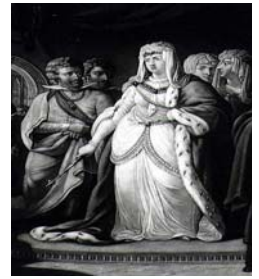




Stephen 1135-1154 and Empress Matilda 1141.

“The Nineteen Long Winters” – “The Anarchy”

CE: War and Rebellion B1 & B2



1) What were the causes of the Civil War?

After the tragic death of his son William in 1120 (White Ship disaster), Henry I made the barons and bishops swear an oath that his daughter Matilda would succeed him. Should this plan fail, Henry put a safeguard into action by marrying Matilda to Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou, a powerful count. When Henry I died, Empress Matilda and her husband were out the country. The Great Council (Magnum Concilium) ignored the wishes of Henry and offered the throne to Stephen of Blois, son of Adela, the daughter of William the Conqueror. Stephen's brother, Henry, Bishop of Winchester persuaded leading barons to support Stephen's claim. Henry I died on 1st December 1135 and Stephen was crowned on the 22nd December.



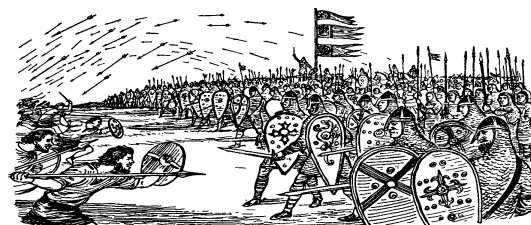
2) Why did the Great Council choose Stephen?

- Many of those who had agreed to Matilda succeeding to the throne of England, felt that they had been **bullied by Henry I** into making that decision.
- Many believed that **Henry I's marriage** to his first wife was **illegal**. (She was a nun). This would make **Matilda illegitimate** and therefore not allowed to be crowned queen.
- Henry I and Matilda had **argued openly** in the last few years of Henry's reign. A fictitious rumour was spread that Henry I had changed his mind as he was dying, and had chosen Stephen as his successor. (deathbed wishes should be followed)
- William I, William II and Henry I had **restricted the powers of the barons**. Stephen was "a mild and easy going man" and therefore unlikely to interfere with the barons.
- The **barons feared that Matilda** would continue her father's strict policies. Matilda had an unfortunate personality. She was proud and overbearing, arranging everything as she thought fit, according to her own whim. She had spent little time in England unlike Stephen.
- They believed that a **woman was unfit** to rule England. The Salic Law of France banned women from taking the throne. A woman could not lead an army! Many barons felt this law should be applied in England.
- When the barons had agreed to Matilda succeeding Henry I, she was a widow. However since then, Matilda had **married Geoffrey of Anjou**, an Angevin, enemies of the Normans.

Stephen was kind, trusting and gentle, characteristics that did not go to make an ideal king in Medieval England. Although Stephen was brave and energetic, his affable, mild-mannered nature prevented him from providing firm leadership. As he rode his black horse through the winter snow at his coronation, he may well have looked an impressive figure, but under him the people of England were to witness the failure of the Feudal System without a strong king. In Stephen's defence, he was in a tricky situation. He had to keep his supporters happy. The barons were also in an awkward position. Many of them held land in both England and Normandy, and Matilda was in control of Normandy. With two masters, their loyalty was going to be tested.

3. The civil war begins

- At first Empress Matilda remained in France with her husband, Geoffrey of Anjou, until they felt strong enough to invade England. (She was also pregnant)
- **Robert of Gloucester**, (Matilda's half-brother) joined Stephen at the beginning.
- Henry, (Stephen's brother) changed sides to Matilda, after Stephen decided not to make him Archbishop of Canterbury. Robert of Gloucester also changed sides.
- In 1138 Robert of Gloucester, revolted but Stephen crushed this rebellion.
- In the same year, **King David of Scotland** (Matilda's uncle) invaded the North of England. The Scots were defeated by the northern fyrd at the **Battle of the Standard** (1138). However, Stephen gave King David land in Northern England – to stay out of the war.
- **Matilda**, with more barons coming over to her side, felt in a strong enough position to **invade England**.
- The barons built illegal castles (adulterines), recruit private armies, and fight each other.
- Stephen was being blackmailed by the barons who threatened to change sides. The lawlessness of his mercenaries and the desperate measures he took to make people loyal to him upset many barons.



