The Battle of Fulford

Coronation of King Harold II

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Harold Godwinson was crowned King Harold II by the Witan on 6 January 1066, and was seen as the rightful king by the most powerful earls in England. Harold's greatest support was in Wessex and the south of England. The earls in the north were independently minded and often challenged the authority of the king, who was based in the south.

Harold knew that Duke William of Normandy had begun preparations for invasion immediately after Harold was crowned. The King of Norway, Harald Hardrada and the King of Scotland were also potential threats to King Harold II.

King Harold II took four major steps to secure his grip on the crown during his nine months as king.

Timeline of the steps king Harold took to secure his rule under the threat of invasion

Harold took an army to the north of England to confront the two powerful Anglo-Saxon earls, the brothers Edwin and Morcar.

Harold secured the loyalty of Edwin and Morcar by agreeing to marry their sister, Edith. Edwin of Mercia and Morcar of Northumbria agreed to defend the north from any attack by Harald Hardrada.

King Harold II then assembled a large army in the south to confront the larger threat from Normandy, led by Duke William.

Tostig returns

Tostig Godwinson was forced into exile in 1065 by his brother Harold because the people of Northumbria refused to accept Tostig as their earl. Tostig was hated for his harsh rule and his repeated refusal to consider the concerns of the Northumbrians. Morcar, the brother of Edwin Earl of Mercia, eventually replaced Tostig as Earl of Northumbria.

Tostig did not go into exile quietly, he travelled to Scotland, Normandy and finally Norway to gain support for his bid to return to power in England. Harald Hardrada, the King of Norway, assembled an army of 10,000 Norwegians and together with Tostig sailed to the coast of north-east England. The English resistance to Tostig and Hardrada was led by earls Edwin and Morcar. The two armies met at Fulford in York on 20 September 1066.

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Statistics to show what happened during the battle of Fulford

The Battle of Fulford was a major disaster for King Harold II. He had expected his northern earls to defeat the Norwegians whilst he waited for Duke William's invasion from the south. Harold II would have to finish the job himself.

The outcome was a decisive victory for Harald Hardrada. He captured the city of York and camped his army 15 miles south at Stamford Bridge to wait for Edwin and Morcar to send money and hostages.