Edith had no children and Edward allegedly promised to make William heir to the throne.
1053 – Earl Godwin died. His sons inherited his lands. Harold became earl of Wessex the richest Earldom in England.
1055 – Tostig Godwinson, Harold's brother became the Earl of Northumbria increasing his family's power.
1057 – Edward needed an heir. Some sources claim he convinced his nephew Edward the Exile to return from Hungary. Edward the Exile died not long after returning to England but his son Edgar lived in Edward the Confessor's court. He was the only living blood relative of the king, but in 1066 he was only 14 years old.
1064 – Edward allegedly sent Harold Godwinson to Normandy to repeat Edwards promise to William. Some sources say that Harold swore an oath to support William's claim to the throne.
1065 – There was a rebellion against Tostig in his earldom of Northumbria. Harold advised the King to remove Tostig from power. Harold and Tostig became enemies and Tostig went abroad perhaps to Norway and Denmark.
Jan 1066 – Edward died. Some sources claim that just before his death he entrusted his wife and kingdom to Harold Godwinson's protection. Next day the Witan nominated Harold Godwinson as Edward's successor and he was crowned King Harold II. When he heard the news William Duke of Normandy began planning an invasion.
Spring 1066 – King Harald Hardrada of Norway prepared to invade England. He allied with Tostig, who was still very angry with Harold Godwinson.

1. Who was Edward descended from?
2. Which family was the most powerful in England in 1066?
3. Which four people thought they had a claim to the throne?

Task 2

Below is an answer to the enquiry question. It's got some errors and uses casual language. Use the timeline above to correct these mistakes. Also, use your understanding of the topic to improve this answer by adding explanation where it is missing.

Edward the Confessor died in March 1066. He had one living blood relative that could be his successor. His name was Tostig and he was 16 years old when Edward died. This was a problem because he wasn't old enough to safely rule the country against the threats that other claimants posed.

One family that had a strong claim to the English throne was the House of Godwin. Earl Godwin was a political mastermind and made sure that his daughter married the new king, Edward. They didn't have any kids. Earl Godwin's son, Harold, was popular and a strong military leader. After his father's death in 1002, he helped Edward defeat threats of invasion and swiftly became one of the most powerful men in the country. It does seem obvious that he should be king because he was already powerful.

Harold Godwinson fell out with his brother, Ethelred, who went to help a Norman called Harald Hardrada, who felt he had a claim to the English throne because of a pact made between Harthacnut and Magnus about the inheritance of kingdoms. This was a problem because of confusing old Viking customs.

Finally, we need to remember that Edward the Confessor was half Norman. His mother, Edith, was a Norman and she sent him to live there when his father's kingdom was at risk. This meant that he favoured Normans when he eventually became king. Some sources say that he even promised William of Normandy the throne when he died because he had no kids of his own to take the throne. This made everything a bit messy really.

Teacher notes

Underlining denotes that a correction needs to be made.

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