Sons of Sussex and Wessex - Harold Godwinson and the Godwins 1001-1094

Harold Godwinson, born in 1022, was the second son of Godwin Wulfnothson, earl of Wessex. Godwin himself had been born in 1001 and his parents and Harold's paternal grandparents are believed to have been Wulfnoth Cild, a thegn of Sussex, and Thyra Svendsdatter of Denmark. Harold may have been a greatx5 grandson of Æthelred I who had reigned in 866–871, but this is unproved.

His family obviously moved in the highest ranks of the English world, as thegns were one rank below earls in the Saxon hierarchy, even though Wulfnoth had possibly blotted his copybook. The story goes that he hijacked 20 of the ships of a new royal fleet assembled by Æthelred II and went on a rampage with them along the south coast. If this happened we do not know why, but for this he is reported to have been banished. But his son Godwin remained a supporter of Æthelred's sons by his first marriage, Athelstan and Edmund Ironside. When Athelstan prematurely died in about 1014 he left an estate in Compton, west Sussex to '*Godwin, Wulfnoth's son, which his father had possessed'.*

Relationships with Cnut

Godwin Wulfnothson's talents must have been recognised, as Cnut soon elevated him, even though Godwin had supported Edmund Ironside in the struggle against Cnut in 1015–1016. His brother, and therefore Harold Godwinson's uncle, may have been Æthelnoth, archbishop of Canterbury (appointed 1020; he collected his pallium in 1022). Æthelnoth's appointment itself was possibly a gesture of atonement by Cnut, as another uncle, Æthelweard, had been executed in Cnut's bloody cull in 1017 of many opponents and turncoats.

Even if one of Godwin's brothers had died in the cull, Godwin had survived and had pledged his loyalty to Cnut. By 1018 he had campaigned with Cnut in Denmark after which the clearly impressed Cnut 'gave' him his brother-in-law Ulf's sister Gytha Thorkelsdóttir as a wife. So he was now related by marriage to the new royal family. Godwin was soon made earl of the eastern part of Wessex and quite soon afterwards of all Wessex apart from Kent, which was added after the death of Archbishop Æthelnoth of Canterbury in 1038. He became an extremely powerful figure in England, and stayed in an influential position during the short reigns of Cnut's sons Harold I Harefoot (1035–1040) and Harthacnut (1040–1042). As we have seen, after Harthacnut's death in June 1042 he was instrumental in getting the pro-Norman Edward eventually accepted by the Witan as king of England.

Cnut had deposed Olaf II as king of Norway in 1028, but Olaf's son Magnus I regained this throne from Cnut's son Sweyn, who had been placed as co-regent of Norway just before

Cnut's death. Magnus I and Harthacnut, who had become king of Denmark on Cnut's death, had made a treaty in 1038-39 agreeing that if either died childless the other was to inherit the other's throne. So Magnus had promptly taken Denmark on Harthacnut's death in 1042, and reckoned that he should have England too, thus posing a significant threat to England from across the North Sea.

Relationships with Edward the Confessor

Although Godwin had been implicated in the murder of Edward the Confessor's younger brother Alfred, he had supported Edward against his mother, now Emma the queen dowager, who for her own reasons had flirted with the idea of supporting Magnus. Godwin then also supported Edward in promoting abbot Stigand to the post of archbishop of Canterbury.

Part of his reward was that one of Godwin's sons, Harold, aged about 25, was made earl of East Anglia in 1044. There had been no earl of East Anglia since 1021, as Cnut was also king of Denmark and Norway, and Harthacnut had also been king of Denmark, so the area had been directly protected by the kings during their reigns. Now Edward needed to place a strong earl there. Harold became Edward's East Anglian representative with powers to act on his behalf in matters of law and to raise a *fyrd* (army) from the earldom in war or emergency. There were extensive estates, the income from which was intended to cover the expenses of administration. A year after his appointment Harold proved his strength as he led the English fleet out of Sandwich in successful manoeuvres to discourage Magnus, who had raised a raiding fleet.

The earls of England needed to work together and by 1045, after subtle nepotistic moves, no fewer than four were Godwins: Harold himself; Harold's father Godwin of Wessex; Harold's brother Sweyn of south Mercia; and cousin Beorn of Northampton. The other earls were Leofric of Mercia, Ralf of Hereford and Siward of Northumbria. On top of this, Edward made Godwin's daughter Edith his queen in 1045 when he was about 43. There were no children, which may have disappointed Godwin, who may have wished to be grandfather to a dynasty.

