

1066-1272 Eastern Sussex under the Norman and Angevin kings of England



From the Battle of Hastings through the accession of William II until the death of Henry II

Introduction

In this paper the relationships of the post-Conquest kings of England to Battle and eastern Sussex between 1087 and 1272 are explored. The area 'eastern Sussex' corresponds to that described as '1066 Country' in modern tourism parlance and covers the area west to east from Pevensey to Kent and south to north from the English Channel coast to Kent.

Clearly the general histories of the monarchs and associated events must be severely truncated in such local studies. Hopefully, to maintain relevance, just enough information is given to link the key points of the local histories to the kings, and events surrounding the kings. Also in studies which have focal local interest there can inevitably be large time gaps between events, and some local events of really momentous concern can only be described from very little information. Other smaller events can be overwhelmed by detail, particularly later in the sequence, when more detailed records become available and 'editing down' is required to keep some basic perspective.

The work is drawn from wide sources and as much as possible the text has been cross referenced between different works. A list of sources is given at the end of the sequence.

Throughout the texts 'Winchelsea' refers to 'Old Winchelsea' which may have only been a small fishing village in 1066, but by the 1200s had become a sizable and important, if somewhat independently minded and anarchic town, which stood on a large shingle bank east of the present Winchelsea, possibly just south of where Camber castle still stands today. Old Winchelsea was destroyed in the great storms of the late 13th century and has been completely lost to the sea.

Reference should be made to chapter 2 of Foord and Clephane-Cameron's book about '1066'. This briefly describes the coastal changes which occurred around the eastern Sussex coast between the Conquest and early 14th centuries which quite profoundly changed the fortunes and strategic positions of Hastings, Pevensey and Winchelsea, and to some extent Rye over this time period.

Part 1a

William I after the Battle of Hastings until 1087

There is no evidence that William I ever revisited Hastings or came to Battle to review the progress of his abbey – although he clearly issued orders about its leuga and received reports on its false start and then its progress, which are discussed in detail in the chapter concerning the Abbots of Battle.

The record of the itinerary of William the Conqueror is actually very sparse and it is hardly possible to know where he actually went, apart from the known ‘headline’ events. So we cannot absolutely say he never returned to the scene of his triumph although we do know that the English ports for his first return visit in 1067 to Normandy after being crowned king of England were nearby – from Pevensey in March with a return to Old Winchelsea in December 1067. He may also have travelled via Pevensey to Normandy in 1085. There were no foundations to inspect at Battle anyway and his major attentions would surely have been elsewhere in England and later back in Normandy.

The Conqueror died on 9th September 1087 following an accidental injury received near Mantes, in the Vexin, a troublesome ‘buffer’ county on the borders of the dukedom of Normandy and the kingdom of France. He was leading his forces against those of a combination of his problematic son Robert Curthose and King Philip I of France. He was taken to Rouen where he died, following which his body was interred at the Abbaye aux Hommes in Caen.

He never saw the consecration of his abbey at Battle, built as a penance for the many deaths he had caused in England, during and after his victory over Harold Godwinson in 1066 and later.

Part 1b

1087-1100 William II (Rufus)

Following the Conqueror’s death his territories were split, with Normandy going to his surviving oldest son, Robert ‘Curthose’ and England to his second son, William, nicknamed William ‘Rufus’ as he was described as having a ruddy complexion and light blond hair.

We have an early indication of Rufus’ interest in eastern Sussex. Cole, in his book *‘Antiquities of Hastings’* says – *‘William Rufus, on arriving in England in 1087, after the death of his father, made it his first care to secure the castle of Hastings, where he often afterwards resided.’*

Without going into detail the division between Normandy and England led to Curthose coveting England, William II defending his new kingdom, and the third brother Henry a rich young man who was later given holdings in the Cotentin and Avranchin, where he would create a small personal power base. The additional complication was that the powerful Norman landowners held lands on both sides of the English Channel and many were

prepared, mainly for their own reasons, to back the less assertive Robert Curthose against the stronger and more ruthless William II, rather than serve two masters.

Unfortunately for William II, Robert de Mortain who held the Rape of Pevensey, and probably William of Eu who held the Rape of Hastings were supporters of Curthose, as were many others across England. Most importantly earl Odo of Kent, bishop of Bayeux, and the half-brother of the Conqueror, who controlled duke Robert's council schemed and revolted against Rufus. Rufus needed to take full control of England and sent for 'Englishmen under the command of sheriffs' – and determinedly focussed his forces on the south-east. He was hunting Odo. He secured London and blockaded Rochester and Pevensey. After capturing Tonbridge castle, he found that Odo was at Pevensey castle which Rufus forced to submit after a six week siege. At about the same time an invading fleet from Normandy was routed by an English fleet.

Odo then promised Rufus that he would persuade the defenders at Rochester to surrender, but he re-joined them, hoping for Robert's fleet to come back. They did not, and in the end Rochester castle also surrendered. Gradually other revolts around the country came to an end, and many major landholders subsequently lost some or all of their lands. The king pragmatically kept in place those he needed, and removed those who were a threat. Rufus was now in a very strong position, and after 1090 he took the dispute to Normandy.

The brothers were in intermittent conflict, with periods of short lived settlements, mainly broken by Robert, partially ended when Rufus re-unified England and Normandy in 1096 by bribing Curthose with a great fortune to go on the 1st crusade.

There were two views in England about Rufus, one ecclesiastical, the other secular. The former is important as far as Battle abbey is concerned, in spite of William II's supposed indifference to religion; the latter is more important to the rest of eastern Sussex, as clearly Rufus became successful in war. Hastings and Pevensey at that time still had good harbours, plus new intact castles, and were on the route to Normandy. Given the above scenarios they were clearly very important strategically to Rufus.

After his father's death and at his coronation in 1087 Rufus had given Battle abbey, it is believed at William I's command, for his soul, a number of items. These included his father's royal cloak trimmed with gold and jewels, 300 gold and silver amulets (small objects to ward off evil, harm, or illness or to bring good fortune), and a feretory (a portable shrine, see illustration).



Harold swearing on portable shrines (feretories). Extract from the Bayeux Tapestry

The last, it has been reasonably conjectured, was one of the shrines pictured in the Bayeux tapestry on which Harold is reputed to have sworn fealty to Duke William. He also gave the large manor of Bromham in Wiltshire and acknowledged the abbey's special liberties, granted by direct royal command from the Conqueror.

The College of St Mary in the Castle at Hastings was founded in circa. 1090 by Count Robert of Eu. A Collegiate College, within the castle itself, and its own canons etc. it was independent and was outside of the See of Chichester. It was well endowed and its canons between them held chapels at Wartling, Hooe and Ninfield, the churches of Bexhill, land at Hailsham, the church of Guestling, churches at Salehurst, Mountfield and Udimore (which were later to cause conflict with Robertsbridge Abbey) and further churches at Peasmarsch, Beckley, Iham, Iden, Playden, Ewhurst, Wilting, Hollington, Brightling and Bodiam. It would pass into the hands of the crown in 1267 and this would later cause some of the same issues between crown and the Bishop of Chichester as Battle Abbey later encountered. It did not prosper long term as the castle itself deteriorated and with it the college.

Rufus clearly used Hastings Castle as a base as (again according to Cole) *'in 1091, before sailing to Normandy, he summoned his nobles to swear fealty. And again in 1093 his army mustered at Hastings to cross the Channel, but was detained by contrary winds a whole month, during which the king lodged in the castle. In the following year, 20,000 men were encamped here preparatory to a war with France, but William, giving up his design, dismissed them, first of all, however, taking from them the ten shillings (50 pence) a head travelling money they had received from their counties.'*

When at Battle for the dedication Rufus was in a more generous mood, giving the abbey the living of nine more churches. Added to the generous endowments already received from William the Conqueror after 1076, these made Battle abbey a very wealthy abbey indeed.

Still it seems without some of its roof leading, the abbey was fully consecrated on 11 February 1095. The service of consecration was performed by Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury, and was attended by the king William II (Rufus), with bishops Walchelin of Winchester, Ralph of Chichester, Osmund of Salisbury, John of Bath, William of Durham, Roger of Coutances and Gundalf of Rochester, as well as many earls, knights, clerics and laymen. The full dedication of the abbey was to *'the Holy and indivisible Trinity and the blessed Mary, forever virgin also the blessed Martin, confessor of Christ'*. Afterwards they all enjoyed 'an oblation of charity' i.e. a slap up meal, and all went joyously away.

