

British History Series: Episode 10 - Anarchy & Lionheart

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Key Events & Figures

1. Henry I's Death & Succession Crisis (1135)

- Henry I made nobles swear to support his daughter **Matilda** as heir, but his nephew **Stephen of Blois** seized the throne with support from the Church and London.
- Matilda, in France with her husband Geoffrey of Anjou, contested Stephen's rule, sparking civil war ("The Anarchy").

2. The Anarchy (1135–1153)

- **Matilda's Allies:** Her half-brother **Robert of Gloucester** (illegitimate son of Henry I) and King **David I of Scotland**, who invaded northern England.
- **Stephen's Weakness:** Nobles built illegal castles, and the Church demanded independence from royal control.
- **Turning Point:** In 1141, Stephen was captured but later exchanged for Robert of Gloucester. Matilda's arrogance (e.g., alienating London merchants) lost her support.

3. Henry II's Rise (1153–1154)

- Matilda's son **Henry Plantagenet** (future Henry II) invaded England. At the **Treaty of Winchester**, Stephen agreed Henry would succeed him.
- Stephen died in 1154, ending Norman rule and beginning the **Plantagenet dynasty**.

Henry II's Reign (1154–1189)

1. Consolidating Power

- Reclaimed northern England from Scotland, forcing young King **Malcolm IV** to retreat.
- Demolished nobles' illegal castles and reasserted royal authority.

2. Conflict with the Church

- **Thomas Becket**: Appointed Archbishop of Canterbury to control the Church, but Becket defended clerical independence.
- **Becket's Murder (1170)**: Henry's knights killed Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, causing outrage. Becket was swiftly canonised.

3. Family Rebellions

- His sons (**Henry, Richard, Geoffrey**) and wife **Eleanor of Aquitaine** rebelled in 1173, backed by Scotland's **William the Lion**. Henry crushed the revolt.

4. Ireland

- Invaded in 1171 using a papal bull from **Pope Adrian IV** (the only English pope), beginning English involvement in Ireland.

Richard the Lionheart (1189–1199)

- **Crusader King**: Spent only 2 of 10 years in England, funding wars via heavy taxes (e.g., **Saladin Tithe**).
- **Legacy**:

- Introduced the **Three Lions** emblem (still England's symbol).
 - Popularised **St. George** as a patron saint (though not official until 1351).
 - **Death:** Killed besieging a French castle in 1199; succeeded by his brother **John**.
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Did You Know?

- **Matilda** was England's first female claimant to the throne, defying medieval gender norms.
- **Wallingford** (Oxfordshire) was a strategic hotspot: William the Conqueror and Henry II both crossed the Thames there.
- **Scottish King David I** blinded and castrated rivals to secure his grandson's throne—medieval politics at its darkest!