Sometime after becoming Earl of East Anglia, Harold took Edith Swanneshals (*Ealdgȳð Swann hnesce = Edith Gentle Swan, although more commonly known as Swan-neck)* as his partner. They were together for the next 20 years and had at least seven children. One of their daughters, called Gytha after her grandmother, married the Grand Duke of Kiev and, if the genealogies are correct, became an ancestor of the present British royal family by way of Philip IV of France whose daughter Isabella married Edward II of England and whose great-great granddaughter Catherine of France married Henry V of England. (After Henry V's death Catherine also had a liaison with Owen Tudor which made her grandmother of Henry VII, the first Tudor king.)

The Godwins were known for their political acumen and talent, but they were also ruthless, headstrong and troublesome, some more than others. In 1046 Earl Sweyn abducted the abbess of Leominster – and it took almost a year to make him release her. Sweyn was exiled for this offence, and his earldom was split between Harold and his cousin Beorn. Earl Godwin's support for Sweyn during this incident strained the relationship between Godwin and Edward. This was already difficult at times as Godwin disliked the large number of Normans that Edward had introduced into the court.

The influence of Normans on Edward cannot be understated. For 30 years since boyhood he had lived in exile in Normandy, and had come back to England only at about the age of 38, once Harthacnut was on the throne. He had acquired the tastes and outlook of a Norman, spoke Norman-French and knew his Norman relations well, including his young first-cousin-once-removed William. Edward had deep religious views and gained the nickname 'Confessor'.

1048 saw Harold once more in charge of the English navy, this time dealing with 'German' raiders who managed to get through and raid Essex, part of his own earldom. Meanwhile the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III was defending his own border from Magnus of Norway. Then Magnus' death saw his half-uncle Harald Hardrada claim Norway and fight Sweyn Ulfson, a cousin of the Godwinsons, for control of Denmark. In these confused and turbulent years, emperor Henry had, by 1049, formed an alliance with Edward whereby the English fleet, part led by Harold Godwinson, was to contain the pirates by sea whilst the emperor dealt with them by land.

In the midst of all this, Sweyn Godwinson returned to England from Flanders where he had been in exile. He tried to reconcile formally with Edward but the Witan, including Harold and Beorn, refused this and Sweyn was given four days' safe conduct to leave England. Before he left there was news of pirates in the English Channel and the king ordered earl Godwin to take a fleet of 42 ships, some commanded by Harold, others by Beorn, to intercept them. The fleet became weather-bound at Pevensey, and Sweyn turned up and somehow persuaded Beorn to accompany him. The cousins quarrelled, the end result of which was Beorn's death. After this Sweyn was named '*nithing*', that is a person of no value, and he went back to Flanders. Some of his ships deserted him, but things had gone too far and two of the others were intercepted by ships from Hastings, their crews slain and the ships given back to the king.

Over the winter of 1049/50 Godwin tried to persuade Edward to allow his son back and this was eventually allowed, under the condition that Sweyn would undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He eventually did this after the events of 1051, but he died at Constantinople in 1052 during his return.

In 1051 Edward blocked the appointment of a nominee of Godwin as Archbishop of Canterbury, and instead appointed his own favourite Norman advisor Robert Champart,

who had been bishop of London from 1044. This may have been the start of new tensions with Godwin, whom Edward still held responsible in part for his brother Alfred's murder.

Then in the summer of the same year Edward was visited by his former brother-in-law, Count Eustace of Boulogne. Afterwards, travelling back to Flanders, Eustace demanded free lodgings for himself and his men at Dover. The people of Dover refused, and there was a fight, with several deaths on both sides. Eustace returned to the king to complain, following which Edward angrily summoned Godwin and ordered him to ravage Dover to punish the people. Godwin refused to ravage in his own earldom.

Edward called the Witan to judge this refusal, and added the issue of Godwin being involved in the murder of his younger brother Alfred by Harefoot's men in 1036. Godwin knew a trap when he saw one and gathered the Wessex fyrd, plus Sweyn and Harold with their troops. He also married off another young son, Tostig, to Judith, daughter of Baldwin IV of Flanders and his second wife Judith of Normandy, daughter of Richard II of Normandy, which created an alliance and a safe haven for himself.

