

What caused the succession crisis in 1066? – Knowledge Organiser



1. Why were the Godwins so powerful?

- The house of **Godwin** began in 1018 during King Cnut's reign, when Cnut made his favourite adviser, Godwin, Earl of Wessex. Godwin was probably the son of an Anglo-Saxon thegn. Godwin had helped Edward the Confessor become King, and in return, the King married Godwin's daughter, Edith of Wessex in 1045. By the mid 1060s the Godwins had control of almost all England. Harold Godwinson became Earl of Wessex upon the death of his father in 1053, giving him riches, influence and a powerful position to the King. In 1055 Tostig Godwinson became Earl of Northumbria. In 1057 East Anglia was given to Gyrth Godwinson, Harold's teenage brother. A smaller earldom in the South-West midlands went to Leofwine Godwinson.
- The only significant rival to the Godwins was Aelfgar, Earl of Mercia who had the support of the Welsh King.
- The Godwins had made political marriages. Edith to King Edward, Harold to the wife of Llywelyn and Edith the Fair to Mercia, Tostig to Judith of Flanders.
- The Godwins were very wealthy and were lords to many hundreds of thegns and were powerful leaders. They also had influence in the Church, convincing Edward to appoint bishops loyal to them to them. Harold was also Earl of Hereford.

2. Why was Harold's Embassy to Normandy significant?

- Harold Godwinson went to Normandy in the summer of 1064 on a mission for King Edward – a visit called an **embassy**. He landed in Ponthieu (between Normandy and Flanders). He was taken prisoner by Count Guy of Ponthieu. Duke William heard of the capture and demanded that Harold be handed over. Harold spent time with William of Normandy and helped him in two military campaigns, which resulted in William giving Harold gifts of weapons and armour. Harold made a solemn **oath** to William – swearing to support William's claim to the throne of England.
- Harold's embassy was significant for three reasons – it showed that Harold was King Edward's trusted adviser. It was used by the Normans to boost William's claim to the throne – even if the embassy was not about William. It was also used by the Normans to portray Harold as an oath-breaker after Harold became King instead of helping William to the throne of England. Even if Harold never swore allegiance, it was useful to show how important oaths of allegiance between a lord and follower were in society

3. Why did the earldom rebel against Tostig in 1065?

- **Tostig** Godwinson became Earl of Northumbria in 1055 after the death of Earl Siward. Northumbria was important because it was large, it guarded the border with Scotland and had a long history of Viking attacks. Northumbria was an obvious point for Vikings to invade. Much of Northumbria was part of Danelaw. In October 1065 there was an uprising against Tostig, led by Northumbrian thegns. There were reasons for the uprising – Tostig taxed too heavily, he was a southerner and Northumbria was typically governed by northerners, he ordered the assassination of some high born Northumbrians and had imposed many unjust new laws.
- Rebels marched on York, where they killed many of Tostig's **Housecarls** and servants and declared Tostig an outlaw. They invited Morcar to be the earl instead of Tostig. Harold met with the rebels and passed on Edward's agreement to their terms. Harold married Morcar's sister. By 1st November Tostig was exiled. It was thought Tostig pushed Northumbria too far.

Keywords:

House of Godwin
– Godwin family.

Hostages – people given to another as a part of an oath or agreement. Could be killed

Succession – the process that decides who should be the next King or Queen and succeed to the throne

4. Why was there a succession crisis in 1066?

- **Edward the Confessor** had no children, which meant that when he died on 5th January 1066, there was a succession crisis. The Bayeux Tapestry shows Edward's hand holding out to Harold.
- **Harold Godwinson** was on the spot when King Edward died. He based his claim on the King's deathbed words, his family connection to him, his role as the king's right-hand man, his influence with earls and thegns and military power. Godwinson believed he was appointed by the King himself. His chance of success was large as Harold had the support required to be made King.
- **Edgar Aetheling** was Edward's nephew and was directly descended from royal blood. Edward the Confessor and Harold Godwinson had brought Edgar and his father back from Hungary in 1054, where they had been exiles under King Cnut. In 1066, the Witan thought that Edgar was not fit to become King as there were threats from Scandinavia and Normandy. His claim was based on royal blood, but he had no power to back it up. He had a weak chance of succession. Although teenagers had become Kings before, Anglo-Saxon England at the time needed a warrior-king to defend it against foreign threats.
- **Harald Hardrada** was the King of Norway as well as a fearsome warrior who was feared across Europe. His claim to the English throne was based on Viking secret deals and treaties. Hardrada believed he had a good enough chance of succeeding to launch an invasion on England. King Cnut ruled from 1016-1035. when he died, his son Harthacnut took the throne, but shortly lost. Tostig Godwinson, when he was exiled from England joined forces with Hardrada. Tostig gave the impression that Harold was very unpopular and that the Viking King had a chance of gaining the English throne. Hardrada's claim to the throne was weak, although the Danelaw might welcome a Viking King. He had a good chance of success as he had 15,000 warriors and 300 ships to invade England.
- **William was Duke of Normandy** and was surrounded by enemies. England offered a chance to real wealth and power. His claim was based on an agreement William said was made between Edward the Confessor and himself in 1051, an agreement that was confirmed by Harold's embassy in 1064. William had the pope's support, but lacked evidence. He had a good chance of gaining the throne as the Normans were the best warriors, but it would be a risky invasion.

