



1. Why were the Godwins so powerful?

- The house of **Godwin** began in 1018 during King Cnut's reign, when Cnut made his favourite adviser, Godwin, Earl of Wessex. Godwin was probably the son of an Anglo-Saxon thegn. Godwin had helped Edward the Confessor become King, and in return, the King married Godwin's daughter, Edith of Wessex in 1045. By the mid 1060s the Godwins had control of almost all England. Harold Godwinson became Earl of Wessex upon the death of his father in 1053, giving him riches, influence and a powerful position to the King. In 1055 Tostig Godwinson became Earl of Northumbria. In 1057 East Anglia was given to Gyrrh Godwinson, Harold's teenage brother. A smaller earldom in the South-West Midlands went to Leofwine Godwinson.
- The only significant rival to the Godwins was Aelfgar, Earl of Mercia who had the support of the Welsh King.
- The Godwins had made political marriages. Edith to King Edward, Harold to the wife of Llywelyn and Edith the Fair to Mercia, Tostig to Judith of Flanders.
- The Godwins were very wealthy and were lords to many hundreds of thegns and were powerful leaders. They also had influence in the Church, convincing Edward to appoint bishops loyal to them to them. Harold was also Earl of Hereford.

2. Why was Harold's Embassy to Normandy significant?

- Harold Godwinson went to Normandy in the summer of 1064 on a mission for King Edward – a visit called an **embassy**. He landed in Ponthieu (between Normandy and Flanders). He was taken prisoner by Count Guy of Ponthieu. Duke William heard of the capture and demanded that Harold be handed over. Harold spent time with William of Normandy and helped him in two military campaigns, which resulted in William giving Harold gifts of weapons and armour. Harold made a solemn **oath** to William – swearing to support William's claim to the throne of England.
- Harold's embassy was significant for three reasons – it showed that Harold was King Edward's trusted adviser. It was used by the Normans to boost William's claim to the throne – even if the embassy was not about William. It was also used by the Normans to portray Harold as an oath-breaker after Harold became King instead of helping William to the throne of England. Even if Harold never swore allegiance, it was useful to show how important oaths of allegiance between a lord and follower were in society.

3. Why did the earldom rebel against Tostig in 1065?

- **Tostig** Godwinson became Earl of Northumbria in 1055 after the death of Earl Siward. Northumbria was important because it was large, it guarded the border with Scotland and had a long history of Viking attacks. Northumbria was an obvious point for Vikings to invade. Much of Northumbria was part of Danelaw. In October 1065 there was an uprising against Tostig, led by Northumbrian thegns. There were reasons for the uprising – Tostig taxed too heavily, he was a southerner and Northumbria was typically governed by northerners, he ordered the assassination of some high born Northumbrians and had imposed many unjust new laws.
- Rebels marched on York, where they killed many of Tostig's **Housecarls** and servants and declared Tostig an outlaw. They invited Morcar to be the earl instead of Tostig. Harold met with the rebels and passed on Edward's agreement to their terms. Harold married Morcar's sister. By 1st November Tostig was exiled. It was thought Tostig pushed Northumbria too far.

Keywords:

House of Godwin
– Godwin family.

Hostages – people given to another as a part of an oath or agreement. Could be killed

Succession – the process that decides who should be the next King or Queen and succeed to the throne

4. Why was there a succession crisis in 1066?

- **Edward the Confessor** had no children, which meant that when he died on 5th January 1066, there was a succession crisis. The Bayeux Tapestry shows Edward's hand holding out to Harold.
- **Harold Godwinson** was on the spot when King Edward died. He based his claim on the King's deathbed words, his family connection to him, his role as the king's right-hand man, his influence with earls and thegns and military power. Godwinson believed he was appointed by the King himself. His chance of success was large as Harold had the support required to be made King.
- **Edgar Aetheling** was Edward's nephew and was directly descended from royal blood. Edward the Confessor and Harold Godwinson had brought Edgar and his father back from Hungary in 1054, where they had been exiles under King Cnut. In 1066, the Witan thought that Edgar was not fit to become King as there were threats from Scandinavia and Normandy. His claim was based on royal blood, but he had no power to back it up. He had a weak chance of succession. Although teenagers had become Kings before, Anglo-Saxon England at the time needed a warrior-king to defend it against foreign threats.
- **Harald Hardrada** was the King of Norway as well as a fearsome warrior who was feared across Europe. His claim to the English throne was based on Viking secret deals and treaties. Hardrada believed he had a good enough chance of succeeding to launch an invasion on England. King Cnut ruled from 1016-1035. when he died, his son Harthacnut took the throne, but shortly lost. Tostig Godwinson, when he was exiled from England joined forces with Hardrada. Tostig gave the impression that Harold was very unpopular and that the Viking King had a chance of gaining the English throne. Hardrada's claim to the throne was weak, although the Danelaw might welcome a Viking King. He had a good chance of success as he had 15,000 warriors and 300 ships to invade England.
- **William was Duke of Normandy** and was surrounded by enemies. England offered a chance to real wealth and power. His claim was based on an agreement William said was made between Edward the Confessor and himself in 1051, an agreement that was confirmed by Harold's embassy in 1064. William had the pope's support, but lacked evidence. He had a good chance of gaining the throne as the Normans were the best warriors, but it would be a risky invasion.