Edward in turn gathered his army and had the support of Eustace, Archbishop Champart, his nephew Ralf of Mantes, and the earls Leofric of Mercia and Siward of Northumbria. On 1 September, while Edward was at Gloucester, news came that Godwin and his army were nearby. Godwin demanded an opportunity to refute the charges made against him concerning Alfred's murder. He also wanted Eustace to stand trial for his actions in Dover. Edward stalled, summoned the northern earls and cried treason. Godwin's bluff was called when the earls with their fyrds arrived. Civil war loomed, negotiations took place, and Godwin's army dispersed.

Once more Edward commanded Godwin and Harold to appear before him. Godwin asked for guarantees but Edward refused. Godwin was again in an impossible position: if he went to Edward, his safety was at risk, but if he stood his ground it could come to armed conflict. In the end he and the rest of his sons were declared outlaws and given five days to leave the country. Wulfnoth, Godwin's youngest son and Hákon, Sweyn's son, remained behind as hostages with Edward. Godwin, his wife Gytha, and his sons Sweyn, Tostig and Gyrth boarded ship at Bosham and went to Flanders. Harold and Leofwine Godwinson sailed from Bristol for the Norse stronghold of Dublin. Murchad, the new king of Dublin, allowed the Godwinsons to recruit mercenaries for what seemed an inevitable struggle with king Edward.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* briefly reports a visit by the 23-year-old Duke William of Normandy and his entourage to Edward in 1051-1052 during the exile of the Godwins. This may have been a follow-up to the appointment of Champart as Archbishop of Canterbury. Champart was a confidant of Edward, and en route to Rome to collect his pallium he is said to have conveyed an offer from Edward of the succession of England to duke William II. Historians disagree about whether this event even occurred and, if so, how seriously Edward meant the promise and whether he later changed his mind. He clearly knew that he would

have no children, for his marriage to Edith of Wessex appears to have been a chaste and political one. While the Godwins were in exile she was sent to a convent at Wilton and Edward toyed with divorcing her.

In 1051 Edward would have been drawn to a Norman successor. No precedent existed for English kings to nominate heirs, this being the duty of the Witan, but this was not the case in Normandy. There from the time of Rollo it was usual for the incumbent to name his successor before his death. Usually it would have been the eldest son, but not always. The logic was that the nobles would swear an oath of allegiance to the heir before the present incumbent died. This method of grooming was less developed in England, but this was how it was done in Normandy, so William would have seen nothing wrong with the process. Possibly, neither would Edward, who had spent so many years in Normandy.

At that time Edward had other living male relatives (via his sister's marriage to Drogo of Mantes, count of the Vexin) – his nephews Earl Ralf (the Timid) of Hereford and Walter Count of Mantes – and there was also an exiled son of his half-brother Edmund Ironside living in Hungary, who would have had little knowledge of England. No one wanted another Scandinavian king, and the power struggles between the earls would have made it difficult for any to be successful. A Norman succession would ensure that the Channel was kept closed to Vikings.

Return of the Godwins

This was all before the return of the Godwins and their gradual re-establishment of a powerbase. On 24 June 1052, Earl Godwin made a sortie from his exile in Flanders across the Channel, possibly to see what support he could count on from Wessex. After recruiting (no doubt vigorously) at Winchelsea, Rye and Hastings he retreated to Pevensey, as Edward's fleet sallied forth from Sandwich to find him. A storm covered Godwin's further retreat to Bruges, after 'acquiring' additional ships from Pevensey, but soon after that he returned to England, landing on the Isle of Wight.

Harold and Leofwine left Dublin with nine ships full of mercenaries. They entered the river Severn to provoke earl Odda, whom William of Malmesbury describes as a kinsman of Edward and who now had responsibility for the area. The local fyrd was called out; they drove off the mercenaries, but with heavy casualties. (This was Harold's first military action.)

The Godwin brothers then sailed round Land's End and joined their father off the Isle of Wight, after which they went to Portland where Godwin re-imposed his authority as earl of Wessex, although it does appear that they were only fully welcomed back and supported in the south-east.