The reign of King Harold – Knowledge Organiser



1. Who should be king?

- Harold Godwinson's chance of succeeding the throne was excellent as he had the support required to be made King. Edgar had little chance of succeeding as he was too young and the threat of invasion meant a stronger ruler would be more suitable. Harold's chance of succeeding was good as he had the resources to launch an invasion and William of Normandy had quite a good chance of succeeding as the Normans were Europe's strongest warriors, but the invasion would be risky and would not be easy to gather the men needed to make it successful.
- In Anglo-Saxon England, the King could not simply announce his successor as the Witan played a role in appointing the successor. It was unlikely that the Witan would have chosen William in January 1066 – Edward's attempt to bring Normans into senior positions earlier in his reign had been opposed very strongly by all the leading earls, many of whom were still in the Witan.
- Harold Godwinson's coronation took place the same day as Edward was buried (6th January 1066) – this was very quick. Edward had waited at least 6 months before being crowned. Everything about the way Harold became King shows how he seized the opportunity before any of his other likely successors could have laid a claim to the throne of England.
- The Witan met on the day that Edward died to elect Harold as King. They suspected that William would act on his claim and it was probably the need to make preparations for England's defence that made the Witan willing to elect Harold II as quickly as possible. When news of the coronation reached William, he reacted furiously.

2. How successful was Harold Godwinson as King of England?

- Harold faced many problems from other powerful Anglo-Saxon Earls, he faced difficulty in the North on whether they would accept him as King, Tostig posed a threat as he was an ally of Hardrada and there were reports that William was building an invasion fleet ready to invade England and lay his claim to the throne.
- Harold went to York after his coronation to meet with other members of the Witan to ensure they supported him. He also gathered a very large army and positioned them along the south coast of England to defend against invasion. He also stationed a large fleet on the south coast. Tostig had support in Flanders (gained through marriage) and so sailed to England in May 1066. When he learned of the strength of Harold's army, he sailed round the coast to Lincoln and began plotting with Hardrada instead. Harold's army guarded the southern coast all summer. He kept his army and fleet provisioned which was very expensive and complicated. The expected Normans did not come and so by September it was time to stand down and refit the fleet.

3. Why were the battles of Gate Fulford and Stamford Bridge significant?

Key Dates:

- **20th September 1066 – Battle of Gate Fulford**
- **25th September 1066 – Battle of Stamford Bridge**
- In September 1066, Harald Hardrada and Tostig launched their attack. Hardrada had 200-300 warships carrying near 10,000 Vikings. They marched to York which had been the capital of a Viking state. Their way was blocked by an army led by Morcar and his elder brother Edwin, the earls of Northumbria and Mercia. The brothers decided on open battle to defend York rather than staying behind the security of the city's heavy fortifications.
- **Gate Fulford** – It was a defeat for Edwin and Morcar. Hardrada and Tostig were thought to have larger armies. Hardrada and his Housecarls were battle-hardened fighters and were very skilled in battle. Edwin and Morcar also stationed their armies with marshlands at their backs which meant troops could go nowhere. The English army broke and tried to run away, but they got stuck and were cut down. The Norwegians boasted that many Englishmen had died. Harold took his Housecarls north, travelling 185 miles in five days. Leaving the South coast was a bad decision for Harold, but he thought that William would not cross the Channel at that time of the year. Some of the September storms had wrecked some of Harold's own fleet and also possibly drove William back from an initial invasion. The wind prevented William from crossing the channel. Harold's five-day march was an outstanding military achievement. At the battle of Gate Fulford Hardrada and Tostig had exchanged hostages with the city of York, which had surrendered to them without a fight. They had also demanded more hostages. Hardrada and Tostig were informed that the extra hostages would be handed over to them at Stamford Bridge. On the 25th September, they were at Stamford Bridge, awaiting their hostages, when Harold launched a surprise attack.
- **Stamford Bridge** – King Harold had probably learned of the hostage deal as he travelled towards York. There was a small hill overlooking Stamford Bridge which meant his army could approach undetected. The battle was a success for Harold. Hardrada and Tostig were both killed and thousands of other men. It is thought that only 24 out of the 200 longships returned. Harold secured a victory because the Vikings had left their armour on the ships with a third of their men. Hardrada's army had fought a battle five days before and were tired and Harold's Housecarls broke the Viking shield wall.

