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?



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.



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.



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. Hadrada was a well-known,
fierce Viking warrior, and skilled commander
who had successfully expanded Norway's
possessions.



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