The combined fleet sailed up the Channel towards London, gathering men and ships as they went (again no doubt from Pevensey, Hastings and elsewhere). Once more Edward summoned the earls. Ralf and Odda responded and harassed Godwin's fleet near Pevensey,

but Leofric and Siward were this time noticeable by their absence, and Edward found himself outnumbered. Arriving in London by way of Sandwich, earl Godwin talked directly to the citizens and persuaded them to support him.

As in 1051, two English armies faced each other, but this time bishop Stigand acted as an intermediary. They made a truce and a meeting of the Witan was called. When it met it included Leofric and Siward. Godwin cleared himself, on oath, of involvement in Alfred's death and of treasonable intent by himself and family in 1051. The Witan and the reluctant king accepted the oath. Following this Godwin and his family were restored to their lands. The Witan, in political fudge, had held that the crisis of 1051 had been caused by 'bad counsellors', that is, Edward's Norman advisors.

Ordericus Vitalis reports that in 1052 Earl Godwin promptly dismissed Archbishop Champart, or at least caused him to flee. Champart may have somehow taken Edward's hostages, Wulfnoth Godwinson and Hákon Sweynson, with him and handed them over to William of Normandy. Stigand was appointed in his place but Champart appealed to the Pope, who re-instated him; but he died at Jumièges on the way back from Rome.

This incident shows just how confident Godwin felt. He was clearly prepared to manoeuvre around Edward, although never to overthrow him. But a new pope still refused to recognise Stigand and removed his pallium so that he was unable to perform archiepiscopal functions such as the consecration of bishops. Stigand continued to hold the see of Winchester and some abbeys – pluralism forbidden by a series of popes. Edward could have dismissed him but he did not.

Earl Godwin did not enjoy his return to favour for very long, for soon afterwards he suffered a stroke and died three days later. Edward then made a surprise political move and appointed Harold as the new earl of Wessex. He also created him Dux Anglorum. This was a new title, indicating not that he had been designated heir but the military deputy of the king.

Over the years Godwin and Harold had used their positions to take direct possession of many manors in Wessex, including some in Sussex. Within eastern Sussex Harold and his family are recorded as holding at least eight manors in the Battle and Hastings area which was about half the number held by the royal family.

Troubles north and west

At this point Northumbria started to cause trouble. It had always been semi-detached from the rest of England and had a residual Danish-Saxon law structure, so when earl Siward died in 1055 Edward appointed another of Harold's brothers, Tostig, to the earldom. Undoubtedly this was with the instruction to convert the earldom to full English law and taxation.

But earl Ælfgar of East Anglia thought that the earldom of Northumbria should have been his. His complaints riled Edward, who promptly outlawed him. Following the former example of the Godwins, the discarded Ælfgar fled to Ireland where he raised a force of mercenaries that sailed to Chester. He then tried to get the king of North Wales, Gruffydd ap Llewellyn, to join him to attack England.

The Welsh king, however, had a prior issue to deal with: Gruffydd ap Rhydderch of South Wales. With the help of Ælfgar's 18 shiploads of mercenaries, Gruffydd ap Llewellyn raided South Wales, which resulted in the killing of his rival. Ælfgar and Gruffydd now turned on the southern Welsh Marches, the area previously known as Hwicce, but avoided conflict with Ælfgar's father, Leofric of Mercia. Ralf the Timid, earl of Hereford, was sent against them. He decided to use cavalry and suffered a monumental defeat, so Edward had to look elsewhere for a force to defend England. He called on Harold.

Harold moved cautiously, making a feint at Wales to draw Gruffydd back, and then opened negotiations with the invaders. Ælfgar was reinstated as earl of East Anglia, Gruffydd gained some borderlands, and Ælfgar accepted Tostig as earl of Northumbria. Although it was not an ideal solution, it broke the alliance of Ælfgar and Gruffydd. Shortly afterwards more problems broke out with Gruffydd. Earls Harold and Leofric gathered an army and with this at their back sat down with Gruffydd to talk. This ended up with Gruffydd being recognised as king of Wales in exchange for him recognising Edward as his overlord.

