

The British Monarchy: A Complete Guide to Britain's Kings and Queens

AN ANGLOPHILE'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO ROYAL
BRITISH HISTORY

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THE BRITISH MONARCHY:
A COMPLETE GUIDE TO
BRITAIN'S KINGS AND
QUEENS

AN ANGLOPHILE'S COMPLETE GUIDE
TO ROYAL BRITISH HISTORY

By
Anglotopia

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INTRODUCTION

The Story of British Monarchy

When we think of British history, we often think of it through its monarchs. From William the Conqueror to Charles III, the story of Britain has been shaped by the men and women who wore its crown. This book traces that story through nearly a thousand years of British monarchy, from 1066 to the present day.

Why start at 1066? The Norman Conquest marks a clear beginning point - it's the last successful foreign invasion of England, and every monarch since William has traced their legitimacy back to his victory at Hastings. More practically, the historical record becomes much clearer and more reliable from this point forward.

But this isn't just a chronological list of rulers. Each monarch's story reveals something about how Britain evolved from a medieval kingdom into a modern democracy. We see the transformation from absolute monarchy to constitutional rule, from religious upheaval to established church, from isolated island to global empire, and back again.

Along the way, we'll encounter extraordinary characters: warrior kings like Richard the Lionheart, reformers like Henry II, tyrants like John, powerful queens like Elizabeth I and Victoria, and modernizers like Elizabeth II. We'll also meet those who briefly held or claimed the throne - figures like Lady Jane Grey, Empress Matilda, and even Oliver Cromwell, whose stories help us understand how British monarchy evolved.

This book aims to make these stories accessible while maintaining historical accuracy. Each chapter provides key facts, important events, and cultural legacy, along with details about relevant historical sites you can visit today. We've also included information about how these monarchs have been portrayed in film and television, showing how their stories continue to captivate us.

This book is a survey, we are not able to go in-depth on each monarch, so consider the selections here a jumping-off point for

further research. We give you enough to get you interested, then provide a list of further research you can explore to learn more about every one of these Kings and Queens. There is no end to historical scholarship!

Understanding the British monarchy helps us understand Britain itself - its laws, its traditions, its institutions, and its peculiarities. These stories of power, personality, and nation-building have shaped not just Britain but much of the modern world.

Whether you're a student of history, a royal enthusiast, or simply curious about how Britain came to be what it is today, these stories of Britain's monarchs offer fascinating insights into one of the world's oldest and most enduring institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Why Start with William?

When telling the story of British monarchs, one must choose a starting point. While Britain's royal history stretches back into the mists of time, with legendary kings like Arthur and historical figures like Alfred the Great, we chose to begin this chronicle with William the Conqueror in 1066. This decision wasn't arbitrary – it marks the last successful foreign conquest of England and establishes a continuous line of succession that leads directly to the current monarch, King Charles III.

The Norman Conquest represents more than just a change in leadership; it transformed English society, law, language, and culture. William brought with him continental feudalism, built lasting monuments of stone, and established record-keeping practices that give us far more reliable historical information than we have for previous periods. The Domesday Book, commissioned by William in 1086, provides us with an unprecedented snapshot of medieval England and marks the beginning of more systematic historical documentation.

But history isn't just about smooth transitions and unbroken lines. Some of the most fascinating chapters in British royal history involve disruptions, challenges, and alternate claims to the throne. That's why I've included several figures who might be considered "interruptions" in the traditional succession.

Take the tumultuous period known as the Anarchy, when Empress Matilda and King Stephen fought for the crown. Matilda was the designated heir of Henry I, but Stephen, her cousin, seized the throne. Their civil war split England and ultimately led to a compromise that put Matilda's son on the throne as Henry II. Their story illustrates how succession rules were still evolving and how powerful personalities could shape the destiny of the nation.