The reason that so many of the great magnates of the nation attended the consecration at Battle was that Rufus was yet again holding court at Hastings Castle, as he was contemplating a new campaign in Normandy against his brother, Robert Curthose. An Anglo-Norman army and a fleet to transport them to Normandy were being assembled near Hastings, but there had been considerable delays because of bad weather and winds (not very surprisingly in February).

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Rufus was *'hated by almost all his people and abhorrent to God.'* The 'Chronicle of Battle Abbey ' is one of few documents to praise Rufus. Rufus' relationship with the church hierarchy generally and Anselm in particular was frosty to say the least. Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury had died two years after William I, and Rufus took his time in agreeing the appointment of a new archbishop, meanwhile directly receiving rentals from the see of Canterbury. Anselm was not appointed until 1092 and went into exile in France four years later – mainly it seems because he and Rufus were so incompatible.

But for Battle he was *'...the magnificent prince who endowed us with churches in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex ... So much did he love, cherish and defend our church, maintaining its dignity and royal customs, that no one would dare oppose it, just as no one had dared do so in his father's time. Whenever he was in the neighbourhood, he would often visit, support and encourage it, so great was his affection for it.'* Although possibly exaggerated this suggests that he had indeed several times passed this way in transit to and from Normandy (see the reports from Cole above) , with or without an army. And maybe this was also because, following the directions of William the Conqueror's founding charter, Battle abbey was free of dominance by the church establishment and was under his direct royal patronage.

In 1095 the first abbot of Battle abbey, Gausbert, died and due to the squabbling between Rufus and Anselm no new abbot was appointed for nearly a year, meanwhile Rufus pocketed some extra income from the abbey! Eventually Henry, a prior from Christ Church, Canterbury was appointed abbot in 1096.



Extract from a miniature of the death of William Rufus, in the 'Grande Chronique de Normandie' British Library: Yates Thompson 33 f. 186



In 1095 Rufus once more saw off another but smaller rebellion in England, after which those who had rebelled twice were dealt with harshly. These included a William of Eu, whom Searle is clearly convinced was the son of the Robert of Eu who had inherited the Rape of Hastings on his father's death in 1093 (although others have queried this). He was blinded and castrated and died soon afterwards and is said to have been buried at Hastings. Certainly it appears that after 1096 Rufus administered the Rape directly.

After this England was relatively settled and Rufus stayed mostly in Normandy, consolidating affairs there. He still returned to England from time to time and died on English soil on Thursday 2nd August 1100 after being shot, maybe accidentally, by an arrow through the chest when out hunting in the New Forest.

Part 2

1100-1135 Henry I (Beauclerc)

Rufus' younger brother Henry had been somewhat involved in his brothers' squabbles in Normandy, but appears to have become an anglophile with a penchant for beautiful English women, and when in England lived in a ménage with his concubines and children near Woodstock, where he is said to have had a zoo.

He had been with the Rufus' New Forest hunting party. He now rapidly stepped in, seizing the royal treasury at Winchester, burying his brother on Friday 3rd August 1100, and succeeding Rufus as king of England, being crowned at Westminster on Sunday 5th by Maurice, bishop of London, the only available senior prelate. He was a fast worker!

He also decided to formally marry Edith of Scotland. Archbishop Anselm, now recalled from exile, performed the marriage ceremony and crowned Edith as queen of England on 11th November 1100. She took the name queen Mathilda. She was sister to king Edgar of Scotland and descended from king Aethelred II of England, as she was the daughter of Edgar Atheling's sister Margaret, who had married King Malcolm III of Scotland. This re-introduced the blood line of Wessex, a move which apparently was well received by the English.

Curthose was in Italy, on his way back from crusading. He returned to Normandy, built up his support again and decided to confront his brother. This led to the single occasion when Henry I definitely visited eastern Sussex. Later he may have passed through the ports on his voyages to and from Normandy, but evidence points to the fact that he normally made these voyages through Portsmouth ... Although Cole says *'Henry I used the (Hastings) castle as a palace, finding Hastings a convenient haven for the passage from England to Normandy, and the fittest station for his royal yacht'* the author can find no evidence to corroborate this. A considerable proportion of the navy was based by this time at Winchelsea and Rye and this may have led some confusion as they were 'limbs' of Hastings.

On 24th June 1101 Henry led a powerful army, largely of Englishmen and vassals of the bishops, towards Hastings, expecting duke Robert to land in the area, as had their father,

and encamped at Pevensey. Whilst in the vicinity at Wartling he signed edicts in favour of the monks of Battle:

Notification by Henry I to all his barons, sheriffs, and officials: That he has granted St. Martin of Battle to have his court in all matters. Wherever the abbot shall be present in the abbey's manors or lands, or another in his place, let him have the royal privilege that if anyone has a plea against his tenant the plea shall be heard in his court. If the plea cannot be determined in the abbot's court, let it be transferred by the abbot to the royal court in order that it may be settled in the presence of the abbot and the justiciar.

The second obviously refers to a local matter, but this shows how difficult it was in those times for the abbey to hold on to its property.

To restore to the Abbot of Battle, by sureties his swine herd. If Robert wishes to plead the abbot he is to come to the court of St. Martin of Battle and have right. The King wishes all his barons and earls to know that he has confirmed to the church of St. Martin of Battle its court, &c.

Robert Curthose failed to turn up at Pevensey. He eventually left Tréport with a fleet of 200 or so ships, landing at Portsmouth on 20th July. Once more the Norman lords favoured Robert, and his mainly Norman army moved on towards Winchester, but passed by the city. Robert's and Henry's forces eventually met near Alton in Hampshire and talks took place between the brothers. After several days of negotiations this ended in a treaty, with twelve lords of the highest rank from each side ratifying it by oath. Robert had accepted a payoff from Henry of 3000 marks (£2000) per year and a pledge of joint government.

There is some evidence that Henry played along with this for a while, meanwhile working on a strategy to recruit Norman landowners favourable to him, and to isolate or convert those who were still a threat. When William de Mortain turned back to Robert in 1104 he was promptly deprived of his English lands.

Henry in turn invaded Normandy in both 1105 and 1106, and captured Curthose at the Battle of Tinchebrai, fought on 28 September 1106, almost forty years after Hastings. England and Normandy were reunited under one king. Curthose was imprisoned, but not ill-treated, and died in Cardiff castle in 1134.

As far as Battle abbey was concerned they received no further gifts from Henry, but he many times supported the abbey in its legal fights with others, even if the results were difficult to enforce. He at one point exchanged land that the abbey held in Reading for land at Appledram in western Sussex, as he wished to build a new monastery on the land at Reading *"for the salvation of my soul, and the souls of King William, my father, and of King William, my brother, and Queen Maud, my wife, and all my ancestors and successors"*. He also exchanged more land at Appledram for the abbey's holding in Carmarthen which he gave to Bishop Bernard and the church of St. David.

He also granted the right to hold a three day fair at Battle in July and later a second fair in winter. Rather more critically for the abbey Henry did not appoint a new abbot after the

death of Abbot Henry in 1102 until 1107 when Ralph of Caen was appointed. During this time as usual the surplus income of the abbey went to the king. However once appointed Ralph was able to confirm via Henry's court the precise holdings of the abbey and the boundaries of its banlieu (or leuga/lowey). These had been encroached on by surrounding landowners - as the abbey had been unable to protect their properties from their less scrupulous neighbours, who had probably been resentful that William I had taken some lands from them to create the abbey banlieu in the first place.

Examples of more notifications and grants made by Henry are below. As will be noted, he may not have visited Battle, but he certainly stood up for the rights of the abbey:

[1102?] Westminster. Precept by Henry I to Rembert [of Hastings] and Robert [son of Ralf] of Hastings: To enjoin on all the barons of Hastings to make enclosures against the land of the Abbot of Battle, as they did in the time of William I and of Abbot Gausbert.

[1102?] Henry I directs the men of Hastings to fence their lands bordering those of the Abbot of Battle

[1103-1106, July 31.] Windsor. Notification by Henry I to Henry Count of Eu and generally: That he has granted to St. Martin's, Battle, the meadows of Bodiam which Geoffrey the monk bought up for the use of the said church at Pentecost in the chapter and that they may hold them as freely as under William I and II and the Counts of Eu.

[1106, May?] Marlborough. Notification by Henry I to Rai[m]bert of Hastings, Robert fitz Ralf, and all of Hastings: That he has granted the monks of St. Martin's, Battle, and their men the same customs within and without their market as the men of Hastings have, as granted by William I. And they shall make their purchases everywhere free of toll.