4. The Battle of Lincoln Feb 2nd 1141

In February 1141, Stephen attacked and laid siege to Lincoln. Matilda's forces led by Robert Earl of Gloucester and Rannulf Earl of Chester arrived to relieve the siege.

In the meantime Stephen was hearing mass. Whilst handing a wax taper to Bishop Alexander, it broke; a sign of the problems of the king's reign. Also, the container in which the bread was kept snapped its chain and fell upon the altar: this was a bad sign of things to come.

1. Stephen took up the centre position in the middle of a group of armoured knights, who were dismounted and in close formation.
2. Robert and Rannulf with their knights were on horseback in two lines had a smaller army, while Stephen's own army was very large.
3. As Stephen lacked a strong voice, Baldwin FitzGilbert, was asked to encourage his men. The shouts of the advancing enemy, the blast of trumpets and thud of the horses as they trampled the ground beneath their hooves were heard.
4. Matilda's cavalry broke through the lines of the royal army with such force that the royal army was scattered and divided into three. Some of them were killed, others taken prisoner and others fled.
5. Stephen's horsemen fled and with them went William of Ypres. As an experienced soldier, he saw that it was impossible to help the king, and he opted to save his own skin and fight another day.
6. Stephen was left alone with his infantry surrounded by the enemy. Matilda's encircled the royal army and attacked it from all sides.
7. Stephen put up a brave and fierce fight. Rannulf attacked the king with his men-at-arms.
8. Stephen's lightning strokes were effective, and wielding his great two-handed battle-axe, he killed some and cut down men.
9. Men rushed at the king. Eventually his battle-axe was shattered by repeated blows and so he drew his trusty sword, and with this he continued to fight, until it too was broken.
10. Seeing this William de Chesney, seized Stephen by the helmet, shouted "This way, all of you, here, I hold the king." Everyone rushed to help him and Stephen was taken prisoner.
11. Until the king was captured his troops continued the struggle, for they were so hemmed in on all sides that escape was impossible. The whole army was either killed or captured.
12. Stephen was taken prisoner to Bristol castle.



5. Empress Matilda in London 1141

- Empress Matilda now held the trump card. Stephen was her prisoner.
- She visited Winchester, where Henry of Blois (Stephen's brother) agreed to speak to the other barons with a view to making her Queen. Henry was successful and Empress Matilda was declared Queen and 'Lady of the English'. She went to London for her **coronation** as Queen.
- London had up to now supported Stephen. This angered Empress Matilda. On her arrival in London, she demanded a payment of £500. She also refused to recognise the charter of freedom issued by her father in 1130. £500 was an enormous amount as the yearly revenue to the Crown was only £300.
- As the mayor and aldermen of London considered what to do, news arrived that Stephen's wife, (also called Matilda) was outside London with an army led by William of Ypres.
- The Londoners again sided with Stephen, revolted and forced Empress Matilda to leave London before she was crowned.

6. The Siege of Winchester 1141

- Empress Matilda's behaviour in London had upset Bishop Henry. He again decided to support Stephen and returned to Winchester.
- Immediately, he besieged Empress Matilda's forces in the Castle.
- She arrived with her own besieging army on 31st July. The Bishop's men were forced to retreat behind the walls of his Palace in the city that had been fortified ready for any attack.
- Henry himself managed to escape and rode fast for reinforcements from the Queen Matilda.
- A double siege developed: the Royalists and London soldiers blockading the whole city, while, within, the Empress's forces besieged the Bishop's men.
- Three days later, Winchester was set on fire, probably by Queen Matilda's forces.
- Empress Matilda all but lost her remaining provisions and the siege lasted only a month before she was forced to make a break for it. A diversionary attack under Robert of Gloucester was arranged for 14th September. During the fighting, Empress Matilda managed to flee the city. Even then she did not feel entirely safe, though Matilda was 'half dead' by this time with shock and fatigue, she could not ride any further. So she was strapped to a litter between two horses, she reached the safe stronghold of Gloucester. (The story that she was smuggled out in a lead coffin is almost certainly made up.)
- Earl Robert was not as lucky as his half-sister. He held back with his forces to protect her escape. He was captured at the Battle of Stockbridge.
- The London soldiers sacked the city. Houses, shops and churches were all wrecked and many captives dragged away for torture and execution. Empress Matilda then released Stephen from captivity in return of her half-brother Robert. Matilda had lost her chance of becoming Queen.