Similarly, Lady Jane Grey's brief nine-day reign might seem

like a historical footnote, but it encapsulates the religious and political tensions that dominated Tudor England. Though she never had a coronation, her tragic story – from teenage queen to executed prisoner – illuminates the dangerous politics of royal succession in the sixteenth century.

Perhaps the most controversial inclusion is Oliver Cromwell, who wasn't a monarch at all but rather Lord Protector during the Interregnum. After the execution of Charles I, Britain experimented with non-monarchical rule for the first and only time in its modern history. Cromwell's inclusion is essential for understanding how the monarchy evolved – the Restoration that followed his death brought significant changes to how British monarchs ruled, leading eventually to the constitutional monarchy we know today.

Throughout this book, you'll find both *de facto* rulers (those who held actual power) and *de jure* monarchs (those with legal claims to the throne). Some reigned for decades, while others held power for mere days or weeks. Each of their stories adds to our understanding of how the British monarchy has evolved over nearly a thousand years.

From William the Conqueror to Charles III, the British monarchy has survived civil wars, religious upheavals, plague, revolution, and the transition from absolute to constitutional rule. By including both the main line of succession and its various interruptions, this book aims to tell the complete story of how the British monarchy has adapted and endured through centuries of change.

The tales of these monarchs – whether they ruled for decades or days, whether they were crowned in Westminster Abbey or never crowned at all – help us understand not just British history, but how power, personality, and circumstance shape the course of nations.

WHAT IS THE UK?

A Tale of Four Countries

When we think of British monarchs, we often imagine them ruling over the United Kingdom as we know it today. But for most of history, this wasn't the case. The story of how England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland came together – and how Ireland later partly separated – is a complex tale spanning nearly a millennium.

When William the Conqueror arrived in 1066, he became King of England only. Wales was a patchwork of independent principalities, Scotland was its own kingdom, and Ireland was divided into various kingdoms. Each had its own rulers, laws, and customs.

Wales was the first to join England, though not peacefully. After centuries of border conflicts, Edward I conquered Wales in 1283. He made his son “Prince of Wales” – a tradition that continues today with the monarch's heir. Wales was formally united with England by Henry VIII's Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542.

Scotland remained independent much longer, despite several English attempts at conquest. The two kingdoms shared a monarch for the first time in 1603 when James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne from his cousin Elizabeth I, becoming James I of England. However, they remained separate countries with different parliaments, laws, and systems of government. It was a union of Crowns, not of countries.

This situation changed dramatically in 1707 with the Act of Union. England (including Wales) and Scotland joined to create the Kingdom of Great Britain. This wasn't just a personal union under one monarch – it created a single parliament and unified political system. The Scottish Parliament was dissolved, though Scotland kept its own legal and education systems, which remain distinct today (and they were given back a Parliament in 1999).

Ireland's story is more complicated. English monarchs had claimed lordship over Ireland since the 12th century, but real control

varied. In 1542, Henry VIII declared himself King of Ireland. When England and Scotland united in 1707, Ireland remained a separate kingdom under the same monarch. In 1800, another Act of Union created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

However, this union wouldn't last. After centuries of conflict and a war of independence, most of Ireland separated from the UK in 1922 to become the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland). The six counties in the northeast remained part of the UK as Northern Ireland, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – the country we know today.

So when we read about early medieval English kings, we need to remember they ruled only England (and sometimes France...). By the Tudor period, they controlled Wales too. From 1603 they ruled Scotland as well, but as a separate kingdom until 1707. And while they claimed authority over Ireland for centuries, Ireland's relationship with the British crown remained complex and contentious until the partition of 1922.

This explains why the titles of British monarchs have changed over time. Elizabeth I was Queen of England and Ireland. Her successor James was King of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Queen Anne ended her reign as Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. And Elizabeth II was Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a title now held by Charles III.

The United Kingdom as we know it today is relatively young – just over a hundred years old in its current form. It's the product of centuries of gradual union, conquest, and separation, reflecting the complex relationships between four nations that share one crown.

Through all of this change, one thing has endured - the Monarchy - and with that The Crown (as a concept).