[1102-7.] Westminster. Notification by Henry I to H[enry] Count of Eu and R[obert] the son of R[alf] de Hastings and all the King's justiciars and officials of Sussex: That he has confirmed to the monks of St. Martin at Battle to have all their roads through the King's lands and especially the road which goes from Battle to Hastings, &c., and their rights of chase and hunting in the rape of Hastings as fully as they had them in the King's time or the time of his father and brother. The addressees are not to meddle in the leuga of Battle any more than they would in the King's own demesne.

[1102-16, Apr.] Windsor. Notification by Henry I to Ralph Bp. of Chichester and all the King's barons: That the King has confirmed to St. Martin of Battle all gifts and purchases of lands in the rape of Hastings (list given); Henry Count of Eu also confirms this.

[1114-16] Writ addressed to Ralph bishop of Chichester and the ministers of Sussex notifying them that the abbot and monks of Battle have deraigned before the king that they have not certain lands which the said bishop alleged that they had, as belonging anciently to Alciston; and mandate that they be henceforth quit thereof, and that their manor of Alciston be quit of shires and hundreds, and particularly of work upon London bridge and the castle of Pevensey

Notification to Ralph bishop of Chichester and his barons of the confirmation to the monks of Battle of lands given, with the consent of Henry count of Eu, in the rape of Hastings. [Ante May 1116.]

Notification, addressed generally, that the monks of St. Martin's, Battle, shall hold in peace, with certain liberties, their lands, including Appledram, which they have received in exchange for Reading [1121-2.]

Writ addressed to the sheriffs, ministers, and barons of England and Wales notifying them of the grant of acquittance of toll to the men of the monks of Battle. [1100].

Notification to Ralph bishop of Chichester, William Fitz-Auger, and the barons of Sussex of the grant to the monks of Battle of the manor of Appledram, in exchange for their possessions in Reading, with 40s. of yearly rent in Appledram which the king had previously retained.

Notification, addressed generally, of the foundation of, and gifts to, the monastery of Reading. The signatories are: the king and Queen Adelaide; ... Warner of St. Martin's, Battle, ... M.C.XXV *Henry's first wife had died and he re-married

Notification to Siefred bishop of Chichester, Anselm de Rouen, the sheriff, barons, and lieges of Sussex, of the grant to the abbot and monks of Battle of 40s. of yearly rent which the king has retained in the manor of Appledram with the farm of Bosham, for part of the exchange for their land of Carmarthen, which he has given to Bishop Bernard and the church of St. David. [1126-33.]

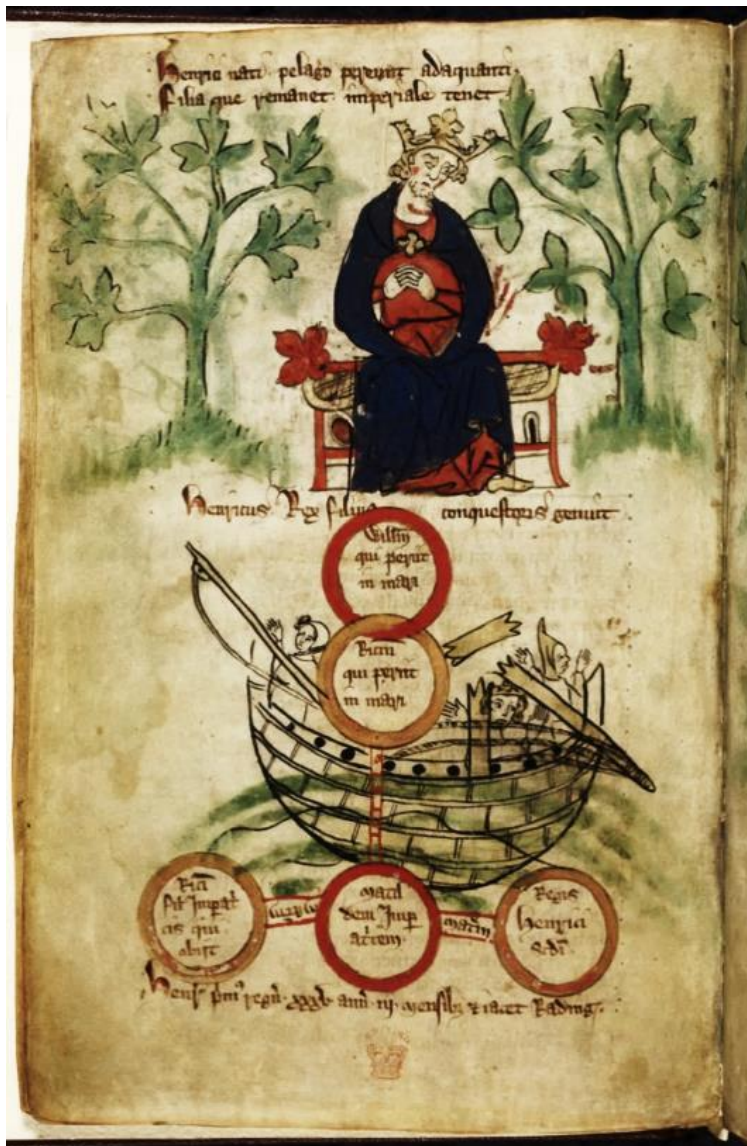
[1100-30.] Westminster. Notification by Henry I to R[obert] son of R[alf] de Hastings, D[rew] de Pevenesele, and all justiciars, &c., of Sussex: That he confirms to the monks of St. Martin's, Battle, and their men, all their roads throughout his lands, particularly that from Battle to Hastings, the roads round Battle, the crossings over (ultra) Winchelsea, and their road over Ashdown (Essesdone), as in the reigns of William I, William II, and in his own. No one is to injure their men or goods within the borough of Hastings or without. The justiciars are not to interfere within the lowy any more than in the King's demesne.

[1100-33.] Winchester. Notification by Henry I to all his officials and collectors of the rape of Hastings: That he has confirmed the gift which Wening the man of William of Hastings gave with his lord's consent to St. Martin of Battle, namely the church of Westfield [co. Sussex] 'cum una wista terre, liberam et quietam ab omni consuetudine terre servitutis in perpetuum possidendam'. No one is to molest the monks of Battle therein.

[1120, Nov.-Dec] Portsmouth. Notification by Henry I to Ralph Bp. of Chichester and William fitz Ansgar and the barons of Sussex: That he has given to St. Martin of Battle in exchange for Reading, the manor of Appledram [co. Sussex], also 40?. which formerly pertained to the said manor, with the ferm of Bosham ; and of feeding in the woods of ' Bocfalde' and ' Betlesparrioc', one pig for every three that the King has there; and the fourth penny of pannage, and the fourth of all the oaks that are felled and the fourth penny from the land pertaining to those woods, &c. The monks and their men of Appledram are to be quit of all custom with sac, soc, toll, team and infangthief, geld, scot, hidage, danegeld, work on bridges, castles, parks, and enclosures, host-service, aids, shires, hundreds, wardpenny, lastage, larceny, murder-fine, treasure-trove, warren, and all pleas and plaints.

In 1120, Henry's legitimate son William and his natural son Richard drowned in the White Ship, which sank in the English Channel off Barfleur. This posed a succession problem, as

Henry never allowed any of his many illegitimate children to expect succession to either England or Normandy. Henry had a legitimate daughter, Matilda (widow of Emperor Henry V, subsequently married to the Count of Anjou). However, it was his nephew Stephen (reigned 1135-54), son of William the Conqueror's daughter Adela, who stepped in and succeeded Henry after his death in 1135, the barons being opposed to the idea of a female monarch. Henry I was buried in his new abbey at Reading.



Miniature of Henry I on his throne, mourning, with a genealogical table of his children with Matilda and a drawing of the sinking of the white ship.

British Library:

Royal 20 A II f. 6v



Part 3

1135-1154 Stephen of Blois / (Empress Matilda)

Henry had named his eldest daughter Matilda his heir, but before doing so he had at least considered naming his nephew Stephen of Blois. When Henry died Stephen invaded England, and had himself crowned instead of Matilda.

Matilda's claim was supported by her half-brother Robert of Gloucester and her uncle, King David I of Scotland. Matilda landed at Arundel in September 1139 and there followed 'the Anarchy', with supporters of the contenders fighting in both Britain and Normandy.

A significant event in the conflicts was the first Battle of Lincoln, which took place on 2 February 1141. Stephen had been besieging Lincoln Castle but was attacked by a force loyal to Matilda, commanded by Robert of Gloucester, Matilda's half-brother. Stephen was captured, imprisoned, and Empress Matilda ruled for a short time, although she was never crowned. Stephen was imprisoned at Bristol, but in the following September exchanged for Robert of Gloucester, who had been taken by forces loyal to Stephen in the 'Rout of Winchester'. This ended Matilda's brief period of power, but not the intermittent flaring of local conflicts between supporters of both parties, although Stephen held onto the crown after this.