Both battles were significant because...	However...
Hardrada and Tostig's invasion meant Harold could not prevent William's invasion	Harold had already disbanded the southern fyrd in September
Edwin and Morcar made strategic errors	Harold was already on his way north before Gate Fulford
Edwin and Morcar survived Gate Fulford but were unable to fight with Harold at Hastings	Edwin and Morcar are not mentioned in sources about the Battle of Hastings
Harold's march south again made his remaining Housecarls less battle-ready	Harold and his Housecarls had just won a victory and morale was high

What happened at Hastings? – Knowledge Organiser

1. What happened at the Battle of Hastings?

- *Harold did not achieve surprise* – William's scouts informed him about Harold's advance in time for him to leave Hastings and threaten Harold's army as it was gathering together on a wooded hilltop. There was a rush to gain control of the high ground of the battlefield, which Harold won, organising his shield wall along a ridge. There was marshland either side of the hill.
- *William sent his foot soldiers in first* - the battle lasted 8 hours which was longer than a typical medieval battle. William first sent his archers forward, but the English caught the arrows on their shields. Norman foot soldiers then went up the hill towards the shield wall. The heavy axes of the English did a lot of damage. The Norman cavalry then laboured up the hill, but failed to break the wall. The battle started in Harold's favour.
- *William showed his face* – Waves of Norman attacks continued throughout the day, with the Anglo-Saxon shield wall standing firm. At a difficult stage for the Normans, a rumour went round William's army that he had been killed or wounded. William tipped his helmet back to show he was still alive and rallied his troops.
- *Harold's shield wall worn down* – a portion of Harold's army disengaged from the shield wall to chase William's men down the hill. They were cut off at the bottom and slaughtered. The Normans gradually reduced the Saxon forces until the shield wall began to break up and became much less effective against cavalry charges.
- *The last stand* – Harold, his brothers Gyrth and Leofwine, their Housecarls and the remaining fyrd troops held their position at the top of the hill, probably in rings of men around their standards. But they were now heavily outnumbered and unable to hold off the Norman cavalry charges. Harold and his brothers were killed, and their Housecarls fought to the last man while the remaining fyrd tried to flee. William was victorious.

Harold's Housecarls

- Shields were round, hide covered with metal. They formed shield walls, with troops two or three lines thick behind it.
- Wore chain mail armour or metal plates sewn onto leather
- They were highly disciplined and could endure. They were elite foot soldiers and would fight to the death to defend their King.
- Javelin, long axe and a sword were common weapons. They were trained to wield their axes with such force.



2. Why did the Normans win the Battle of Hastings?

- *Weakening of the Shield Wall* – possible that this happened due to a lack of discipline in Harold's army. When Harold's foot soldiers broke ranks, the shield wall began to be badly weakened.
- *Feigned Retreat* - a body of troops would pretend to flee in panic, hoping that their opponents would lose their discipline and chase after them. It was very risky because there was a good chance that a pretend flight could turn into a real one.
- *William's leadership* – William made all the right decisions. All of William's risks paid off and for Harold they did not. William's long wait in the summer of 1066 was not because of bad weather, but because he was waiting for Harold's fyrd to disband. As soon as this happened, William set sail. Keeping his army and fleet together took strong leadership. The crossing for William's men was highly ambitious – special boats were constructed to transport the horses. When William and his troops arrived at Pevensey Bay, he showed strong strategic awareness – William organised a pre-fabricated castle which gave them security from attacks. Once in England, William allowed his men to ransack and pillage surrounding areas for food.
- *Harold's leadership* – Harold's military leadership was well renowned throughout England. Calling out his southern army in May was a problem as he had to maintain it for four months, before finally disbanding it. Deciding to rush down to fight William in the South was not Harold's only option. He could have waited for William to come to him in London. If Harold had planned on surprising William, in fact it was the other way around. William learned of Harold's muster point from his scouts and arrived there after a long, early morning march from Hastings, before Harold's army were ready. In the chaos of the battle anything could have happened. Getting an arrow in the eye could have easily have happened to William.
- Luck, or God's will did play a significant role in William's victory, which easily could have gone in Harold's favour. William's time he sailed was very dangerous and he could have easily have been destroyed and so he was very lucky.
- Medieval battles were often chaotic. Despite the differences in tactics, the two sides were easily matched. William was also very lucky that he did not lose and perhaps owes his victory to the indiscipline of the fyrd.



William's Knights

- Years of training to fight on horseback
- Wore chain mail armour
- Shield was kite shaped to protect left side and leg
- Lance, javelin, sword and mace were common weapons
- Horse was specially bred to be strong enough to carry an armoured knight and trained for battle
- Knights saddles held them tightly in their place on their horse so they could use their arms freely. Their stirrups allowed them to stand in the saddle for a lance thrust.