

History

How did a Norman become King of England?

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4

## **2. 1066 and the Succession Crisis**

Mr Charles



# Edward and Harold

Edward was a very religious man born to Ethelred and Emma of Normandy. He had spent some time in his early life in Normandy because the Vikings threatened England at the beginning of the 11th century. He was therefore very familiar with Normandy. He was also married to Harold Godwinson's sister, Edith.

Harold Godwinson was England's most powerful noble and his family controlled much of Southern England. Harold and Edward the Confessor had a mixed relationship. Harold had **rebelled** against Edward in 1051 but it failed and Harold was forced to leave the country for a year. Harold was a good fighter who had proved himself in battle before against Welsh tribes. Harold was popular amongst English nobles and so it was often better for Edward to have Harold on his side rather than against him. Edward had often relied on Harold Godwinson's power to help him rule England.



# 1066: A Year of Crisis

By 1066, Edward had ruled for 24 years. Normally in the 11th century, if a King died then his oldest **legitimate** son would become the next King. However, Edward had no children from his marriage with Edith Godwin. He only had a nephew but he was too young to become King. This was worrying for everyone in England, because if there was not going to be a clear next King, then there might be a power struggle for the throne or even an invasion.

Edward the Confessor died on 5th January 1066. His death meant there was a **succession crisis**. A decision had to be made quickly over who the next King should be. Nobles in England knew that William of Normandy and a Viking called Harald Hardrada might try to invade.



# Harold is crowned King

The day after Edward the Confessor's death, Harold Godwinson was crowned King at Westminster Abbey. Harold was crowned by the **Witan**, a group of powerful English nobles and Church members. Many English nobles were pleased to have someone who they knew as King. They knew it was likely he might face an invasion from others who wanted to become King of England.

This method of choosing a King was unusual as normally the next King would be a blood-relative of the King. Harold was only the brother in law of the King and not related by blood. His only relation to the King was because his sister married Edward! Some people did not see Harold's rule over England as **legitimate**. In his defence, Harold said that on his deathbed, Edward had promised the throne to him. Therefore, Harold's **claim to the throne** was that he was chosen by Edward the Confessor to become the next King of England, making him a rightful ruler.



# Glossary

**Rebelled** - armed resistance against a leader or country.

**Legitimate** - Someone who is seen as a rightful ruler.

**Succession crisis** - When a King or Queen dies without a clear heir to the throne.

**Witan** - powerful group of English nobles and Church people who made important decisions, such as deciding the next King in times of crisis.

**Claim to the throne** - someone's reason or evidence for why they should become King or Queen.



# Comprehension Questions

1. Where did Edward the Confessor spend some of his time when he was younger?

**Sentence Starter: Edward the Confessor spent time in...**

2. Why was there a succession crisis in 1066?
3. Which 2 people were thinking about invading England once Edward died?
4. Who decided Harold should be the next King?
5. Why did Harold think he should be the next King of England?

**Challenge Question:** What was Harold's relationship with Edward like?

**Clue: Think about how much Edward needed Harold.**