Pevensey castle was involved in the conflict between Matilda and Stephen, with its owners often switching sides. In 1147 Gilbert de Aquila (or de l'Aigle), whose father had been a supporter of Robert Curthose, rebelled against King Stephen. Stephen besieged and starved the occupants to take the castle, and then gave it and its property to Eustace, his eldest son. Following this Eustace made various grants of Pevensey's fiefs, chapelry and fishing rights to Richard de Luci (see below), to the see of Chichester and to Lewes Priory. The details of events during the Anarchy are complex, but no other noted events took place in eastern Sussex.



Portrait of Empress Matilda, from "History of England" by St. Albans monks (15th century); Cotton Nero D. VII, f.7, British Library

By PurpleHz via Wikimedia Commons 

It has been noted that the mint at Hastings, originally founded in the time of Aethelred II is not heard of after Stephen's reign. This is probably indicative of Hastings decline, even though in the same reign an up and coming monk called Thomas a Beckett was appointed Dean of the College of St Mary within Hastings Castle precincts by Archbishop Theobald.

By now the crown had less affinity with Battle abbey, but the abbey was still tied to the crown. However Stephen did issue a general confirmation of status quo for Battle Abbey in

1137, issued via and witnessed by Robert fitzRichard de Clare (a steward of King Stephen), at Hastings.

Stephen also used Battle abbey to advance the de Luci family. At Christmas 1138 abbot Warner was induced to resign and Walter de Luci, the brother of one of Stephen's justiciars (the equivalent of a senior minister today) Richard de Luci, was named abbot. This was a ploy to elevate the de Luci family, but in the end a useful move which protected the abbey from both the worst effects of the Anarchy and the bishop of Chichester. The see of Chichester had long wished to bring Battle abbey fully under its jurisdiction. Things boiled to a head in 1148 when abbot Walter was summoned to Chichester, to be told that bishop Hilary now expected Battle to be a fully under his jurisdiction. Abbot Walter re-iterated the abbey's position as a Royal Peculiar and Stephen's reaffirmation of that, and the matter rested as such until Stephen's death.

Stephen wanted his son Eustace to inherit his throne. He tried to convince the church to agree to crown Eustace to reinforce this claim, but Pope Eugene III refused. Meanwhile in Anjou Mathilda's second husband, the count of Anjou died in 1151 and their son Henry became the new leader of Anjou. In 1152 Henry married Eleanor of Aquitaine, who had divorced the French king, and so between them they then held the vast territories of Anjou, Poitou and Aquitaine.



Marginal drawing of the Battle of Lincoln, in Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*. Captions identify the man to the left as Baldwin FitzGilbert and the central crowned figure as King Stephen; the king is directing Baldwin to address the army on his behalf. British Library: **Arundel 48 f. 168v**



Henry's mother (called empress Mathilda as her first husband was Holy Roman emperor Henry V) was still in de facto dispute with Stephen over Normandy, Brittany and England. In 1153 Henry invaded England and built an alliance to support his mother's claim for the throne. Stephen and Henry's armies met at Wallingford, but neither was keen to have a battle. Then Stephen's son Eustace died in August 1153 and Stephen moved towards a negotiated peace. Later in the year Stephen and Henry agreed to the 'Treaty of Winchester', in which Stephen recognised Henry as his heir, passing over his own surviving son William. Stephen died in 1154 and Henry succeeded as Henry II, now overlord of a vast empire that

stretched from Northumbria to the Pyrenees. As soon as Stephen died, and before Henry II was crowned, bishop Hilary of Chichester, in cahoots with pope Adrian IV (the only English pope), tried to excommunicate Battle's abbot, Walter de Luci.

Part 4

1154-1189 Henry II (Curtmantle)

It was now nearly 100 years since Hastings. The royal affinity that William I, and to a degree William II had had for Battle Abbey, and the support at distance given by Henry I was becoming a faded memory. Henry II, the son of Geoffrey Plantagenet, count of Anjou, and Henry I's daughter Matilda, was of the Angevin house and became the first Plantagenet king of England.

But Bishop Hilary had not realised the power of Richard de Luci, Abbot Walter de Luci's brother, who was soon to be one of Henry II's chief justiciars, and who maintained the administration of the kingdom even during an interregnum. He had words in the ear of archbishop Theobald of Canterbury and the threat to Walter was rapidly overturned. The events which followed are really the story of Abbot Walter and will be covered in more detail in other papers (in preparation) about selected abbots of Battle. It is essentially a story of the de Lucis versus bishop Hilary, about the continuing rights of Battle abbey as a Royal Peculiar, or perhaps more cynically as a temporarily De Luci Peculiar.

Henry II was a restive monarch, constantly putting down revolts small and large, and dealing with the unwelcome attentions of French kings. His empire was both huge and restless. Not only that, but later in his reign his sons and wife in modern parlance gave him immense 'grief'. The essence of his story will be familiar to those acquainted with the film and play 'The Lion in Winter' and with the 1978 BBC series and book 'The Devil's Crown'. His reign was the apogee of the Angevin empire.

The closest he got to Battle was late in his reign, when he landed at Winchelsea after one of his last tours of empire in January 1188. Otherwise he hardly touched Sussex, although a Royal Charter of 1155/6 established the first three Cinque Ports, which included Hastings, to maintain ships ready for the monarch. He issued a further more general charter to the ports in 1160.

It is also noted that Pevensey castle was once more surrendered to the crown in 1157, this time from William, earl Warenne (aka William de Blois, the son of King Stephen, overlooked for the monarchy. He became earl Warenne by marrying the countess of Warenne, who had inherited as she had no brothers). Gervase of Canterbury asserts a plot against Henry's life was discovered in 1154 and allegedly William of Blois had some knowledge of this plot. Whatever the truth, William fled to Normandy, leaving the countess behind. Pevensey would remain a royal castle until the early 13th century.

Although King Henry II may have never visited Battle he would now be a key figure in setting the abbey's future status and relationships with the Catholic Church.

The abbey needed to sort out the row with Hilary of Chichester. To meet Henry II the abbot of Battle first travelled to the Loire, finding him at Saumur castle on 29th August 1156. Walter de Luci later met with Henry at Richard de Luci's castle at Ongar, just after Easter 1157, then attended Henry's court at Colchester in late May 1157, where armed with some re-written charters, the de Lucis backed up by no less than Thomas à Beckett had Battle abbey's royal exemption maintained. To Bishop Hilary's chagrin he had to write an apology to Battle's abbot.

The case which was heard on 23 May 1157 is transcribed in detail in Latin, with English notes over no less than 20 pages in *'The Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth: Anglo-Saxon Period. Containing the Anglo-Saxon Policy, and the Institutions Arising Out of Laws and Usages which Prevailed Before the Conquest, Volume 2 by Sir Francis Palgrave (1832) pp xliv-lxiv*. The details of the case are also given (from the perspective of Battle abbey of course) at considerable length in the 'Chronicle of Battle Abbey'. The preludes from 1148 are also described by Palgrave between pp xxviii and xliii.



Miniature of Henry II enthroned, arguing with Thomas Becket.

British Library: Royal 20 A II f. 7v



The Cistercian Abbey of St Mary was founded in Robertsbridge in 1176 by Alvred de St Martin who was sheriff of the Rape of Hastings and a steward to King Henry II. The first abbot recorded was called Denis. To support the abbey he also gave some estates in Ewhurst, Sedlescombe and Pett Level, and the abbey much later purchased more land at

Playden and Bexhill from the Abbey of Tréport and also obtained the advowsons of Salehurst, Udimore and Mountfield. Alvred had also witnessed the Treaty of Falaise made at Falaise castle between the captive King William I of Scotland and Henry II in December 1174. William I had been captured at the Battle of Alnwick during an invasion of Northumbria and was being held at Falaise whilst Henry sent an army north and took several Scottish castles, including Berwick and Edinburgh. To secure his release William explicitly recognized Henry as feudal overlord of Scotland.

Henry II died at Chinon on the Loire on 6th July 1189. His family was in disputational chaos, and the French had made great inroads into his empire. His body was escorted to Fontevrault for burial by his natural (bastard) son Geoffrey. His decorated tomb (along with those of Eleanor of Aquitaine, King Richard I and King John's Queen Isabella of Angoulême) can still be seen at Fontevrault abbey which has been superbly restored in recent years.

