

among other things, the Bishop of Winchester, led these a position that brought huge wealth and huge power. Stephen, the richest man in England and Normandy, was only alive in the 1130s to press his claim against Matilda because of a late decision not to travel back to England with his cousin, William the Atheling, on *The White Ship* fifteen years before.

Matters were also made considerably more intriguing by the fact that Geoffrey Plantagenet and Matilda were actually at war in Anjou with the old king at the time of the latter's death. This war was being prosecuted through a series of alliances organised by various renegade elements in France who opposed the old king, and many English nobles came to fear that if Matilda was crowned queen, many of these supporters of the Plantagenets would be given land in England. For the 70 years since the Conquest, many towns and barons had become jealous of the rights and privileges granted by the Norman kings and so were not willing to give these up to another latter-day Conqueror, this time led by Angevin, rather than, Norman interests.

In this atmosphere of conspiracy and intrigue in the aftermath of the king's death, it was Stephen who proved by far the quickest off the mark. Setting sail from Normandy in the depths of winter, he landed on the south coast and marched on Winchester where, like his uncle before him, he quickly secured the Treasury. This, in essence, secured the means by which he could govern, and he then went on to settle various disputes with the Church and the king of Scotland that in general brought peace to the country. All this early activity should have produced the support that would allow Stephen a long and successful reign as England's fourth Norman king. With Matilda and Geoffrey in Anjou and with the overall support of the English barons, little seemed to threaten Stephen's crown.

But Stephen's early good relations with the majority of England's barons did not dent his cousin's ambition and, in the summer of 1139, a year or so after the outbreak of civil war, Matilda landed on the Sussex coast. In her counter bid for the crown, Matilda was most energetically championed by Robert, the Earl of Gloucester, her half-brother and the illegitimate son of Henry I, who

meeting where each side mustered on opposite sides of the River Thames at Wallingford, agreed to meet at Winchester at the end of the year. In the resulting Treaty of Winchester, which was sealed with a sacred kiss between the two in the cathedral, Henry Plantagenet agreed to pay homage to Stephen who in turn named his rival as his successor.

The Treaty of Winchester, sometimes also known as the Treaty of Wallingford, brought the Anarchy to an end and this seemed to galvanise the king who spent much of the next year travelling across his English kingdom in an attempt to re-establish his royal authority. However, he was taken ill at Dover during this procession in October 1154, and it was there that the grandson of the Conqueror, and the last of England's four Norman kings, was to die. Stephen was buried in Kent at Faversham Abbey where his son and wife had earlier also been laid to rest.

The Accession of Henry II and the Foundation of Plantagenet Rule

Henry II, Henry Plantagenet, was just 21 years old when he came to the throne of England and was to become the first, and one of the most successful, in a long line of Plantagenet kings who were to rule for the next 250 years. Gaining their name from an anglicisation of *planta genista*, the Latin name for the yellow-flowered broom plant that was worn by Geoffrey, Henry's father, and that was an emblem on the coat of arms of the House of Anjou, the Plantagenets were to rule England until 1399 when Richard II was deposed by Henry IV, the first of the Lancastrians. Geoffrey Plantagenet was also, from his coat of arms, to give England and the English crown the heraldic insignia of the rampant lion.

Eight more Plantagenet kings were to follow Henry II, or fourteen more if the kings from the Houses of Lancaster and York are also to be included, although it was not a name that was used until in the mid-fifteenth century. These kings, who, in essence, forged the identity and character of the country that they ruled, gave England its longest ruling dynasty and used their time in power to reform justice and the law, build cathedrals, develop a system of government based on parliament and, in general terms, transform the country into one of the best governed in medieval Europe. But most of all,

money for his brother's ransom. However, he was once again in revolt early in 1194 when news came from Europe that the Emperor had accepted the first ransom payment and released Richard. John, as a result, fled to his lands in France.

It was this period, when the king was absent and John was trying to usurp his brother's crown, that was to become most commonly associated with Robin Hood, the legendary outlaw from Sherwood Forest who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. Although innumerable ballads and stories have been written about him, there is no actual evidence for either his existence or for that of his followers, Little John, Friar Tuck or Maid Marion, and he was only later described as the fallen nobleman, Robin of Locksley. However, virtues everpresent in his character such as loyalty to the crown and opposition to tyranny, as well as many anti-establishment traits such as his willingness to break hunting and poaching laws, have always touched a chord throughout the ages and his position as an everyman hero in English history is unparalleled in its longevity and endurance.

Richard's Return and his Final Years

It can only be guessed whether Richard's return from captivity in Germany was helped by the efforts of such men as Robin Hood and Blondel. But what is clear is that Richard certainly returned to a country, dominated by Plantagenet rule, where strong centralised government focused around the king was a fact of political life. It was one in which the political organs of the nation had withstood the monarch's absence and imprisonment for 5 years and this allowed him to return to a kingdom that remained sturdy, prosperous and functioning. This was a huge development from the time of Stephen where the institutions built up by Henry I had withered during the Anarchy and the decade of disputes with the Matilda and the barons.

Richard I returned to London in March 1194, and had himself crowned for a second time at Westminster Abbey a month later in a ceremony that contemporaries describe as being even more elaborate than his first. But Richard I was nothing if not impatient and, having re-established his regal authority, he set about raising a war chest for the fight for which he was

spoiling against Philip in France. Richard I spent only two months in England raising the army and taxes needed for this military campaign and, having filled his ships with soldiers and money, left England in May 1194 never to return.

Richard I soon made his peace with John and spent the next 5 years clawing back his Plantagenet-Angevin empire in France. This campaign was punctuated by truces and winter breaks, and slowly Richard edged out from his power base in Normandy, with notable victories over his old rival, Philip Augustus, at the Battle of Freteval in 1194 and the Battle of Gisors in 1198, where Richard used the battle cry *Dieu et mon Droit* for the first time. This was later taken up by Henry V who placed it on his coat of arms. Richard the Lionheart was also at this time to place three lions on his standard, with these representing Normandy, England and Aquitaine.

At the heart of Richard's operation was Rouen, the capital of Normandy, and it was there in 1194 that he gave orders for the construction of a new, magnificent castle, the Château-Gaillard, on the banks of the meandering River Seine that soon came to be celebrated for its size and magnificence. It was also during this period of war, in 1196, that a gallows was erected for the first time to the north of the old city walls in London near the Tyburn River that at the time flowed into the Thames. This was to be the location of public executions in the capital until 1783 when they were moved to Newgate Prison. The last public execution in Britain was to take place there in 1868.

In early 1199, Richard I received information that the Count of Limoges was in possession of a large cache of gold that he, Richard, as overlord, intended to add to his depleted coffers. However, the count claimed the money for himself and locked himself up in his castle at Châlus in Aquitaine, confident that Richard would soon depart for more pressing matters elsewhere. However, Richard laid siege to the castle and it was there that a crossbow arrow struck him in the shoulder when he rode too close to its defenders while checking on the progress of his soldiers.

Infection soon set in and it became clear that the wound was mortal. In the absence of any children from his marriage to Berengeria, he made his nobles swear their loyalty to his brother, John. Richard the Lionheart, in the company of his mother, died after ten days from gangrene at the age of forty-two. The king was said to have forgiven the archer who had inflicted his wound, although he was subsequently flogged to death. His body of Richard the Lionheart was buried at the abbey at Fontevraud where his father was interred and where later his mother would join them. However, he left orders that his heart should be cut out, a common medieval practice, and sent for burial to Rouen in Normandy. It was perhaps apt that a king of England who spent such little time there and who spoke no English should be buried in France.

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