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WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR (1066–1087)

The Battle of Hastings in 1066 was the swiftest, most effective, and most brutal military occupation ever seen and is believed by many to have been the most important battle in English history. Leading the victorious Norman invaders was William, a Norman duke known after 1066 as William the Conqueror, King of England. William completely transformed England, transferring all land from English freemen and Saxon-Danish nobility to his Norman followers, suppressing revolts by massacring entire villages and recording the new lay of the land for the benefit of generations to come in his famous Domesday Book.

Key Facts about William the Conqueror

- William the Conqueror was born in 1027, son of Robert the Devil and Herleva, daughter of William the Tanner.
- William became King of England on December 25th, 1066, aged 39.
- William married Matilda of Flanders, had ten children, and died on September 9th, 1087, aged 60.

A Brief Sketch of William the Conqueror

William the Conqueror was bred for battle at a young age. His father, Robert, the Devil Duke of Normandy, and his mother, Herleva, daughter of a burgher of Falaise known as William the Tanner, were not married. Herleva was married off to a Norman baron against her will but maintained a romantic relationship with Robert the Devil throughout his short life. When Robert died in 1035, William was just 8 years old. Despite the fact that his mother was married to another man, William was Robert's only son and thus became the Duke of Normandy.

Over the succeeding twenty years, William protected his Dukedom against the King of France, who continually plotted to invade Normandy and assassinate William, and against English rebels whose aim was to create anarchy in his duchy. Throughout William's childhood and adolescence, Norman nobles fought each other for power, with the battle lines often drawn between those in support of William and those against him. It is thought that up to four of William's custodians were killed during the early years of his dukedom. In 1047, William was victorious in quashing a Norman rebellion with the support of King Henry of England, but the years between 1045 and 1060 were relentlessly bloody and chaotic.

In the early 1050s, William married Matilda of Flanders in a union that was forbidden by Pope Leo IX. The papal sanction was eventually secured a few years later with the founding of two monasteries in Caen. William's marriage to Matilda secured his position and gave him important allies, as Flanders was a powerful French territory with links to the French monarchy and German emperors. William arranged for his allies to hold powerful positions in the Norman church and, in later years, took control of the neighboring territory of Maine.

William the Conqueror was a second cousin of King Edward the Confessor of England (William's father was the nephew of Edward's mother), and during the late 1050s, with no natural heir from King Edward, William became a real contender for the English throne. William claimed that Edward had already promised the throne to him, but on his deathbed in 1066, Edward named English Earl Harold Godwinson his successor.

The Battle of Hastings

By the time William invaded England in 1066, he had the support of the wealthiest barons and knights in Flanders and Brittany and had amassed a huge army and fleet of invasion barges. On the 14th of October, 1066, the Battle of Hastings began and lasted for one day. Harold's army of foot soldiers and archers offered a worthy opponent to William's army of cavalry. The decisive moment in the battle came with the death of Harold, who fell with arrow wounds

to his head. King Harold's mother, Gytha, is said to have offered William the weight of her son's body in gold if she could have it in order to perform a proper burial. William refused and promised instead to throw Harold's body into the sea. Later, it was claimed Harold's body was buried at Waltham Abbey.

William was crowned King of England at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066 and immediately set about the tremendous transformation of the English nation. As England's first total conqueror, William united the country in complete subjugation. The predominantly Saxon-Danish English nobility who earned the majority of land in England were either killed at Hastings or completely expropriated by the new king. Three-quarters of the whole territory of England was shared out amongst around 5000 of William's followers and speculators from Brittany and Flanders, with the last quarter staying in the possession of the King. William's newly created magnates were required to contribute knights to his army as well as to defend local garrisons. This new feudal system structure meant that William was able to crush every rebellion against his rule successfully, including the Welsh and Danish attacks.