Curiously a charter in favour of the monks of Robertsbridge was signed in his name by Stephen de Turonis at Chinon the day before Henry II died. One doubts that Henry took much notice of this.



Tomb effigy of King Henry II at Fontevrault abbey (Detail from a photo taken by Keith Foord)

Part 5

1189-1199 Richard I (Lionheart)

Richard was born in England, but once he became king spent very little time there. He was the third son, but his older brothers had died.

The Treaty of Falaise made between his father and William I of Scotland was annulled in 1189 when Richard, effectively sold southern Scotland back to the Scottish king to help fund his crusade.

His history is one of legend, but tumultuous, including a crusade on which he departed in 1190, finally returning in 1194 after being captured in Austria during his return, transferred to Bavaria and then ransomed by the German emperor Henry VI.

Sometime during Richard I's reign Hastings Priory of the Holy Trinity was established by either Sir Walter Bricet or Walter de Scotney who gave the priory the churches of Crowhurst and Ticehurst. They later also obtained more churches at Dallington, Ashburnham and St Michaels in Hastings from Ralph Neville in 1237 and lands at Michelham in 1229 from Gilbert d'Aigle then lord of Pevensey.

In 1192 abbot Denis of Robertsbridge was sent together with the abbot of Boxley to search for King Richard. It may have been the connection with the royal family by the abbey's founder that led to the choice of the abbot for this task. Having found him, the abbots were sent back to England with the details of the deal which had been done with Richard's 'keeper', which was for a huge ransom of 150,000 marks (£100,000). In modern terms this may equate to 30 billion pounds!

After Richard initially returned to England he crossed to France and never returned. When besieging the castle of Châlus in central France he was fatally wounded by a crossbow bolt, and he died of gangrene on 6 April 1199. He too was interred at Fontevrault.

He never visited Battle. But nevertheless he did find time to confirm Battle abbey's charter, but not the sole right of the abbot to dispense justice within the leuga, which now increasingly fell into the remit of the realm's itinerant justices.



Richard I's tomb effigy at Fontevrault abbey

(Detail from a photo by Keith Foord)

Part 6

1199-1216 John (Lackland)

John was born around Christmas in 1166 or 1167 in Oxford, the youngest son of Henry II. When his brother Richard became monarch John received titles, lands and money, but in October 1190, Richard recognised his nephew, Arthur, son of his deceased brother Geoffrey – who would have been older than John had he lived – as his heir. John was regent in England whilst Richard was on crusade and he tried to take over, unsuccessfully. Richard returned in early 1194, and when Arthur was captured by Philip II of France in 1196, Richard named John his heir. Arthur was 'disappeared' when held by John. Strong rumour has it that after some prevarication John had Arthur murdered.

After becoming king, John once more renewed Battle abbey's charter, on the same terms as Richard.

War with France was renewed, triggered by John's marriage to Isabella of Angoulême, who had been betrothed to Hugh de Lusignan. Isabella became countess of Angoulême in her own right on 16 June 1202. By 1206, John had lost Normandy, Anjou, Maine and parts of Poitou. He wanted to win them back, but this required huge sums of money, so taxes were increased, and he used his feudal rights in 'innovative' ways to extract even more money from the barons. This bred much baronial discontent and eventually this led to his sealing of the Magna Carta in 1215, which was soon rendered impractical when, backed up by the pope, John claimed that he had sealed under duress.

The itinerary of king John was well researched by Thomas Duff Hardy in 1835, but has recently been double checked and updated in a project led by J J Crump of the University of Iowa - The 'Itinerary of King John Project' can be found on-line. Combining the Hardy and Crump works with the histories of Battle abbey, Hastings and Winchelsea a good appreciation can be made of John's local visitations, and of other interactions with Battle abbey and the towns and ports of eastern Sussex.

Some have suggested that John rather favoured Battle abbey, but this really did not cost John much, just a few visits and gifts. In 1200 he is reported to have given the abbey 'a small piece of the sepulchre of our lord' brought back from the Holy Land by Richard I. There is no evidence from his itinerary that he came to Battle to personally deliver this. In 1203 John demanded a gift of 60 marks (£40) from the abbey. In 1211 he sold to the abbey his royal prerogative and confirmed the ancient liberties for 1500 marks (£1000), almost certainly because his need of money for wars, rather than from altruism or any thought of the potential consequences. The monks might later be wary of entanglements with respect to management of the abbey's properties by their abbots' families, on the other hand no longer would the monarch take the abbey's surpluses when there was an abbatial vacancy, and the lands would remain intact.

In 1212 the abbot of Robertsbridge was again sent abroad as the king's messenger.

John also issued edicts such as:

The King to Ws beloved the Prior and Convent of Battle, greeting. Since the persons of your house are wholly unknown to us, we earnestly beg of you to choose by canonical election the best and most fit monk of your house as abbot, and to present him to us, that to his election we may give our assent; and in testimony hereof, &c. Witness ourself at Guildford, on the 17th day of January, in the 16th year of our reign (1215)

The King to the Convent of Battle, greeting. In our presence appeared Hugoline, the precentor of your church, and Julian and A. your monks, and presented to us the election of monk Richard, your confrère, according to canonical form, begging us to give the royal assent to such election. We, therefore, in giving our assent to the said election, command you to be obedient and intente to the same elect henceforth as your abbot ; and in

testimony hereof, &c. Witness ourself at Knep, on the 23d of January, in the 16th year of our reign.

There is doubt about whether John may have visited Hastings on the 30th March 1201 after staying at Canterbury for Easter. There is a three day gap in his itinerary between his leaving Canterbury and his being recorded to be in London. If so this is reputed to be issued, at Hastings, the 'Ordinance of the Sea' which was later transcribed into the 'Black Book of the Admiralty' which contains naval regulations, the 'Laws of Oléron' (basic early seafaring rules), another three ordinances issued by king John, and other ordinances of Henry I, Richard I and Edward I. This was related to the 'sovereignty of 'the seas' and demanded that if a king's ship is met the second ship should strike its flag or lower its topsail or be regarded as an enemy. This was probably initially related to the fact that at that time he was nominally in possession of the land on each side of the English Channel (or seas), and therefore anyone else was crossing 'his' waters. This was before he had to cede Normandy to king Philip of France in 1205....

During his rule the abbey was visited by king John on a few occasions – his visits to Battle are noted to be 6th April 1206, 25th and 26th April 1213 and 13th June 1213. In 1206 he appears to have been on a general progress from London to Dorset, by way of the north and south coasts of Kent and the coasts of Sussex and Hampshire. Before Battle he had been at Romney in Kent, and was moving on to Malling near Lewes. He gave a fine cassock at the time of this visit



Seal of the barons of Hastings

Around 1210-11 John had by various schemes and impositions raised huge sums of money, and commissioned new ships for the navy, 10 galleys and 10 boats of which were built at Winchelsea, where his own galley the '*Deulabeneie*' was also repaired. These ships were to be used in 1213 to raid the French coast, attacking Fécamp and Dieppe plus destroying ships at the mouth of the Seine. Earlier he had issued orders to the Cinque Ports including Winchelsea, Rye, Hastings and Pevensey such as this of 1210:

The King to his Barons of Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney, Winchelsea, Rye, Hastings, Pevensey, and all his faithful men of the Cinque Ports, &c. We command you, as you regard your own safety and welfare and our honour and peace, to select immediately, on sight of these, the best and strongest men of your ports, and those who are well armed, to man our vessels, at our cost and for our service, and act in this as our beloved and faithful William de

Wrotham, Archdeacon of Taunton, shall tell you on our part, that our affairs may not be impeded by your default. Witness Geoffrey Fitz Peter, at Marlborough, the 17th day of March, in the 9th year of our reign.

Similar writs were sent to Seaford, Shoreham, Chichester, Portsmouth, and Southampton.

The visits of 1213 were gift-less; but it was while here in 1213 that he *'annulled his previous sentences of outlawry against certain ecclesiastics and undertook never again to outlaw clerks.'* But the main purposes of the visits were related to the earlier threat from France, which had led to the above naval activities.

On the first 1213 visit he was moving from Arundel to the Cinque Ports – to Dover, then back to Rye and Winchelsea where he stayed two nights – after which he moved on to Rochester. The second visit of 1213 followed another naval success when the English fleet carrying an army to Flanders had come across the French fleet anchored off Zwin and inflicted severe damage on it. John was moving from Chilham near Canterbury in Kent to Aldingbourne near Chichester, then to Portsmouth (from whence he had intended to strike for Poitou, but he failed to get enough support) and so to Corfe, one of his favourite castles. Chilham castle was built for Henry II in 1174, and the bishop of Chichester had his 'palace' at Aldingbourne. Presumably he was using the coastal route to once again congratulate his navy, overnighting at Battle abbey on the way to meet his hoped for army!

