

Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex

Harold was the most well known of the Saxon earls at the time of Edward the Confessor's death. During the last years of Edward's reign, Harold had effectively been running England. His sister, Edith, was also married to Edward.



Images used from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Claim to the English throne

Strengths

- Harold was Edward the Confessor's brother-in-law.
- He was the richest and most powerful of the Saxon earls.
- His mother was related to the former king, Cnut the Great.
- He had the support of the Witan, England's royal council.

Weaknesses

- He had no direct link to the throne.
- After being shipwrecked in Normandy, he swore to support William's claim to the throne.
- He had been exiled with his father by Edward the Confessor and had to force the king to give him his titles back.

William, Duke of Normandy

William was the son of Robert, Duke of Normandy. Due to his mother being lowborn and not a noblewoman, he was sometimes called 'William the Tanner' as a sign of disrespect by his enemies. His father died when he was seven years old and William had to fight to keep his dukedom.



Images used from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Claim to the English throne

Strengths

- William was the second cousin of Edward the Confessor, making him a blood relative (though not a close one).
- While Edward was in exile from England, he was protected by William's father in Normandy. This meant William and Edward became good friends.
- He claimed that Edward had named him his heir in 1051, while Harold was exiled.
- He married Matilda of Flanders which gave him a strong military ally.

Weaknesses

- William was only a distant relation to Edward the Confessor. Edgar Aetheling was a closer blood relation.
- It wasn't Edward's place to offer William the throne – that right belonged to the Witan.
- He wasn't English – he was French.

Harald Hardrada, King of Norway

Harald was a fierce Viking warrior and an experienced fighter, having fought in battles since the age of 15. Harald was around 50 years old when he died which proved what a skilled fighter he was. Harald was one of the last great Scandinavian war leaders to land in England.



Images used from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Claim to the English throne

Strengths

- Harald was the current King of Norway and married to a Russian princess.
- He was reported to be over seven feet tall and was known as Harald the Ruthless.
- Harald claimed he was a descendant and heir of Cnut the Great who was King of England from 1016–35.

Weaknesses

- Except for his alliance to Tostig, the rebellious brother of Harold Godwinson who had been in exile, Harald had no support in England.
- His claim to the throne through his ties to Cnut was seen as weak.
- He did not have the support of the Witan.

Edgar Ætheling

Edgar was the grandson of King Edmund 'Ironside' II, who was King of England in 1016 before his defeat by Cnut. His father had escaped to Hungary when Edmund died, and Edgar had been brought up abroad.



Images used from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Claim to the English throne

Strengths

- Edgar had the strongest claim to the throne. He was a grandson of a previous English king, King Edmund II.
- He had the support of the Witan, but only after Harold Godwinson's death at the Battle of Hastings.

Weaknesses

- Edgar grew up in Hungary and had few supporters in England.
- In 1066, Edgar was only in his early teens; he wasn't in a position to be an effective military commander.
- He was the second choice behind Harold Godwinson in the eyes of the Witan.