William used the lawlessness of constant but uncoordinated rebellions to justify the terrifying massacre and brutal suppression of any area that challenged his rule and many that didn't. William ordered the building of many new castles, keeps, and mottes and used these new fortifications as bases of aggression from which his armies could occupy the English countryside and retreat to safety when threatened. The central keep of the Tower of London was built high, outside the city walls, in order to ensure the domination of any would-be invaders.

During William's reign, royal power was at its peak. Observing the old, established Saxon laws, William set up ecclesiastical courts to settle marital and spiritual matters, banishing bishops from the shire court and administering 'King's Justice.' William also introduced a clerical bureaucracy separate from the church that was answerable only to him.

In 1085, William ordered the compilation of the Domesday Book. His scribes undertook a tremendous survey, recording the landholdings held by himself and his vassals throughout the entire

country. Each listing records the holding, its owner, who owned it before the Conquest, and its value. The manuscript is still in existence, held at the National Archives in Kew, London, and offers a unique insight into land ownership, taxation, and way of life in Medieval England.

William the Conqueror was a brutal king who reduced many English villages to desolate graveyards during his rule. However, the 'revolt of the earls' of 1075 led to an invasion by The Danish King's brother Cnut, who saw William suffer his first defeat at the Castle Dol in Brittany. A rebellion led by William's oldest son, Robert, in 1077 and 1078 saw Normandy raided and William nearly killed in battle. In 1079, King Malcolm of Scots raided the River Tweed, and William's slow response led the Northumbrians to rebel against the Bishop of Durham and Earl of Northumbria.

William also fought in rebellions on the continent in the early 1080s. William's son Robert again rebelled, this time with support from the French king. In 1083, William's wife Matilda died, and just four years later, William joined her. In July 1087, William was fighting in an expedition against the French Vexin, a clash instigated by his son Robert, and was taken ill. It's unclear what illness he succumbed to or what injuries he sustained, but after being taken to the priory of Saint Gervase at Rouen, William died on 9th September 1087.

William was buried at the abbey-aux-hommes, but his tomb was disturbed many times. As promised, Normandy was bequeathed to William's eldest son, Robert, while custody of England was given to his second son, William. A decision that would inevitably lead to more war.

Legacy of William the Conqueror

William the Conqueror is one of the best-known monarchs in British history. Victor of the famous Battle of Hastings in 1066, William the Conqueror was the first man to successfully invade and conquer the whole of England.

The consequences of William the Conqueror's reign as king of England are complex and long-lasting. Immediately following William's death, his sons Robert and William went to war over

control of England and Normandy, and the battles continued for many years, leading to the revolt of Maine and a resurgence of aristocratic power in Normandy. In England, William the Conqueror changed the church and aristocracy, influenced the English language, and altered the way land was owned and taxed forever. William created a fusion of English and Norman systems of power to create a new kingdom that lasted well into the Middle Ages. England's ties with Scandinavia were severed, and her ties with France were tightened, an alliance that has lasted to the present day.

William the Conqueror instigated the writing of the Domesday Book, the oldest statistical survey of life in England ever created.

Films and TV Shows Featuring William the Conqueror

- Lady Godiva of Coventry (1955)
- A Choice of Kings (1966) TV Play
- William the Conqueror (1982)
- Royal Blood: William the Conqueror (1990) TV series
- William the Conqueror (2015)

Further Research

- Douglas, David (1964) William the Conqueror
- Bates, David (2001) William the Conqueror
- Carpenter, David (2004) The Struggle for Mastery: The Penguin History of Britain 1066 to 1284
- Hugh, Thomas (2007) The Norman Conquest: England After William the Conqueror
- Huscroft, Richard (2009) The Norman Conquest

Locations Related to William the Conqueror

- Hastings Battlefield, in which William defeated King Harold II and became known as William the Conqueror. A Battle Abbey was built by William to commemorate the dead.