Following on from John's repudiation of Magna Carta a civil war erupted in 1216. In the end the Dauphin, prince Louis of France, married to Blanche, a niece of John via his sister Eleanor, was invited by the dissident barons to invade England, with a view to taking the throne on behalf of his wife – who in modern terms had the same right to the throne as her cousin Arthur (deceased son of John's brother Geoffrey, therefore John's nephew). He entered England via Sandwich in May 2016. John had been at Sandwich on 22nd May but, as John Gillingham says, *'rather than attack Louis's army as it came ashore, John decided to run for it. By the evening of the 23rd he was at Seaford, at least 60 miles away. If he had ridden through Battle that day, he cannot have stopped for long. Dover castle held out for John, but Louis was soon in control of most of south-east England, and he had Alexander II, king of Scotland and the Welsh prince Llewelyn the Great on his side.'* So Louis and the barons made rapid and considerable progress and they captured the Cinque Ports. In 1215 John had given orders to the Cinque Ports to be defended. But by early 2116 he had clearly feared that the castles of Hastings and Pevensey would fall into French hands and ordered them slighted. At Hastings the damage was minor enough to be rectified when Henry III ordered the repair and re-fortification of the castle in 1220. Pevensey castle was rebuilt later, around 1250, under Peter of Savoy, the Earl of Richmond.

Louis reached London on 2 Jun 1216, and received the homage of the barons and the mayor. However the castles at both Dover and Windsor remained held by those loyal to John. Louis was never crowned because the archbishop of Canterbury was away at the papal court, and no bishop 'was available' to perform a coronation. John then died on 19th

October 1216 at Newark, only in partial control of the western part of the country, with the war with the barons and Louis still in progress. His body was entombed in the choir of Worcester cathedral. But eastern Sussex had not yet seen the end of involvement in the war, which spilt over into the next reign.

There is no doubt that John was a very active and well-travelled king. Some have questioned the distances that he was able to travel in a day, but there is no doubting his itinerary which is very well recorded. He did no harm to Battle abbey, and made it independent of himself and his successors, as well keeping it out of the hands of the bishops of Chichester. If he had not 'sold' this right the abbey may have very soon lost its independence from Chichester, as later English kings forgot its reason for existence as William I's royal permanent memorial, to the dead of the Norman Conquest.

This was at the cost of the abbey gradually losing its rights to administer justice within its leuga, but armed with royal charters, it was able to elect its own abbot, recover and retain its lands coveted by greedy neighbours, and in fact expand its estates, and to keep its profits between losing one abbot and appointing the next.



Newark castle, where King John died

By David Ingham from Lancashire, England (P7117389) [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Part 7

1216-1272 Henry III, the fourth longest reigning monarch of England

After the death of King John (18/19 Oct 1216), the supporters of his nine year old son, the young prince Henry, arranged his coronation as King Henry III (28 Oct 1216). His early coronation led to a long reign and he became the third longest reigning monarch of England (but not Scotland!) after queens Elizabeth II and Victoria and King George III.

Historians divide Henry's reign into four chronological periods and this division will also be followed here for clarity:

- The Minority of Henry III and its aftermath, 1216-1234
- The Personal rule of Henry III, 1234-1258
- The Period of reform and rebellion, 1258-1267
- The Final years, 1267-1272

1216-1234

Louis had continued to make progress after taking London and had moved on to take Hertford castle and receive the surrender of Berkhamsted castle by the end of 1216. Henry's followers, led by William Marshall, who was brother-in-law of king John and appointed protector of the young king, and regent of England in spite of his advanced years (he was then about 70), continued the fighting against prince Louis of France and his English baronial supporters.

Two weeks after the new king's coronation Magna Carta was re-issued at Bristol in November 1216. The idea was to encourage the barons to abandon Louis. It was not identical to the charter of 1215, but it did retain the great bulk of the reform programme, and in some ways improved on it. The age of majority, for example, was for the first time set at twenty-one. The most important chapter of all, the one in which the king promised not to arrest or imprison anyone, or take their property, or outlaw them or exile them 'except by the lawful judgment of their peers or by the law of the land', was retained in full. The reissue of Magna Carta helped diffuse some of hostility that existed between the government and the baronial insurgents.

Louis continued to gain territory in the east and in January decided to go to France for more reinforcements. He had a slightly difficult trip and by the end of February 1217 Louis had reached the south coast and taken refuge at Winchelsea. Sensing an opportunity William Marshall moved towards Winchelsea, but as he approached a French fleet arrived, and allowed Louis to escape the short distance to Rye, which was rapidly captured from its inhabitants by the French – following which Louis escaped to France itself, then returned to

England. On the last day of February king Henry wrote to the men of Rye, saying *'that he had heard of the capture of their town by Louis, and bidding them to be of good cheer and not allow the enemy to take any hostage or pledge from them, as he would in a few days send an army under the Earl Marshal and other barons to drive out the French'* (Pat. I Hen. III. m. 13d). William Marshal did indeed detach Philip d'Aubigny to occupy Rye, but himself moved his army westwards to Shoreham, then on to Farnham, Knepp surrendering to him on the way. Chichester and Winchester were then re-taken from Louis and at Chichester a truce was made and the Earls of Arundel and Warenne re-joined the king

Louis suffered a number of further reverses in 1217. There was a real turning point when Louis lost the 2nd Battle of Lincoln on 20 May 1217, but equally important was his failure to take Dover castle and not to have a clear passage to and from France. Lincoln was followed by further losses, including critically at the sea Battle of Sandwich on 24 August 1217 when a French fleet laden with reinforcements for a French army in London was destroyed. The English fleet had a strong core from the Cinque Ports, the men of which, including from the freed Rye and Winchelsea, had to be bribed to take part! However the English proceeded to capture the French flagship and many supply vessels, forced the rest of the French fleet back to Calais and established full control of the English Channel. Negotiations then rapidly took place on 5 Sep 1217 near Kingston on Thames. On 11 Sep 1217 a peace treaty (the Treaty of Lambeth) was agreed and ratified on 20 Sep 1217, putting an end to Louis's pretensions.

Henry III's government struggled to rebuild authority and prevent a return to anarchy and as part of the re-stabilisation process re-issued a modified Magna Carta again late in 1217, and with further revisions yet again in 1225. It was to be this last version, not the charters of 1215, 1216 or 1217 which entered the statute book as England's first and most fundamental statute.

In late 1222 the abbot of Robertsbridge was once more sent as a messenger for the king overseas, possibly to the pope, with a letter of protection.

Early in 1225 Henry visited the Cinque Ports, as a threat had been received that Louis was thinking of invading again. Henry's visit was to organise the naval defences and to ask for advice to be given to a great council which was convened for February. On the Patent Rolls are documents issued by Henry III to all the Cinque Ports when at Romney on 13 January 1225, and some more specific entries were made at Winchelsea on 19 January, at Rye on 20 January, Battle on 24 January, at Robertsbridge on 25 January* and one was issued to the abbot of Battle just after this, from Westminster, dated 7 February 1225.

*The abbot of Robertsbridge was granted a weekly Friday market and an annual three-day fair in August. Within three weeks the grant was cancelled, apparently due to the threat to existing markets in the area.

Louis did not re-invade, and once Henry reached his majority he firmly held the throne. After this Sussex did not host any notable historical event for many years, although problems rumbled on in the background.

1234-1258

In January 1237 Henry III married Eleanor of Provence, whose sister Margaret was married to King Louis IX of France (the son of the prince Louis who had invaded England, who himself became King Louis VIII).

Following his marriage Henry started to grant what was perceived by the barons as excessive favours and appointments to foreigners. Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester and Henry's tutor, introduced Frenchmen from Poitou, and Italians followed through Henry's ties to the papacy. His reign coincided with an expansion of papal power and the Church was perceived as excessive in extorting money from England. As early as 1240 English churchmen were protesting to Henry about this and abbot Ralph of Coventry, elected abbot of Battle in 1235, was amongst the ecclesiastical spokesmen. Lower records in his 'Summary of the History of Battel Abbey', which follows on from his translation of the 'Chronicle of Battel Abbey': *'A contemporary writer assures us that the large sum of 200 marks has been claimed and recovered from this convent' and '...notwithstanding the severe extractions they had suffered at the hands of his minions, who had, under various pretexts, levied unheard of contributions on the ecclesiastics of the kingdom.'* So Henry was starting to upset both barons and clergy.

