

Matilda of Scotland

Matilda of Scotland (c. 1080 – 1 May 1118), originally christened **Edith**,^[1] was **Queen of England** as the first wife of **King Henry I**.

Matilda was the daughter of the English princess **Saint Margaret** and the Scottish king **Malcolm III**. At the age of about six Matilda was sent with her sister to be educated in a convent in southern England, where her aunt **Cristina** was abbess. It is not clear if she spent much time in Scotland thereafter. In 1093, when she was about 13, she was engaged to an English nobleman when her father and brother Edward were killed in a minor raid into England, and her mother died soon after; her fiancé then abandoned the proposed marriage. In Scotland a messy succession conflict followed between Matilda's uncle **Donald III**, her half-brother **Duncan II** and brother **Edgar** until 1097. Matilda's whereabouts during this no doubt difficult period are uncertain.

But after the suspicious death of **William II of England** in 1100 and accession of his brother **Henry I**, Matilda's prospects improved. Henry moved quickly to propose to her. It is said that he already knew and admired her, and she may indeed have spent time at the English court. Edgar was now secure on the Scottish throne, offering the prospect of better relations between the two countries, and Matilda also had the considerable advantage of Anglo-Saxon royal blood, which the Norman dynasty largely lacked.^[2] There was a difficulty about the marriage; a special church council was called to be satisfied that Matilda had not taken vows as a nun, which her emphatic testimony managed to convince them of.

Matilda and Henry married in late 1100. They had two children who reached adulthood and two more who died young. Matilda led a literary and musical court, but was also pious. She embarked on building projects for the church, and took a role in government when her husband was away; many surviving charters are signed by her. Matilda lived to see her daughter **Matilda** become **Holy Roman Empress** but died two years before the drowning of her son **William**. Henry remarried, but had no further legitimate children, which caused a succession crisis known as **The Anarchy**. Matilda is buried in **Westminster Abbey** and was fondly remembered by her subjects as “Matilda the Good Queen” and “Matilda of Blessed Memory”. There was an attempt to have her canonized, which was not pursued.

1 Early life

Matilda was born around 1080 in **Dunfermline**, the daughter of **Malcolm III of Scotland** and **Saint Margaret**. She was christened (baptised) **Edith**, and **Robert Curthose**, Duke of Normandy, stood as godfather at the ceremony. The English queen **Matilda of Flanders** was also present at the **baptismal font** and served as her godmother. Baby Matilda pulled at Queen Matilda's head-dress, which was seen as an omen that the younger Matilda would be queen one day.^[3]

The Life of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland was later written for Matilda possibly by **Turgot of Durham**. It refers to Matilda's childhood and her relationship with her mother. In it, Margaret is described as a strict but loving mother. She did not spare the rod when it came to raising her children in virtue, which the author presupposed was the reason for the good behaviour Matilda and her siblings displayed, and Margaret also stressed the importance of piety.^[4]

When she was about six years old, Matilda of Scotland (or Edith as she was then probably still called) and her sister **Mary** were sent to **Romsey Abbey**, near **Southampton** in southern England, where their aunt **Cristina** was abbess. During her stay at Romsey and, some time before 1093, at **Wilton Abbey**, both institutions known for learning,^[5] the Scottish princess was much sought-after as a bride; refusing proposals from **William de Warenne, 2nd Earl of Surrey**, and **Alan Rufus**, Lord of **Richmond**. **Hériman of Tournai** claimed that **William Rufus** considered marrying her. Her education went beyond the standard feminine pursuits. This was not surprising as her mother was a great lover of books. Her daughters learned English, French, and some Latin, and were sufficiently literate to read **St. Augustine** and the Bible.^[6]

In 1093, her parents betrothed her to **Alan Rufus**, Lord of **Richmond**, one of her numerous suitors. However, before the marriage took place, her father entered into a dispute with **William Rufus**. In response, he marauded the English king's lands where he was surprised by **Robert de Mowbray, Earl of Northumbria** and killed along with his son, **Edward**. Upon hearing of her husband and son's death, **Margaret**, already ill, died on 16 November. Edith was now an orphan. She was abandoned by her betrothed who ran off with a daughter of **Harold Godwinson**, **Gunhild of Wessex**. However, he died before they could be married.^[7]