- William the Conqueror is buried at the Abbaye aux Hommes located in Caen, Normandy.
- Hastings Castle was built from timber in the months following the Battle of Hastings and then rebuilt in stone four years later.
- Westminster Abbey, where William the Conqueror was crowned king.
- Windsor Castle was commissioned by William the Conqueror, as were many other castles, including Corfe Castle, Durham Castle, Dover Castle, and Warwick Castle.



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WILLIAM II (1087–1100)

William II, also known as William Rufus, was the second son of William the Conqueror and was King of England from 1087 until his death in 1100. Despite his relatively short reign, William II played a significant role in the history of England. In this article, we will explore the life, reign, and legacy of this controversial monarch.

Key Facts about William II

- William II, also known as William Rufus, was the second son of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders.
- He was probably born between 1056-1060 in Normandy, France, and was sent to England to be educated when his father became king in 1066.
- William II was known for his love of hunting and his military skills, which he showcased in campaigns against Scotland and Wales.
- His reign was marked by conflict with the Church and with Scotland, as well as by his own love of luxury and disregard for the welfare of his people.
- William II died in 1100, possibly assassinated by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest.

Early Life and Education

William II was born in sometime between 1056 and 1060 in Normandy, France. He was the second son of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. When his father became King of England in 1066, William II was sent to England to be educated. He was known for his love of hunting and his military skills, which he showcased in campaigns against Scotland and Wales.

Reign

William II ascended to the throne in 1087 following the death of his father. His reign was marked by conflict with the Church, which he often clashed with over issues of power and money. William II was known for his love of luxury, and he spent lavishly on his court and on his own personal pleasures, such as hunting and feasting.

One of the most controversial events of William II's reign was the death of his younger brother, Richard, who was killed in a hunting accident in the New Forest in 1075. There has been much speculation that William II was responsible for his brother's death, but there is no firm evidence to support this theory.

William II's reign was also marked by conflict with Scotland, which he invaded and defeated in 1091. He also campaigned against Wales, although he was unable to achieve a decisive victory.

Death

William II of England, commonly known as William Rufus, met his end in a mysterious and controversial manner in the New Forest on August 2, 1100. While out hunting with a small party, an arrow fatally struck him in the chest. The circumstances surrounding his death have been the subject of speculation and intrigue for centuries. Some historians believe it was a simple accident, a case of mistaken identity in the thick woods, while others suspect foul play, suggesting that his brother, Henry, who stood to gain from his demise, may have orchestrated the killing.

William Rufus' reign was marked by turbulence and conflict, and his death only added to the instability. His relationship with the Church was fraught with tension, as he clashed with Archbishop Anselm over issues of ecclesiastical authority and the king's right to appoint bishops. Additionally, his aggressive policies in Wales and Scotland fueled resentment among the native populations, further complicating matters. His sudden death without a clear successor plunged England into a period of uncertainty and set the stage for a

power struggle among the nobility.

The death of William II had profound implications for the future of England. With his passing, his younger brother Henry seized the opportunity to assert his claim to the throne, quickly securing support from key nobles and clergy. Henry was crowned king within days of William's death, ushering in a new era for England. However, suspicions lingered regarding the circumstances of William Rufus' demise, fueling rumors and conspiracy theories that endure to this day.

Legacy

William II's reign was marked by controversy and conflict, and he was often portrayed as a cruel and selfish monarch. He was known for his love of luxury and his disregard for the Church, which made him unpopular with many of his subjects.

Despite these controversies, William II played a significant role in the history of England. He strengthened the power of the monarchy and established a centralized system of government that would endure for centuries. He also laid the foundation for the development of a strong military, which would prove crucial in the wars that would shape England's future.

William II's reign also saw the emergence of a new class of wealthy landowners who would come to play a significant role in the politics and economy of England. This class, which was made up of the descendants of the Norman conquerors, would dominate English society for centuries.