Eastern Sussex was involved to an extent in the king's policy of favouritism towards his foreign courtiers. The castle and manor of Pevensey were given firstly to the Poitevin Peter de Rivallis, and later after de Rivallis spectacularly fell from favour, to Henry's uncle Peter of Savoy, who also received Hastings.

1247 saw Henry III resuming ownership of Winchelsea and Rye from the abbey of Fécamp which had held the manor of Rameslie, which included the two ports, since the time of King Cnut, i.e. from well before the Conquest. Fécamp was left with the manor of Brede (which included some rentals in Hastings) and with Steyning in west Sussex, but received other lands in Gloucestershire and Lincolnshire in exchange for the two strategically important Cinque Ports, which in defence of the realm terms clearly could no longer be owned by a French abbey.

Sometime before 1253 a Franciscan (Greyfriars) Priory was established at Old Winchelsea and in 1253, after waiting 28 years, the Abbot of Robertsbridge was once again granted a weekly Monday market and an annual fair on September 14th. William of Etchingam had been granted a Wednesday market at Salehurst five months earlier.

The rumbling national discontent rose to a head in 1258. Henry had levied extortionate taxes to pay for war with Wales, failed campaigns in France, and extensive ecclesiastical building, including the rebuilding of Westminster abbey which had begun in 1245. The last straw was when he agreed to cover the debts of the papacy in a fruitless war with Sicily. The

barons demanded sweeping reforms and Henry was in no position to resist. In 1258 Henry agreed to the 'Provisions of Oxford', an agreement placing the barons in virtual control of the realm, through a council of 15 men, without whose consent Henry could do very little. The scene was being set for conflict, but also set a precedent which would curtail the authority of all subsequent English monarchs.

1258-1267

In 1258 the barons initiated a three-year period of reform, with new processes, which included sanctions against their default, covering justice, finance and the role of foreigners.

Between 14 November 1259 and 21 April 1260 Henry was in France ratifying the Treaty of Paris by which he and his heirs formally renounced their claims to Normandy, Anjou and Poitou in return for Gascony, which was to be held as a fief from the king of France. This visit had enabled Henry to evade the reformers work and many of the reformers had become demoralised and support was evaporating.

As his father had done with the 1215 Magna Carta Henry obtained a papal bull in 1261, proclaiming the reforms unconstitutional. Henry began to reassert his authority and by late 1261 the majority of reformers had acquiesced. Chief reformer, the Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, Henry's brother-in-law, and married to Henry III's sister Eleanor, the youngest daughter of King John, returned to his native France.



Miniature of Henry III visiting Louis IX, and Henry III at St Denis.

From: Les Grandes chroniques de France, after 1332, before 1350 British Library: Royal 16 G VI f. 426



Various barons encouraged de Montfort to return to England in April 1263. He gathered supporters and began ravaging the estates of Henry's allies and generally making a thorough nuisance. In order to end the issues between them Henry and Montfort agreed to submit their arguments to King Louis IX of France for arbitration. Louis's verdict, known as the 'Mise of Amiens', was unsurprising as he declared in favour of his fellow monarch. One has to suspect de Montfort may have been using this as a delaying process to gain even more support rather than expecting a favourable result. Full civil war broke out and this led to the Battle of Lewes on 14 May 1264.

The leaders of the barons were Simon de Montfort and Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester. Each had some connection with Sussex, the former holding the manor of Sheffield (at Fletching) and the latter the manor of Rotherfield. London was held by the barons and strongly favourable to their cause. The barons reinforced by a large contingent of Londoners, left London on 6 May and marched in the direction of Lewes

Henry decided to focus his forces where they would have the support of the local lords. For this purpose Sussex appeared a good choice. Lewes castle was in the hands of the king's brother-in-law John de Warenne, Pevensey and Hastings were held by his uncle Peter of Savoy, and William de Braose of Bramber and John Fitz-Alan of Arundel had both proved their loyalty in the defence of Rochester Castle. In early of May the Henry's army moved southwards from Tonbridge, having taken Tonbridge castle from the earl of Gloucester on 30 April with the aim of securing the Cinque Ports and south coast.

En route they encountered an affray at Combwell on 2 May and one of the king's cooks, 'Master Thomas' is reported to have been murdered. Although it may just have been that the locals did not take kindly to the cook taking their produce to feed the army, John de la Haye, who was a member of the local gentry and would next be seen at Lewes, and would become constable of Rye and Winchelsea, is said to have been involved in this folly, as are (allegedly) some of Battle abbey's tenants. This is recorded in Lower's 'Summary of the History of Battel Abbey' from an original document thought to have been written by a contemporary monk at Battle Abbey, the manuscript of which is still held at the Bodleian library (in Rawlinson MS.150). The reprisal was an unusually severe act of terror even for its time. Carpenter says, *'315 archers were beheaded in the Weald in the parish of St Mary, Ticehurst, in the place called Flimwell in the presence of the king, all of whom had been called deceitfully to the king's peace only to then incur that death through the counsel of Richard king of Germany.'*

Moving on to Robertsbridge abbey, Henry, Edward and company were entertained, but obliged the monks to pay a heavy ransom of 500 marks (£333) to prince Edward to spare their lives.

The next day abbot Reginald of Brecknock and the brothers of Battle abbey went out in procession (presumably in considerable trepidation) to meet the king and give him a loyal welcome, but Henry was still angry and demanded 100 marks (£66.67) from the abbey as he said that some of its tenants had been at Ticehurst – not that the abbey was in a position to forbid them to go wherever they wished. Prince Edward demanded another 40 marks. In addition some damage was inflicted on the abbey's goods. Compared to Robertsbridge they got off relatively lightly.

The king then went on to Winchelsea on 4 May, to ensure the support of the Cinque Ports. This was not happily forthcoming and Henry took hostages, who gave a grudging promise to obtain ships for the king's use. The army was let loose on the wine cellars, and worse. After four days Henry returned to Battle, and received news that the barons were assembling

near Lewes. He moved out westwards and lodged one night at Herstmonceux, where his army hunted and generally rampaged around the park, then moved on towards Lewes on 10/11 May. Henry lodged at the priory and Lewes castle defences were bolstered with royalist troops.

The barons had encamped at Fletching, some 8 miles away. Some negotiations took place, but no accord was reached and on the 14 May the Battle of Lewes took place. The barons won and King Henry and Prince Edward were taken prisoners. On 15 May the 'Mise of Lewes' was agreed and the 'Provisions of Oxford' were enacted.

Prince Edward was initially sent to Dover castle to be guarded by Henry de Montfort, whilst King Henry was taken back to Battle Abbey by Simon de Montfort, *'no longer with power to extort money from his entertainers as he had done on his last visit less than a fortnight before'*, and thence to London, but not before Henry signed royal orders at Battle for the appointment of Drogo de Baranton as governor of Windsor castle and for the release of many prisoners, including de Montfort's son, also called Simon. Blaauw says *'the monks must have relished the spectacle of speedy retribution, which now brought the wrong-doer humiliated and harmless to their door'*. Henry and his eldest son, Edward, along with his brother, Richard, earl of Cornwall, were placed under house arrest.

The Cinque Ports, Winchelsea to the fore but also involving Rye and Hastings, in the aftermath of Lewes joined a fleet off Sandwich to prevent foreign assistance being sent to Henry. 300 archers were stationed at Winchelsea whilst the fleet was away. The fleet also pillaged Calais. But after that things went astray as the younger Simon de Montfort encouraged naval anarchy, and the Cinque Ports activity deteriorated into piracy with ships of no nation, even English, being safe. The fleet even attacked Portsmouth in jealousy of its growing trade, they invaded and burned the town, murdered those who put up a defence and stole the ships in harbour.

During the years before the Battle of Lewes Pevensey castle had been in the hands of the royalists. A number of prominent royalists fled to Pevensey after the battle and took ship to France, and soon afterwards the garrison at Pevensey were commanded not to leave the castle. In July the occupiers were ordered to 'explain to the king', who was still under house arrest, their behaviour at Pevensey. Later in the month John d'Abernon was ordered to take over the castle and to give the three principal defenders safe-conduct to either join the king under house arrest, or to go into exile. They refused to surrender and in September various baronial supporters joined the son of de Montfort, also called Simon de Montfort, in besieging the castle. As it was still possible for the defenders to bring in reinforcements and provisions by sea the siege failed. This was a microcosm of the problems still facing the barons.