Earl Leofric's son, Ælfgar, succeeded him in Mercia and a new earl of East Anglia was appointed – yet another Godwinson, Gyrth. On 21 December 1057, Ralf the Timid, earl of Hereford, died. To replace him the earldom, which actually covered much of south-west Mercia, was divided into three: Harold gained the Welsh border counties, and Ælfgar and Leofwine split the more eastern counties. Of all the earls of England, now only the unsettled Ælfgar was not a Godwinson. In 1057 Ælfgar made another alliance with Gruffydd ap Llewellyn, which Edward saw as a threat; he banished him. Again Harold in diplomatic mode arranged for Ælfgar to be given back his earldom and Gruffydd more English borderlands.

The alliance ended when Ælfgar died sometime after August in 1062. As soon as Christmas was over, Harold as military commander struck at Gruffydd, determined to smash him once and for all and to regain the lands the English had had to concede to him over the years. Harold and his brother Tostig undertook a joint land/sea operation. By the spring of 1063 Gruffydd and his shrinking forces had fled inland to the fastness of Snowdon, from where he continued to harass the English. On 5 August Cynan ap Iago, who was the son of Iago ab Idwal, ruler of Gwynedd from 1033 to 1039, brought Gruffydd's head to Harold, who took it and laid it at the feet of king Edward. Edward's response is not recorded.

Edward had started to think about his successor again and tried to find Edward Ætheling, the son of Edmund Ironside, who had fled with his family to Hungary**.** Bishop Ealdred of Worcester set out in 1054 to track him down but was unsuccessful. In 1056 Harold, in diplomat mode, may have travelled to visit Baldwin of Flanders and on to Cologne then to

Regensburg, met the Hungarian king there, found Edward Ætheling and negotiated his return to England as a possible heir for King Edward. Whatever happened, Edward Ætheling arrived in England with his family in 1057, coinciding with the death of earl Leofric. Edward Ætheling also died soon after arriving, but he had a young son, Edgar, and other children whom Edward took into the royal household.

Harold Godwinson and Normandy

In the autumn of 1064, possibly early 1065, Harold visited Normandy. The early records suggest that he was to inform William that he was Edward's preferred heir, but the sources of information are Norman and written after 1066, so the storyline may be more than suspect.

All the sources concur that a visit happened, but they vary in describing what transpired. Another theory is that this was an attempt by Harold to retrieve his young brother Wulfnoth and nephew Hákon, who were still being held hostage in Normandy, although why he should suddenly decide to do this twelve years after they became hostages is not clear.

Having sailed from Bosham, he may have been aiming for Flanders to use count Baldwin as an intermediary, or he may have tried to sail directly to Normandy. Whatever his projected landfall, his ships were caught in a storm and ended up north of Normandy. Harold became a hostage of the count of Ponthieu, a vassal of Duke William, and was held to ransom himself. William found out and had Harold released to his 'care' at Eu where he met him himself with a troop of armed horsemen and took him to Rouen.

Harold stayed at the Norman court for some time, and took part alongside William in a campaign against Conan II of Brittany who was besieging Dol. William knighted Harold, which as an English earl he may have regarded as no more than an act of gratitude, but to the Normans it would clearly have been taken that Harold had accepted William's lordship. In addition there was the possible oath on (hidden?) holy bones that Harold would do all he could to make William king of England.

If he did take this oath, it might have been under duress to secure his own release or to protect his own future position in the event of the duke's success in gaining the throne of England. William had agreed that as part of the deal, Harold would marry one of his daughters (possibly Agatha or Adeliza), and that one of William's related magnates would marry Edith, Harold's sister, who would by then be Edward's widow.

Harold's return

Harold returned to England with Hákon, but still without his brother, Wulfnoth, who remained a hostage. The story is told in the Bayeux Tapestry, which is chiefly a tale of Harold's double dealing and his denouement as seen from the Norman viewpoint. This is in some pictorial detail, but we should be wary of over-interpretation and of taking specific

scenes too literally. As with all things related to the Conquest it has been academically dissected until there is nothing left to dissect. The tapestry imagery contains nuances and sub-tales in the border images which, whilst often decorative, sometimes appear to give commentaries (sometimes not very complimentary and sometimes obscene) on the events related in the adjacent main panel, and also refer to Middle English fables, particularly in the first section.

There was probably no smoke without fire about all this. Edward's many years in Normandy must have counted for something. Although Edward was about 28 when William was born, Edward had been brought up, educated and lived 'like a son' in the Norman court through the difficult years when William's father died and William only just survived. He must have known the dukes of Normandy well, and William as a boy.