Further Research

Here are some books and documentaries about William II of England:

- William Rufus: The Red King – Frank Barlow
- William II: The Red King – John Gillingham
- The Reign of William Rufus and the Accession of Henry I – E.A. Freeman

Locations Related to William II

- Winchester Castle – William II was crowned at Winchester Cathedral and often held court at Winchester Castle.
- Winchester Cathedral – William was buried in Winchester Cathedral.
- The Rufus Stone – The Rufus Stone is a historical monument located in the New Forest, Hampshire, England. It marks the traditional site where King William II was fatally shot with an arrow while hunting in the forest on August 2, 1100. The stone itself is a large block of granite, inscribed with a plaque recounting the events of William Rufus' death.
- The New Forest – The New Forest is the site of the hunting accident that led to the death of William II.
- Tower of London – William II made significant additions to the Tower of London during his reign.
- Durham Cathedral – William II invaded and defeated the Scottish army near Durham Cathedral in 1091.
- Carlisle Castle – William II besieged Carlisle Castle during his campaign against Scotland.
- York – William II held court at York and made significant additions to York Castle.
- Wales – William II campaigned against Wales during his reign but was unable to achieve a decisive victory.



HENRY I

(1100–1135)

King Henry I of England, born on September 1068, was the fourth son of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. He was the king of England from 1100 until his death in 1135. He is often called the Lion of Justice for his legal reforms and for being a just ruler. Henry's reign was marked by significant achievements and struggles, mostly notably the legacy of his succession, which led to a dark period in English history called the Anarchy.

Key Facts about Henry I

- Henry I was the fourth son of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders, born in September 1068.
- Henry I was King of England from 1100 until his death in 1135.
- He was known as the Lion of Justice for his legal reforms and for being a just ruler.
- Henry I defeated his brother Robert Curthose in the Battle of Tinchebrai in 1106 and captured him.
- His Charter of Liberties established the principle that the king was subject to the law and limited the king's power.

Life and Early Reign

Henry I's early years were marked by political turmoil and strife between his father and brothers. His father, William the Conqueror, had divided his kingdom among his sons, which led to conflicts. After William's death in 1087, Henry supported his brother William Rufus in the fight for the throne against their elder brother Robert Curthose. After William Rufus's 'accidental' hunting death in August 1100, Henry quickly claimed the throne and was crowned king.

During his early reign, Henry I focused on consolidating power and establishing peace in the country. He married Matilda of Scotland (also known as Edith), daughter of Malcolm III of Scotland, to secure peace with Scotland. He also secured alliances with the nobles and the Church by granting them favors and privileges.

Legal Reforms and Governance

Henry I's reign was significant for his legal reforms and governance. He appointed able and learned men to key positions in the government, such as the chief justice and chancellor. He also introduced legal reforms that strengthened the royal authority and improved the administration of justice. He established a system of royal justices who traveled throughout the country to administer justice and hear cases. He also introduced the concept of the writ, which allowed people to appeal to the king's court for justice. Henry I also issued the Charter of Liberties, which was a precursor to the Magna Carta. The Charter of Liberties was a document that listed the rights of the barons and the Church and limited the king's power. It also established the principle that the king was subject to the law.

Henry was viewed as a tough yet efficient ruler by his peers. He adeptly managed the barons in England and Normandy. In England, he utilized the existing Anglo-Saxon system of justice, local government, and taxation while also bolstering it with additional institutions such as the royal exchequer and itinerant justices. Normandy also saw the implementation of a growing system of justices and an exchequer. Many of Henry's officials were "new men" from humble origins rather than from high-status families, and they advanced through the ranks as administrators. Henry promoted ecclesiastical reform, although he became entangled in a serious dispute in 1101 with Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, which was eventually resolved through a compromise solution in 1105. He backed the Cluniac order and played a significant role in appointing senior clergy in England and Normandy.

Military Campaigns and Succession

King Henry I of England led several significant military campaigns during his reign, showcasing his prowess as a formidable military commander. One of his most notable military achievements was the Battle of Tinchebrai in 1106, where he decisively defeated his elder brother Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy. This victory solidified Henry I's control over Normandy and effectively ended the threat posed by his brother's claim to the English throne, securing Henry's position as the undisputed ruler.

