











The Normans in Britain

by Mandy Barrow

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500 BC	AD 43	450	793	1066	1485	1837	1939

Meet the four claimants to the English throne

When the English king Edward the Confessor died on 5 January 1066, no fixed procedures were in place to decide who should succeed him on the throne.

The Witan (a supreme council of wise men) had to make the decision, and they had four candidates to choose from.

Edgar the Atheling, closest blood claimant to Edward

Edgar, a Saxon prince and nephew of Edward, was a sickly fourteen year old boy.

Harold Godwinson, powerful noble in England, a good soldier and a gifted politician



Harold was **born and bred in England** and **popular** with ordinary people. He was son of Earl Godwin, the most powerful noble in England. Harold was a leading **Saxon** Lord and the brother of Edward's wife. He had won a number of battles for Edward.

Harold was chosen by the Witan (the King's council) to succeed Edward the Confessor. He also said that it was Edward's dying wish that he, Harold, should have the crown (There were no witnesses to Edward

saying this)

The day after Edward died, Harold became King Harold II of England.

Harold did not have a direct blood link to the king. He was not of royal birth. (see timeline below)
(Photo on left shows Harold at a Battle of Hastings re-enactment. The real Harold would have had long hair.)

William, Duke of Normandy, over the sea in France



William was a **distant cousin of Edward the Confessor** and wanted to be the next king. He claimed that **both Edward and Harold had promised him the throne**, but English supporters of Harold challenged this.

When Edward was a boy in 1016, King Canute invaded England and Edward ran away to Normandy for safety. Edward stayed in Normandy until he became King of England in 1042. Edward invited William of Normandy to

his court in 1051 and supposedly promised to make him heir.

After a shipwreck in 1064, Harold was handed over to William of Normandy, who forced him to swear an oath that he would help William become the next king of England when Edward died. It was said that the oath was given over a box that unbeknown to Harold contained the bones of a saint. Oaths were important guarantees that were considered binding in the Middle Ages, so this particular oath bound Harold to helping William, and made Harold's own claim to the throne look illegal.

William had been a very successful ruler of Normandy and he thought he could do an equally good job for England.

(Photo on left shows William at a Battle of Hastings re-enactment)

Harald Hardrada, Viking king of Norway

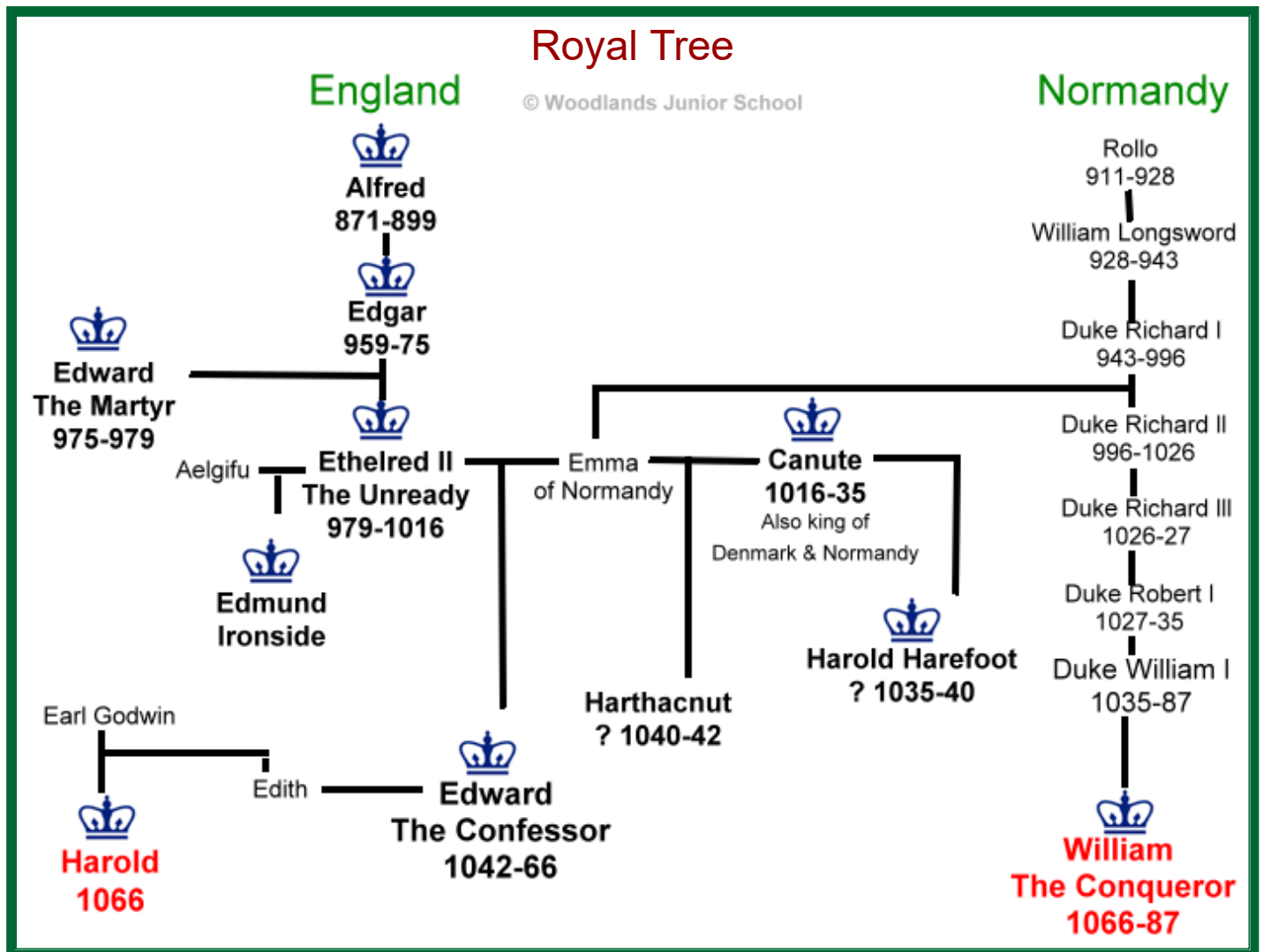


Hardrada was king of Norway and a **direct descendant of the kings of England**. He was related to King Canute, the King of England from 1016-1032.

The Vikings invaded England long ago, in the 860s, and settled in the north. In 1016 the Viking King Canute became King of England, Denmark and Norway. England was ruled by Norwegian kings right up until 1042 when Edward the Confessor (the last Saxon King) snatched back the throne from them.

Hardrada wanted to be King of England because he wanted more power and better land. Hardrada was very unpopular, but very powerful. His name

alone was enough to strike fear into the hearts and minds of his enemies.



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