Edward clearly detested the Godwins but was at first powerful enough to use them, although after 1052 his position was much weaker. He had also found that he could not trust his own mother. For a man who was supposed to be deeply religious he also held strong opinions and had a fierce temper. His situation must have led to deep frustrations.

In 1065 the Northumbrians rose in revolt against earl Tostig. Tostig had increased taxes, never a popular thing to do, but there were deeper-seated reasons for the revolt. He had curbed the power of local landholders through intrigue and murder, and his men were using arbitrary justice to enforce tax collections.

In the autumn of 1065 this led the thegns of Northumbria to seize and occupy York and kill Tostig's retainers. The revolt involved '*all the thegns of Yorkshire*', the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says. The Northumbrians took back what they deemed theirs by right, then declared Tostig an outlaw and sent for Morcar, the younger brother of earl Edwin of Mercia, to be the new earl. Led by 'earl' Morcar they were joined at Northampton by earl Edwin (Edwin and Morcar were sons of Ælfgar), and moved south looking to find recompense from Tostig's holdings. Harold met them for discussions and concluded that it was impossible for Tostig to remain earl of Northumbria.

Harold returned to the king, counselled against military action against Morcar and his thegns and against acceptance of the rebels' demands. Edward was angry, as Tostig had been another favourite, but he was finally swayed. For the first time since Sweyn's death, the Godwinsons were divided. Harold went to Northampton and told Morcar he was now officially earl of Northumbria, and the rebels that they were pardoned. Tostig continued to argue with Edward and in the end took himself off to Flanders or, as was usually the case with Godwinsons, found himself exiled. He went to Bruges to join his brother-in-law, count Baldwin V.

Death of Edward the Confessor

It was now November 1065 and it became obvious that Edward would soon die. New kings of England were normally drawn from the royal family but not necessarily by primogeniture. A possible heir was Edgar Ætheling, and normally, with the approval of the Witan, he might have succeeded with Harold 'Dux Anglorum' continuing as regent, and running the country until the boy was old enough to rule on his own. There were also aggressive claims from Harald Hardrada of Norway and William of Normandy, the latter having a family claim through his great-aunt, Emma of Normandy.

The meeting of the Witan and celebrations held at Christmas saw all five earls, the archbishops of York and Canterbury, eight bishops and many leading thegns gathered in London. On 5 January 1066 Edward summoned the Witan to his deathbed. He had been semi-conscious for several days, but was roused. He 'commended' his kingdom and the protection of his queen to Harold, and bound his Norman servants to take oaths of loyalty to Harold.

Soon afterwards the Witan unanimously acclaimed Harold king of England, perhaps taking into account that to appoint a child king in such circumstances would be too dangerous but also wishing to have an English king. What has never been clearly ascertained, and never will be, is whether Harold expected and manoeuvred for this. He had been Edward's right-hand man, protector, advisor, diplomat and fixer for over ten years: did Edward mean to hand over to him as a caretaker regent, not as king? Would Harold have been just as content serving Edgar Ætheling, now 13? He would not have wished to serve William.

The main contemporary English source – the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – observes a prudent post-Conquest silence about Harold's elevation, but later English writers such as John of Worcester and Roger of Hovenden (the latter drawing on the much earlier work *Historia Saxonum sive Anglorum post obitum Bedae*) say that Edward before his death chose Harold for his successor.

William of Malmesbury says:

> he (Harold) said, that he was absolved from his oath, because his (William's) daughter, to whom he had been betrothed, had died before she was marriageable.

The half-English Ordericus Vitalis has the most to say:

> There is no doubt that Edward had bequeathed the realm of England to his kinsman William, duke of Normandy, announcing it, first by Robert [Champart], Archbishop of Canterbury, and afterwards by Harold himself, and, with the consent of the English, making the duke heir to all his rights. Moreover Harold had taken the oath of allegiance to duke William at Rouen, in the presence of the nobles of Normandy, and doing him homage had sworn on the holy relics to all that was required of him. … This Englishman was distinguished by his great size and strength of body, his polished manners, his firmness of mind and command of words, by a ready wit and a variety of excellent qualities. But what availed so many valuable gifts, when

> good faith, the foundation of all virtues, was wanting? Returning to his country, his ambition tempted him to aspire to the crown, and to forfeit the fealty he had sworn to his lord. He imposed upon King Edward, who was in the last stage of decay, approaching his end, by the account he gave of his crossing the sea, his journey to Normandy, and the result of his mission, falsely adding that Duke William would give him his daughter in marriage, and concede to him, as his son-in-law, all his right to the throne of England. The feeble prince was much surprised at this statement; however, he believed it, and granted all the crafty tyrant asked.