She had left the monastery by 1093, when **Anselm**, Arch-

bishop of Canterbury, wrote to the Bishop of Salisbury ordering that the daughter of the King of Scotland be returned to the monastery that she had left. She did not return to Wilton and until 1100, is largely unaccounted for in chronicles.^[8]

2 Marriage

After William II's death in the New Forest in August 1100, his brother, Henry, immediately seized the royal treasury and crown. His next task was to marry and Henry's choice was Matilda. Because Matilda had spent most of her life in a convent, there was some controversy over whether she was a nun and thus canonically ineligible for marriage. Henry sought permission for the marriage from Archbishop Anselm, who returned to England in September 1100 after a long exile. Professing himself unwilling to decide so weighty a matter on his own, Anselm called a council of bishops in order to determine the canonical legality of the proposed marriage. Matilda testified that she had never taken holy vows, insisting that her parents had sent her and her sister to England for educational purposes, and her aunt Cristina had veiled her to protect her "from the lust of the Normans." Matilda claimed she had pulled the veil off and stamped on it, and her aunt beat and scolded her for this act. The council concluded that Matilda was not a nun, never had been and her parents had not intended that she become one, giving their permission for the marriage.

Matilda and Henry seem to have known one another for some time before their marriage — William of Malmesbury states that Henry had "long been attached" to her, and Orderic Vitalis says that Henry had "long adored" her character. It is possible that Matilda had spent some time at William Rufus's court and that the pair had met there. It is also possible Henry was introduced to his bride by his teacher Bishop Osmund. Whatever the case, it is clear that the two at least knew each other prior to their wedding. Additionally, the chronicler William of Malmesbury suggests that the new king loved his bride.^[9]

Matilda's mother was the sister of Edgar the Ætheling, proclaimed but uncrowned King of England after Harold, and, through her mother, Matilda was descended from Edmund Ironside and thus from the royal family of Wessex, which in the 10th century had become the royal family of a united England. This was extremely important because although Henry had been born in England, he needed a bride with ties to the ancient Wessex line to increase his popularity with the English and to reconcile the Normans and Anglo-Saxons.^[10] In their children, the two factions would be united, further unifying the new regime. Another benefit was that England and Scotland became politically closer; three of Matilda's brothers became kings of Scotland in succession and were unusually friendly towards England during this period of unbroken peace between the two nations: Alexander married

one of Henry I's illegitimate daughters and David lived at Henry's court for some time before his accession.^[11]

Matilda had a small dowry but it did incorporate some lordship rights. Most of her dowry estates were granted from lands previously held by Edith of Wessex. Additionally, Henry made numerous grants on his wife including substantial property in London. Generosity aside, this was a political move in order to win over the unruly Londoners who were vehement supporters of the Wessex kings.^[12]

3 Queen



The seal of Matilda

After Matilda and Henry were married on 11 November 1100 at Westminster Abbey by Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, she was crowned as "Matilda," a hallowed Norman name. By courtiers, however, she and her husband were soon nicknamed 'Godric and Godiva'.^[13] These two names were typical English names from before The Conquest and mocked their more rustic style, especially when compared to the flamboyance of William II.

She gave birth to a daughter, Matilda, born in February 1102, and a son, William, called "Adelin", in November 1103. As queen, she resided primarily at Westminster, but accompanied her husband on his travels around England, and, circa 1106–1107, probably visited Normandy with him. Matilda was the designated head of Henry's cu-

ria and acted as regent during his frequent absences.^[14]

During the English investiture controversy (1103-07), she acted as intercessor between her husband and archbishop Anselm. She wrote several letters during Anselm's absence, first asking him for advice and to return, but later increasingly to mediate.^[15]

3.1 Works

Matilda had great interest in architecture and instigated the building of many Norman-style buildings, including Waltham Abbey and Holy Trinity Aldgate.^[16] She also had the first arched bridge in England built, at Stratford-le-Bow, as well as a bathhouse with piped-in water and public lavatories at Queenhithe.^[17]

Her court was filled with musicians and poets; she commissioned a monk, possibly Thurgot, to write a biography of her mother, Saint Margaret. She was an active queen and, like her mother, was renowned for her devotion to religion and the poor. William of Malmesbury describes her as attending church barefoot at Lent, and washing the feet and kissing the hands of the sick. Matilda exhibited a particular interest in leprosy, founding at least two leper hospitals, including the institution that later became the parish church of St Giles-in-the-Fields.^[18] She also administered extensive dower properties and was known as a patron of the arts, especially music.

