

Topic Summary

1. England had a troubled History in the 50 years leading up to the succession crisis of 1066.
2. There were no clear rules in place for succession to the English throne.
3. Edward the Confessor had been a weak ruler. He increased Norman influence at court, which frustrated the English Earls, and allowed the Godwins to increase their power. In 1051 the Godwins rebelled against Edward. Although Edward survived the rebellion, the Godwins kept their powerful position. By 1057, the Godwins controlled earldoms in every part of England except Mercia.
4. Of the four claimants to the throne in 1066 Harold had the strongest position – **being sub-regulus** (deputy king) and having the support of the **Witan**. However, he faced competition from others who thought they had the right to be king – in particular William, Duke of Normandy.
5. Harold was hurriedly crowned just one day after Edward’s death. The haste reflected how insecure he felt. He knew he would face challenges from other claimants.

Rules of Inheritance in Anglo-Saxon England

- **Male inheritance** - sons could inherit (usually but not always the first born)
- **Post Obitum** = after death. A nomination by the old king or bequest (gift). These promises were more important in Norman custom and could not be undone by Novissima Verba.
- **Novissima Verba** = decision made by the King on his deathbed. This decision was more important in English custom.
- **Witan** = group of nobles and leading churchmen could suggest an heir
- **Use of force** – claimants could challenge each other for the throne.
- **Sub-regulus** = deputy king could have a claim to the throne.

The Succession Crisis of 1066

Summary of England in the 11th Century

- England had rich mineral resources and fertile farming land.
- England was a Christian (Catholic) country.
- Viking influence: In 1013 the Vikings invaded England and Canute became the first Viking king of England. The North of England kept close links with Norway. Danegeld payments were made to Vikings to get them to leave.
- England was divided into four Earldoms: Wessex, Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia.
- The Earls became the most powerful men in England after the king.

- Edward was able to become king because the Vikings were losing interest in England.
- Edward was crowned king on 3rd April 1043.
- Norman influence: Edward had been sent to Normandy by his mother Emma when she married King Cnut. When he became king he appointed Normans to important posts in his court as he felt he could trust them more than the English Earls. However, he did marry Earl Godwin’s daughter Edith.
- The **Witan** did not like the Norman influence and encouraged the Godwin family to return to England (after their exile).
- Edward was a weak ruler. He focused more on religion (he built Westminster Abbey. In the late 1050s Edward proclaimed Harold Godwinson was proclaimed **sub-regulus**.

The claimants to the throne in 1066

Edgar Aetheling		Harald Hardrada (The Viking)	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edward’s nearest blood relative • His grandfather was named successor in 1056 but died in 1057 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was only 14 years old in 1066 • He had no money, soldiers and no military experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was an experienced ruler of Norway • A famous Viking warrior • Had the support of Harold Godwinson’s brother (Tostig – former Earl of Northumbria who had been sacked by Harold). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He settled disputes using force • His name means ‘hard ruler’ and that was the approach he took
Harold Godwinson (Earl of Wessex)		William, Duke of Normandy (The Norman)	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strongest and richest man in England • Acted as sub-regulus to Edward during the final years of his life • Skillful military leader • Edward asked Harold to become king on his deathbed (Novissima Verba). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempted to overthrow Edward in 1051 but failed • Sworn an oath of allegiance to support William’s claim to the English throne already 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distant cousin of Edward • Promised the throne after helping Edward against the Godwin rebellion • Harold Godwinson had visited Normandy in 1064 and promised, under oath, to support William’s claim to the throne. • Proved himself to be a capable ruler in Normandy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegitimate son of Robert of Normandy– known as ‘William the bastard’. This made his blood link to Edward flawed.