No time was wasted. Ealdred, Archbishop of York, crowned Harold the following day (Stigand of Canterbury was still under interdict). Sometime afterwards Harold formally married Ealdgyth, daughter of earl Ælfgar, sister of earls Edwin and Morcar and widow of the Welsh king Gruffydd ap Llewellyn. This considerably strengthened Harold's ties with the north of England.

After this Malmesbury records:

> William, in the meantime, began mildly to address him by messengers, to expostulate on the broken covenant; to mingle threats with entreaties; and to warn him, that ere a year expired, he would claim his due by the sword, and that he would come to that place, where Harold supposed he had firmer footing than himself. Harold again re-joined, concerning the nuptials of his daughter, and added, that he had been precipitate on the subject of the kingdom, in having confirmed to him by oath another's right, without the universal consent and edict of the general meeting, and of the people: again, that a rash oath ought to be broken; for if the oath, or vow, which a maiden, under her father's roof, made concerning her person, without the knowledge of her parents, was adjudged invalid; how much more invalid must that oath be, which he had made concerning the whole kingdom, when under the king's authority, compelled by the necessity of the time, and without the knowledge of the nation. Besides it was an unjust request, to ask him to resign a government which he had assumed by the universal kindness of his fellow subjects, and which would neither be agreeable to the people, nor safe for the military.

William of Poitiers records that, shortly before the Battle of Hastings, Harold sent William an envoy with a message admitting that Edward had promised the throne to William, but argued that this was over-ridden by Edward's deathbed promise to Harold. In reply, William did not dispute the deathbed promise, but argued that Edward's prior promise to him took precedence. It seems that in Normandy he might have been correct, but this was England.

Harold needed to be sure of the support of the leaders of Northumbria, including that of Oswulf who was subordinate to Morcar, so by marrying the sister of earls Morcar and Edwin he had reassured northern England that Tostig would not be welcomed back. He also created Waltheof Siwardson, second son of the old Earl Siward of Northumbria (who had preceded Tostig) as earl of Northampton – an area somewhat larger than Northamptonshire is today – and confirmed the positions of Edward's Norman civil servants.

In May Tostig returned. After landing on the Isle of Wight he raided along the south coast to Sandwich. Harold called out the fleet and the Wessex fyrd and Tostig retreated. He turned

north and raided along the coast of East Anglia up the Burnham and then Lincolnshire, an area under the control of Edwin. Together Morcar of Northumbria and Edwin of Mercia expelled the weakened Tostig, who fled to Scotland and the protection of King Malcolm III.

Harold remained well-informed about William's actions across the Channel, and all summer of 1066 held ready the fyrd and navy in Hampshire and the Solent, where William had been expected to strike. Nothing happened, and Harold had to stand down his army and navy on or about 8 September 1066. The men were at the end of their period of service and harvests had to be gathered in, and it was also getting late in the year.

Meanwhile Tostig plotted with Harald Hardrada, who had his own ideas about becoming king of England, the outcome being an attempted invasion from the north and the Battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge, where Tostig Godwinson was killed. The weather at the same time turned in favour of Duke William of Normandy. Disaster for Harold, Gyrth and Leofwine Godwinson was just around the corner on a battlefield north of Hastings at a place with no name, now called Battle. Harold never recovered his brother Wulfnoth from William, and Wulfnoth remained under supervision in Normandy and later in Hampshire, probably dying in Winchester Cathedral priory in about 1094.

The next generation of Godwins tried several times to re-invade England, but were easily dealt with and faded from the scene. Harold's sister Edith, who was Edward the Confessor's queen, remained living in seclusion in Winchester. On her death in late 1075 her body was interred next to her husband Edward the Confessor's in Westminster Abbey. Harold's bloodline may live on in royal circles even today through his daughter Gytha.

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