7. Siege of Oxford 1142

- Feeling vulnerable in Gloucester, Empress Matilda moved to Oxford Castle.
- In 1142, Stephen besieged the castle, which stood by a river.
- A harsh winter set in and Stephen proceeded to starve the castle into submission.



- Matilda managed to escape one night, assisted by four knights. She dressed up in white, slid down a rope from the battlements and escaped across the ice.



8. The Final Years of the War

After 1142 the war entered a stalemate with few significant events happening. Both sides had lost the will to fight. Both Matilda and Stephen had thrown away their advantages.

- In 1142, Henry (Matilda's son) invaded England. The south-west supported the Angevins and the rest of the country Stephen. Later in 1142, Henry returned to Normandy.
- In 1147, Henry again invaded England, but his army was too small to be any use, and he had to beg Stephen to give him some money so that he could return home!
- In October, 1147, Robert of Gloucester died and early in 1148, Empress Matilda returned to Normandy.
- In 1152, Henry married Eleanor of Aquitaine and became the ruler of a huge empire.
- In 1152, Stephen asked the Pope to nominate his son Eustace, as his successor. The Pope had quarrelled with Stephen and disliked the idea of Eustace (a violent drunk) succeeding. The Pope refused using Eustace's poor behaviour and violent temper as an excuse. (Unfit to be king).

10. Treaty of Westminster 1153

The war continued until 1153 with no side gaining any significant advantage. In 1153, **Henry of Anjou**, (Matilda's son) invaded England. Stephen was by now tired with fighting and saddened after the death of his son Eustace in August. In December 1153, Stephen agreed to the **Treaty of Westminster (Wallingford)** with Henry. In the treaty it was agreed that: -

- **Stephen** would remain **King**.
- **Matilda** gave up her claim to the throne
- Stephen **adopted Henry** as his son.
- On Stephen's death the **throne would go to Henry**.
- Stephen's son William could retain all of his father's baronial land.
- All **adulterine** castles would be pulled down.

In 1154, Stephen died and the line of Norman Kings ended.

"When the traitors perceived that King Stephen was a mild man, and a soft, and a good, and that he did not enforce justice, they all did wonder. They had done homage to him, and sworn oaths, but they no faith kept; all became forsworn, and broke their allegiance, for every rich man built his castles, and defended them against him, and they filled the land full of castles. They greatly oppressed the wretched people by making them work at these castles, and when the castles were finished, they filled them with devils and evil men. Then they took those who they suspected to have any goods, by night and by day, seizing both men and women, and they put them in

prison for their gold and silver, and tortured them with pains unspeakable, for never were the martyrs tormented as these were. They hung some up by their feet, and smoked them with foul smoke; some by the thumbs, or by the head, and they hung burning things on their feet. They put a knotted string round their heads and twisted it till it went into the brain. They put them into dungeons wherein were adders and snakes and toads, and thus wore them out. Some they put into a chest that was narrow and short, and not deep, and they put sharp stones in it, and crushed the man therein so that they broke all his limbs. Many hundreds they exhausted with hunger. I cannot and I may not tell of all the wounds and all the tortures that they inflicted upon the wretched men of this land; and this state of things lasted the nineteen years that Stephen was king, and ever grew worse and worse. Then the corn was dear, and flesh, and cheese, and butter, for there was none in the land. Wretched men starved with hunger; some lived on alms who had been rich; some fled the country. Never was there more misery, and never acted heathens worse than these. The earth bore no corn; you might have well tilled the sea, for the land was ruined by such deeds, and it was said openly that Christ and his saints slept."

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