De Montfort had taken control of the government 'in the name of the king' but realised the need to obtain wide support. In 1264, he summoned barons from the whole country to an early pre-Parliament and in 1265 also invited burgesses from selected towns, with a

representative parliament called in 1265. On 14 February 1265, during a parliament summoned in the name of King Henry III, an announcement was made that the king had promised to keep Magna Carta. This was the 1265 inspeximus (inspection) of Magna Carta 1225, which has been used to help determine the attendance at the parliament.

Meanwhile prince Edward had escaped from his confinement at Hereford, and rallied royalist forces. De Montfort had lost the support of the earl of Gloucester, Gilbert de Clare, who had helped arrange Edward's escape and guaranteed him the military support of the Welsh Marcher lords.

In June 1265 de Montfort arranged for his wife Eleanor to move to the safety of Dover castle from Odiham in Hampshire. She was met by her son Simon, taking a break from besieging Pevensey castle, at Wilmington and they overnighted at Battle abbey, where the cost of their dinners and overnight stays (for which she paid it seems) was detailed. This included the costs of pasture for 395 horses, which gives an idea of the size of her retinue. They went on to visit Winchelsea, holding a feast there with the burgesses, before reaching Dover castle. The countess of Leicester had with her at Dover a contingent of archers from Pevensey under John la Warre, a hundred sailors from Winchelsea, under Richard de Montfort, John de la Haye, who had been appointed constable of Rye and Winchelsea in August 1264, Waleran de Monceaux and Matthew de Hastings, the latter of whom seems to have been instrumental in the final surrender of the castle to prince Edward.

On 4 August 1265, Edward caught up with de Montfort at Evesham. De Montfort and many of his supporters were killed. Inevitably, the remaining reformers gradually capitulated. The 'Dictum of Kenilworth' of 30 October 1266 was an accord with the rebels. The document marked the end of the reform movement and the restoration of royal power, although many of the reforms passed by Simon de Montfort's parliaments were accepted by the king.

The Cinque Ports did not escape retribution for their support of the barons, although Rye and Hastings made 'grovelling apologies' in similar letters to the king. That from Hastings read:

'Most dear Lord, the most illustrious King of England, his liege and faithful barons of Hastings, greeting, in the Saviour of all, and prompt and ready willingness to obey in all things, even to the division of soul and body, with all subjection, reverence, and honour. We have thought it right to declare by these letters, to the excellence of your Royal Majesty, that extreme grief of heart, and anguish beyond measure, have now for a long time past affected all and each of us, inasmuch as we have neither been able to approach the bodily presence of your loyal clemency during the delay of your long sojourn in remote parts, nor to direct sure messengers in order to ascertain the certainty of the good condition of your person, for the sake of both the love and honour of which we are ready to be crowned with a victorious death, if necessary. Moreover, let your Royal excellence take notice that we have, up to this time, guarded your town of Hastings for your use and that of your heirs, and at your good pleasure shall guard it for ever, although anything of the contrary may have been suggested

to your pious ears by our enemies against us. To which enemies, indeed, do not give credence, since they are not to be believed in anything; and although some persons, without the assent of our community, may have offended your Royal Majesty, we have at no time adopted them nor their evil deeds, but, even in the presence of your Royal Majesty, have disapproved and disavowed them and their evil works, and have never ceased to disapprove them. Wherefore, we humbly implore the clemency of your Royal Majesty. May the excellence of your Royal Majesty be in health, and flourish to endless time.'

These apologies were successful in avoiding severe retribution as it is reported that Rye just had its bailiff replaced and all its ships were placed 'for the common good' and were forbidden to go venturing overseas without the king's permission. The barons of Rye were forgiven.

Winchelsea – a town of possibly more than 700 houses, two churches and over 50 inns and taverns and a population of a few thousands did not apologise. In late 1265/early 1266 Prince Edward approached Winchelsea after taking Dover castle, from which Simon de Montfort's wife Eleanor, countess of Leicester, sister of Henry III, had escaped to France never to be reconciled with her brother. Edward recruited ships from the east coast and the town was subjected to a combined attack from the sea and from land with a force that contained 577 Welsh archers. The leading citizens were 'put to the sword', but the majority spared. Winchelsea also revolted in a smaller way in 1267, the result was the same.

When Edward came to the throne a few years later he took a great interest in Winchelsea and arranged the development of the planned 'New' Winchelsea on the hill.

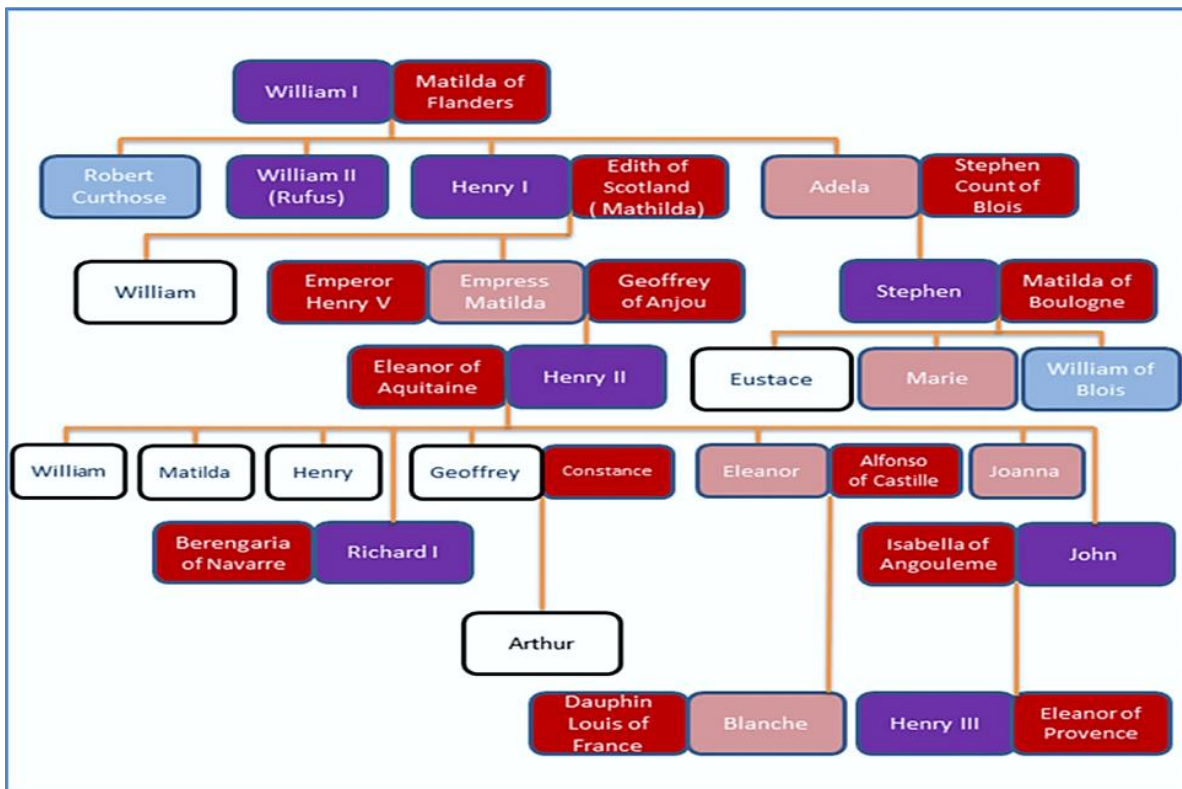
The Final years, 1267-1272

The king's authority was finally restored by the Statute of Marlborough (1267), in which the king also promised to uphold the latest version of Magna Carta and some of the 'Provisions of Westminster', evolved from the 'Provisions of Oxford'. Eastern Sussex quieted after the excitements of the previous few years. Nothing of note is recorded for Battle and area for the last five years of Henry III's reign.

Henry had revered King Edward the Confessor, who had been canonised in 1161, even having a mural painted of him in his bedchamber. Henry III's life's major architectural work was the re-building of Westminster abbey which had been founded by Edward. In 1269, the new abbey was consecrated, and Edward the Confessor's body reburied there with Henry III himself helping to carry the Confessor's coffin to its new resting place. The occasion was intended to show that rifts between the king and the barons had been overcome, but fearing violence, a planned crown-wearing was cancelled. Three years later Henry III himself died at his Palace of Westminster on 16 November, 1272, aged sixty-five. He became the first of the Plantagenets to be buried within the abbey.



Effigy of King Henry III in Westminster Abbey by Valerie McGlinchey [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons



The English regal line from William I to Henry III : Kings in purple, spouses of all in royal lineage in dark red. Others of royal lineage in pale colours, males in pale blue, female lines in rose. Those who died before they could be considered as possible inheritors are in white.

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