

HENRY I BEAUCLERC OF ENGLAND

By Rider, 2 August 2007;

Henry was born in Shelby, Yorkshire in 1068 as the fourth son of William I and Matilda. During his early life, he learned much and that was useful for him in his later days – for example, he spoke fluent French, English and Latin. From those lingual skills came one of his nicknames – Beauclerc.

Succession

He, being by the time of William I's death the third son, was given five thousand pounds of silver, however, no domains. Yet, he had support due to the inefficient rule of William II Rufus. It is also told that it was one of his supporters who shot William II with an arrow during a hunt in the New Forest. Henry succeeded to the throne on the 2nd of August and was crowned three days later – on the 5th of August. This quick acting infuriated his brother, Robert Curthose of Normandy (who had been left with the Duchy of Normandy), who would have been the legal inheritor. Henry had quickly won the nobles to his side though and when Robert landed in England, Henry was there to meet him. He then, however, dropped the claim for a sizable pension.

Dealing with Normandy

Yet, Robert could not be trusted – Henry knew this very well and after some arguments in 1106, Henry led an army to Normandy, intent on capturing the Duchy. In the Battle of Tinchebrai, Henry decisively defeated Robert and managed to capture him. With this, Normandy was safely united with the English crown.

Marriages

He was the first 'popular' king amongst the local Anglo-Saxon. He managed that by wedding Edith (or Matilda, as she was later named), the daughter of Malcolm III of Scotland. This also united the older Saxon line of kings with the Norman lineage. The local Normans didn't, however, enjoy the marriage very much. She carried three children of whom one died very young; the son, William, died in the shipwreck of the 'White Ship' (leaving England without a male heir) and a daughter – Matilda who married Emperor Heinrich V of the Holy Roman Empire and later wanted the throne of England for herself (competing with Stephen over it).

His second wife was Adela (or Adelaide). She was the daughter of Count Godfrey VII of Louvain. Henry had no sons with her.

France

France had been a troublesome issue for the Dukes of Normandy and Kings of England – for one, the French didn't want a strong unified state to the north of themselves. Henry I waged war with Louis VI (the Fat) of France in 1119. Henry won quickly in the Battle of Bremule, in which only 900 knights took place, of whom 3

died and 140 were taken captive. As the next step, Henry had his son, William, marry the daughter of the Count of Anjou in the same year.

Church

The Church in England had always been more secular than in the rest of Europe. Changes there took place later and the king had more powers. Henry first called Anselm from Rome to England. However, Anselm opposed the King when he got there and wished to make the Church more independent. Anselm was in England from 1100 to 1107.

One of the largest problems Henry faced was excommunication (the Pope threatened him with it) because he refused to give up the powers of investiture. Investiture meant that the King had control over all clerks. Later, Henry agreed to a treaty – the Church could select the higher clerks and he would remain in control over the lower ones.

State Affairs

Henry was a strong statesman. As one of his actions, he created the Exchequer institution. The Exchequer acted as a financial minister, organizing the treasury and controlling it – institution unlike anything seen before in England. The Exchequer installed information to 'pipe rolls' – a method used up to the second part of the 19th century.

He also released the Charter of Liberties. This was done soon after his succession to the throne. The Charter was based on the laws of Edward the Confessor (and later became the basis for the Magna Charta Libertatum of 1215). The Charter protected both the Anglo-Saxons and Normans equally. Henry also bound himself to the laws. Due to these actions, Henry was also called 'the Lion of Justice'.

Death

The second husband of Matilda, Geoffrey Plantagenet, the Prince of Anjou, grieved for power. He requested many belongings from his father-in-law and most were granted. However, when Geoffrey requested certain strategic fortresses in Normandy, Henry angered and wished to punish Geoffrey.

However, on the 1st of December, 1135, Henry died due to overeating one of his favourites. Since there was no direct successor, Matilda (Henry's daughter) and Stephen, the Count of Blois, both claimed the throne. Stephen managed himself to be crowned on the 22nd of December on the same year. A civil war followed.

Sources

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