She was patroness of the monk Bendeit's version of The Voyage of Saint Brendan, c.1106-1118.^[19]

4 Death

After Matilda died on 1 May 1118 at Westminster Palace, she was buried at Westminster Abbey. The death of her son, William Adelin, in the tragic disaster of the White Ship (November 1120) and Henry's failure to produce a legitimate son from his second marriage led to the succession crisis of The Anarchy.

5 Legacy

After her death, she was remembered by her subjects as "Matilda the Good Queen" and "Matilda of Blessed Memory", and for a time sainthood was sought for her, though she was never canonized. Matilda is also thought to be the identity of the "Fair Lady" mentioned at the end of each verse in the nursery rhyme London Bridge Is Falling Down. The post-Norman conquest English monarchs to the present day are related to the Anglo-Saxon House of Wessex monarchs via Matilda of Scotland as she was the great-granddaughter of King Edmund Ironside, see House of Wessex family tree.

6 Issue

Matilda and Henry had issue


1. Euphemia (July/August 1101), died young
2. Matilda of England (c. February 1102 – 10 September 1167), Holy Roman Empress, Countess consort of Anjou, called *Lady of the English*
3. William Adelin, (5 August 1103 – 25 November 1120), sometimes called Duke of Normandy, who married Matilda (d.1154), daughter of Fulk V, Count of Anjou.
4. Elizabeth (August/September 1104), died young

7 Appearance and character

"It causes pleasure to see the queen whom no woman equals in beauty of body or face, hiding her body, nevertheless, in a veil of loose clothing. Here alone, with new modesty, wishes to conceal it, but what gleams with its own light cannot be hidden and the sun, penetrating his clouds, hurls his rays." She also had "fluent, honeyed speech." From a poem of Marbodius of Rennes.

8 Notes and sources

- [1] She is known to have been given the name "Edith" (the Old English *Eadgyth*, meaning "Fortune-Battle") at birth, and was baptised under that name. She is known to have been crowned under a name favoured by the Normans, "Matilda" (from the Germanic *Mahthilda*, meaning "Might-Battle"), and was referred to as such throughout her husband's reign. It is unclear, however, when her name was changed, or why. Accordingly, her later name is used in this article. Historians generally refer to her as "Matilda of Scotland"; in popular usage, she is referred to equally as "Matilda" or "Edith".
- [2] Though Matilda of Flanders, wife of William the Conqueror and Henry's mother, was descended from Alfred the Great
- [3] Huneycutt, Lois (2003). *Matilda of Scotland: a Study in Medieval Queenship*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. p. 10.
- [4] "The Life of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland". Retrieved 14 March 2011.
- [5] Hollister 2001:128.
- [6] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. New York City, New York: Pegasus Books LLC. p. 42. ISBN 978-1-60598-105-5.
- [7] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. pp. 42–43.
- [8] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. p. 43.

- [9] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. p. 45.
- [10] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. pp. 44–45.
- [11] Hollister 2001:126.
- [12] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. pp. 46–47.
- [13] Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland: a Study in Medieval Queenship*. p. 73.
- [14] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. p. 50.
- [15] Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland: a Study in Medieval Queenship*. p. 76.
- [16] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. p. 53.
- [17] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. p. 63.
- [18] Hilton, Lisa (2010). *Queen Consort*. pp. 47–48.
- [19]  Ritchie, R.L.G. (1950). The Date of the “Voyage of St Brendan”. *Medium Ævum*. Oxford, UK: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature. **19**: 64–66. doi:10.2307/43626381. ISSN 0025-8385. JSTOR 43626381. OCLC 6733541455. (Registration required (help)).

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- *Women’s Biography: Matilda of Scotland, queen of the English*, contains several letters sent and received by Queen Matilda.

9 References

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- From a poem of Marbodius of Rennes.

10 External links

- Matilda 3 at Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England

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11.1 Text

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