In addition to his triumph at Tinchebrai, Henry I also conducted successful military campaigns against the Welsh and the Scots, asserting his authority and expanding his influence into these regions. These campaigns demonstrated Henry's strategic acumen and his ability to effectively command his forces in diverse geographical and political contexts. His military successes not only strengthened his hold on the English crown but also enhanced his reputation as a skilled and respected leader in both domestic and foreign affairs.

Henry I's military campaigns were pivotal in shaping the geopolitical landscape of his era and consolidating his authority as a monarch. His adeptness in military strategy and his ability to secure significant victories against internal and external threats contributed to his legacy as a powerful and influential ruler in English history.

Henry I's reign was marked by his struggle to secure the succession. He had only one legitimate son, William Adelin, who died in a shipwreck in 1120. After his son's death, Henry I named his daughter Matilda his successor and heir, which led to a succession crisis after his death in 1135; this is commonly known as The Anarchy and was one of the most turbulent and violent periods in English history. More on this in the next chapters.

Further Research

Books:

- Henry I: King of England and Duke of Normandy by

Judith A. Green

- Henry I: The Father of His People (Penguin Monarchs)
- Henry I by C. Warren Hollister
- The English and Their History by Robert Tombs (includes a chapter on Henry I)

Documentaries:

- Kings and Queens of England: The Normans – Henry I (Season 1, Episode 3)
- The Plantagenets: Henry I – The Father of His People (Season 1, Episode 2)
- Monarchy with David Starkey: Henry I (Season 2, Episode 1)

Locations Related to Henry I

- Reading Abbey – Henry I was buried there.
- Falaise, Normandy – Henry I was born there.
- Caen, Normandy – Henry I was educated there.
- Bayeux Cathedral, Normandy – Henry I swore an oath to support his brother William Rufus there.
- Tinchebrai, Normandy – Henry I defeated his brother Robert Curthose there in 1106.
- Westminster Abbey – Henry I was hastily crowned there in 1100.
- Tower of London – Henry I used it as a royal residence and a place to store his treasures.



STEPHEN (1135-1154)

King Stephen of England's reign was a tumultuous time in England's history, marked by political instability and conflict often called 'The Anarchy.' Stephen was the grandson of William the Conqueror, and he came to the throne after the death of his uncle, Henry I. However, his claim to the throne was disputed by Henry's daughter, Matilda, who had been designated as Henry's heir. This led to great instability in the kingdom.

Key Facts about King Stephen

- King Stephen of England reigned from 1135 to 1154 during a period of political instability and conflict known as 'The Anarchy.'
- He was the grandson of William the Conqueror and became King of England after the death of his uncle, Henry I.
- His claim to the throne was disputed by Henry's daughter, Matilda, which led to great instability and conflict in the kingdom.
- The conflict during his reign was characterized by its brutality, with widespread violence and destruction across England.
- Despite some progress in terms of governance and administration, his reign was largely defined by the impact of the Anarchy on English society and the lasting scars it left on the country.

The Life and Reign of King Stephen

Stephen was the grandson of William the Conqueror, and he came to the throne after the death of his uncle, King Henry I. His claim to the throne was contested by his cousin, the Empress

Matilda, who was Henry's daughter and had been designated as his heir. Matilda's supporters argued that she had a stronger claim to the throne as the daughter of the previous king, while Stephen's supporters argued that he had been chosen by Henry as his successor.

The resulting conflict, known as The Anarchy, lasted for nearly two decades and had a profound impact on English society. Throughout Stephen's reign, there were numerous rebellions and uprisings as both sides fought for control of the country. The conflict was characterized by its brutality, with widespread violence and destruction across England.

One of the most significant rebellions during Stephen's reign was led by Empress Matilda herself. In 1139, Matilda landed in England with an army and began to seize territory in the south of the country. She was initially successful, but her campaign was eventually stalled by Stephen's forces, and she was forced to retreat. The conflict continued for several years, with both sides gaining and losing ground.

