

Contenders to the throne in 1066

When Edward the Confessor died childless on the 5th January 1066, he left no direct heir to the throne. Four contenders stepped forward claiming they had the legitimate right to be king.

Who do you think had the best claim?



Harold Godwinson
Earl of Wessex

Claim Harold was chosen by the Witan (King's Counsel) to succeed Edward. He also said that it was Edward's dying wish that Harold should have the crown, though there were no witnesses to this.

Reality Though not blood-related to Edward, Harold was exceptionally popular within England and, through his inherited position as Earl of Wessex, he controlled huge amounts of land in Southern England. He had also previously won a lot of battles for Edward.



William
Duke of Normandy

Claim William was a distant cousin of Edward, and claimed that both Edward and Harold had promised him the throne.

Reality Edward had supposedly agreed to make William heir after inviting him to court in 1051. After a shipwreck in 1064, Harold had been handed over to William who forced him to swear an oath. As this was under the threat of death, the Witan found it invalid. William was a very successful and powerful ruler in Normandy and was an experienced military commander.



Harald Hardrada
King of Norway

Claim Hardrada had been promised the Kingdom of Denmark by Harthacnut, who had briefly been King of England in 1040-42. Harald had no blood tie to Edward but was related to former English King Canute.

Reality Hardrada was not popular in England. Despite this, he did have the support of Tostig Godwinson, who joined him in rebelling against his brother Harold. Hardrada was a well-known, fierce Viking warrior, and skilled commander who had successfully expanded Norway's possessions.



Edgar Atheling
Great-nephew of Edward

Claim Edgar was the great-nephew of Edward, and was the last Anglo-Saxon prince. As such it is possible that Edward wanted an Anglo-Saxon to succeed him. He was also the closest blood relative to Edward.

Reality Edgar was only a teenager when Edward died, and not considered strong enough to hold England together. He had spent the early years of his life in Hungary meaning he was less well-connected than Harold.

Discover our range of school trips, designed to inspire students with topics relevant to your history curriculum. Visit nstgroup.co.uk/history-school-trips