During this time, Stephen faced numerous challenges from other factions within England. One significant turning point was his treatment of Roger of Salisbury, who had been a powerful administrator and ally, having served as Henry I's chief justiciar. In 1139, Stephen arrested Roger and his family members, seizing their castles in a move that shocked the kingdom and damaged his reputation with the Church. Roger died that same year in custody. In 1141, the tide turned against Stephen when he was captured at the Battle of Lincoln. During his imprisonment, Matilda gained control of London and styled herself "Lady of the English," though she was never crowned queen. However, her arrogant behavior alienated the Londoners, and Stephen's wife Matilda of Boulogne rallied support for his cause. Stephen was eventually released in exchange for Robert of Gloucester (Matilda's half-brother), and the conflict continued.

Despite the ongoing violence and instability, Stephen was able to make some progress in terms of governance and administration. He established a number of new castles and fortifications throughout the country, which helped to strengthen

his control over the territories he held. He also worked to develop a system of royal justice, which included the establishment of new courts and the appointment of new judges.

However, Stephen's reign was ultimately defined by the constant conflict and violence that characterized the Anarchy. The conflict took a heavy toll on the people of England, who suffered from widespread destruction and displacement. The country was left deeply divided, with many regions controlled by local warlords and factions rather than the central government.

In 1153, the conflict finally came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Wallingford. Under the terms of the treaty, Stephen agreed to recognize Matilda's son, Henry Plantagenet, as his heir, effectively ending the dispute over the succession. Stephen also agreed to rule jointly with Henry until his death, ensuring a smooth transition of power.

Stephen died the following year, in 1154, having ruled for nearly 20 years. His reign was a period of great upheaval and conflict in English history, characterized by widespread violence and instability. While he made some progress in terms of governance and administration, his legacy is largely defined by the impact of the Anarchy on English society and the lasting scars that it left on the country.

Legacy of King Stephen

The legacy of the reign of King Stephen is one word: Anarchy. The period of conflict and instability known as the Anarchy had a profound impact on the country, with widespread violence and destruction causing significant social and economic upheaval. The legacy of this period can still be seen in the decentralization of power in England, with many regions retaining significant autonomy and local control. Additionally, the conflict contributed to the development of a system of royal justice and the establishment of new castles and fortifications throughout the country. Despite these advancements, however, the reign of King Stephen remains a cautionary tale of the dangers of political instability and the devastating impact it can have on society.

Portrayals of King Stephen

Stephen, the King of England, has been a popular historical figure who has been featured in several works of historical fiction. One such example is the detective series *The Cadfael Chronicles*, written by Ellis Peters, set in the years between 1137 and 1145. Peters' portrayal of Stephen's reign is a localized narrative primarily focused on the town of Shrewsbury and its surroundings. Despite his execution of the Shrewsbury defenders after the taking of the city in 1138, Peters depicts Stephen as a tolerant and sensible ruler. However, in contrast to this depiction, Stephen is portrayed in an unsympathetic light in both the historical novel *The Pillars of the Earth*, written by Ken Follett, and the TV mini-series adaptation of the same.

Further Research

- “Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53” by Jim Bradbury
- “The Anarchy: The Darkest Days of Medieval England” by Richard Kohn
- “Stephen: The Reign of Anarchy” by Carl Watkins
- “The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English” by Marjorie Chibnall (includes a chapter on King Stephen)

Site of Interest

- Oxford Castle, where Stephen was imprisoned during the conflict with Matilda.
- The Tower of London is where Stephen was kept prisoner after his capture at the Battle of Lincoln.
- Bristol Castle, which was besieged by Stephen's forces during the Anarchy.
- Fotheringhay Castle, where Matilda was born and where Stephen's son Eustace died.
- Wallingford Castle, where the Treaty of Wallingford was

signed, ended the conflict between Stephen and Matilda.